

The REGISTER

Men Behaving Badly

Tuesday 13th December 2022

Exactly a year ago today I wrote that Karrie and Alex needed their house back. That very evening her brother Jim lost his temper about the washing up and physically assaulted them both, resulting in a quick call to Mr.Plod and him being banished from the premises. He went to stay that night on his Mum's chair-bed in Kingsbridge... where he remains to this day. I guess Betty (at 92) could do with having her flat to herself again¹.

Alex too has left the nest, but for much better reasons - to start his Leiden University course in International Studies at the Hague. Karrie took him over in the Summer (in my car) for a pre-course camping holiday, then I met them both in the Hague to take Karrie away for more camping before returning home.



Alex is living in a converted shipping container (actually rather smart) and working very hard (the course is a bit of a brute) but is thriving, getting good marks and we believe has successfully fledged.

As well as that trip we did a 'dry run' to the Hague earlier in the year, which was useful, and went to see Mum in March at Easter (a planned visit last Christmas was scuppered by Alex being ill).

I work two days in the office from Bovey but live for the long weekend and VPN in Modbury. Karrie is finding work hard but is getting through it all despite occasional health grumbles; she's taken on some extra responsibilities and extra training, so I think she's actually doing rather well. Younger and fitter colleagues are also finding things tough

in schools, I remind her. Lots of illness in school at the moment, not especially COVID (although that's in the picture), and consequently long lists of absentees among staff (25%) and students (50% in some classes). We've had three years to work out how to control infections in schools... I think she's planning to step down to a four-day week next year which I hope she manages to secure. Although she's anxious to have money to get her boy through his degree, I don't think that will be a problem.

I am looking at retirement from the toad WORK² at SHEU with some longing but not much prospect of realising it yet. I'm still being paid for a 4-day week but rarely manage to do just the four: with all our clients trying to catch up with studies missed during the worst of COVID, we had a record year last year, 150,000 scripts, so we've all been pretty flat-out and late with everything. We don't really have a plan to let me and other oldies on the staff be replaced in a considered way.

I learned about this time last year that my niece Evie was pregnant and engaged; she asked me to walk her down the aisle, which I was pleased to do in May. She was by that time very heavily pregnant and gave birth a couple of weeks later; her daughter Betsy is very bonny, smiley and alert (four generations in the pic).



However, soon after this happy event, her husband Steve took exception to being asked to load the dish-washer (correct response: of course, Darling, and can I make you a cup of tea?), threw a huge wobbly and stormed out of the house. He was then AWOL for a few days and then what contact he did make was not

¹ STOP PRESS: Betty's kicked him out. Happy Christmas everyone...

² <https://www.poeticous.com/philip-larkin/toads>

constructive, and Evie decided fairly soon after this that she didn't want him back. He has since apparently decided to try and make her life as awkward as he can for her without actually being there: I won't bring you down with the whole sorry saga but it included spreading rumours about Evie, allegations of stolen/damaged possessions and trying to get her benefits stopped. Evie is putting a brave face on it but what an absolute sack of shit that man has turned out to be. I stood a few feet away from him in church when he promised with tears in his eyes to love honour and whatever else, which all blew away like smoke within days. My sister Nicky is finding it hard to make ends meet as the only person with a wage in the house, and is struggling a bit with her health. She came down for her usual week with me in August (bringing Jack and my Mum)



and had lost some weight, and has shed more since, so I'm clucking a bit over her. Jack has re-restarted his motor mechanics course and is an excellent uncle.

This Autumn has seen a return to a full schedule for the Exeter Junior Chess Club and a full season of events for the Devon Junior Chess Association. All the DJCA events have gone well but I'd welcome more support from colleagues on the committee - they've supported such events for years and may be hoping to wind down but at the moment it's all falling to myself and Tim, and I'm chafing.

I don't play much chess these days but was at the club of the evening of the Bubbly Blitz and emerged with first prize of a bottle of Moët & Chandon; nobody was more surprised than me. I still chat with Theo once a month about his progress in US Chess; my student Pengxiao is still very keen and has been successful in the English Chess Federation's online Grand Prix series of tournaments. This year at Tim's invitation I've done half-a-dozen sessions for the chess club at Torquay Boys' Grammar; not really a money-spinner but I'm thinking ahead about doing a working week with less at SHEU and a bit more at chess.

My weekly games session with David Beckwith has seen us visit another long list of new games last year; one recent discovery was

one-dimensional chess. David continues to be a huge support to the junior club.



The jazz calendar has cautiously returned to a regular programme too although I haven't been anything like as regular an attender as I was; Paul goes a bit more often than I do.



When we don't physically meet, he and I usually have an hour or so each week on the 'phone, making ourselves generally gloomy by weighing the latest grotesqueries perpetrated by Trump, Johnson, Putin or Kwarteng. The Sunak/Hunt era may be calmer but seems as callous and damaging than the last. Karrie and I both needed an ambulance last year and both had to give up and get ourselves to A&E by some other means, only to find all the available ambulances queued outside the hospital. Whatever settlement is made with the unions this winter, underlying problems seem unlikely to be addressed.

Young George has started school despite some initial reluctance; Leo's fascination with the natural world has been overtaken by Pokemon. Laura and Harry have just had a very fine attic conversion made in their house. I try and have a curry with them once a month or so but life is very busy for us all. Sal is well and has found her vocation as a grandmother; she and I have our own separate curry every now and then.

Wildlife encounters: bee-fly, bush cricket, and a juvenile gull which was no respecter of boundaries (that's it in my utility room).



I hope the New Year brings good things for you and the world