

Annual Letter - 2017 from Scott Sledge

As we start 2018 I hope it will be a swing year, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1968 which many regard as an *annus mirabilis*. I think most people struggled during 2017, and I was on an emotional rollercoaster, stabilised somewhat by the constant foolishness of the USA's new President, the narcissist-in-chief.\*

The year started off well enough with my grandson Tyson elected to be Primary School Captain and member of the Student Rep Council for Nimbin Central School.

Grandparenting has become my main occupation this year: with Sebastien's 4 living on the same property: Tyson (12) Amelie (7) Matisse (5) and Lilah (2). Emmanuel has 2 living with him at Kingscliff : Maeva (14) and Camille (21) who has a job, a car and a live-in girlfriend named Kiara. During school terms I start my day by going to Sebastien and Ruby's house to collect the grandees and go to meet the school bus. Often I look after the littler ones, but Matisse has been going frequently to pre-school, and next year goes to "The Big School." I love all these young people dearly. We don't ever see the 6 children Daniele's daughter Emilie produced, so can't comment further on that.

When not occupied by grandees' activities (and these are NOT quiet children !) I work in the gardens of our 103-acre property, which is rapidly growing into a jungle. I also spend time in 2 different choirs and Men's Group. I have been called the "President of Everything" but this isn't accurate. I have a long-term commitment to leading the political activist group Northern Rivers Guardians, Inc. and being on the management committee for the Nimbin Community Centre. My friend Dick Hopkins served as President of the Nimbin Community Centre until he died in April, age 70. Now I have become his replacement.

I need to talk about Death. I have attended too many funerals this year and not enough births. I will confess to a few fun birthday parties, including 30 years for Rainbow Power Company. People die every year: I know that. But this year's toll has rocked me. Nici Paitson who conducted many funerals for the alternative community in our area was herself the focus this year, age 66. Mook Hanley and Shanto Oliver who performed locally for decades as iconic musical duo *Bahloo* both passed away, age 72 and 70.

I first met Stuart Collins in 1986 when he was a young doctor doing volunteer work for the Queensland Museum as a diver on shipwrecks. We called him "Smee" because of a joke he often told. He would phone and say, "Hello. It's Smee again!" He was a bright spark with a great sense of humour, his life dedicated to helping others and our environment that ended in a fatal truck crash near Canberra. He was 54. So was Aboriginal artist Burrie Jerome. Tanya Loydell was 57. I won't talk about all the famous people who left this life this year except to name Fats Domino, Tom Petty, and Glenn Campbell. I am comforted by thinking about all the good people who are still alive! Yea! If you are reading this, you are probably among them !

Daniele and I are both 70 and have been granted an Age Pension: not much but something to keep the creditors from our door. We are healthy, apart from a few minor ailments, but one never knows how long that lasts, eh? I start to think about sorting through all my books, papers, photos and 'puter files and know I really **should** do something. I also think about writing stories from my amazing life and / or something fictional: maybe mix those together. Will I do that before it is too late? Probably not: I look

at all the things that need fixing in the world and try to prioritise my efforts. I'm sure I am not alone in that. Someone else may have to write the books.

Daniele spent a few months in France this year on a trip down Memory Lane. She visited family and old friends all around that country. I could not bear to miss out on all the fun so I flew to Paris for the final 2 weeks of her sojourn. I visited old friends Jean-Jacques and Isabelle at Versailles. Daniele and I took a fast train to La Rochelle (north of Bordeaux) on the Atlantic coast. That was superbe with long warm days amid historic sites (think *Three Musketeers*.) Daniele's sister Agnes now lives intra muros with partner Dom. Annick from Reims was with us on holiday.

Back to Paris, where Daniele caught a flight back to Oz and I went via Switzerland and SF to Spokane. I was there in time for my late mother's BD on 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but came back by 14<sup>th</sup> July. It was a quick visit, hastily arranged, but I enjoyed catching up with a few old friends : Betsy, Mark and Susie, Pam and Rick while swanning about on Coeur D'Alene Lake. I was gone before the region became covered by smoke from wild fires.

The year ended well, with Amelie awarded the Juvenile Girls Sports Champion Medal. Tyson goes on to High School (year 7) next year and has decided to take the bus to a larger school in Lismore. He has been selected for the "Advanced Class" there.

Annie Owens came up to stay at our place and see the year out between 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> December. Lovely to reminisce about the 42 years we have been friends. We met with Gary Frontin and Cindy at Kingscliff on one of those days.

I am really looking forward to 2018, hopefully more calm and possibly rewarding of efforts to create a better world. Our most high-profile campaigns this year were the struggles to keep this region free from a threatened boom in water extraction for commercial bottling, the consequences of carbon pollution from the proposed Adani coal mine in Central Queensland and the protection of koalas and other wildlife at Black Rocks and Limpinwood. We have requested funding to help connect habitat for wildlife corridors. If the Hewittville land at Limpinwood can be purchased that could prevent further damage there. We are on the threshold of a future world that technology promises to transform - probably at an ever-accelerating pace. We need to make a choice of how to use our human capacities: will we see a future when we share the planet wisely with all other species or continue to pollute and destroy?

I believe that Australians are not proud that we are 2nd only to Indonesia in the number of species extinctions... and these continue as habitat is cleared for mining, logging etc. If we continue down this path the Earth may soon only be suitable as a launch pad for rockets to take our cancerous greed to other planets across the universe. The future will be decided by us . I take this seriously....and with love. XoXo

\*Actually, I never thought I would live to see the day when USA conservative politicians would vote to **increase the deficit** in order to give an even greater tax advantage to the rich. In 1964 I was in High School and I campaigned for the Goldwater Republicans. Now I think the whole party political model needs fundamental reform : the system does not serve the common man when elections are swung by propaganda and politicians are bought by corporations.