

From Beyond The Pond

2013 Edition

The Mallinsons, Orillia, Ontario, Canada

Dear All,

It's the 7th of January already, and I'm starting to feel guilty about not writing earlier. But why should I feel guilty? I'm retired, and don't have to work to deadlines any longer!

As I write, we are in the middle of a blizzard that is dumping another 10 cm of snow on top of the 15 or 20 we had last night. Since the beginning of December, we have had over four feet of snow fall in Orillia, and many of the snow banks on the sides of the road are taller than a man. If the weather continues this way for the next month, there will be no room on our front lawn for the snow that we blow off the driveway.

2013 in brief:

January: We had hardwood flooring installed throughout the rest of our second floor, and re-decorated all the remaining rooms on that level with the exception of the bathroom. Having painted our bedroom a pale green, we decided we did not like it, which will necessitate a re-paint in the next couple of months.

February: Followed the final stages of the Vendee Globe round-the-world yachting race; won by a Frenchman as usual. Whatever happened to British seamanship?

March: Helped to make maple syrup at the Bowes' cottage. The sap did not run during the March break school holiday, so the Sault Ste. Marie Bowes clan came down again at Easter, the trees obliged, and the clan produced more syrup than ever before.

May: Friends Steve and Marilyn were selling one of their two aircraft, and offered us flights over Orillia and the surrounding area before their son Geoff flew it out



west to the buyer. Great views of the town and countryside.

June: Rebecca's graduation ceremony, in which she received her master's degree in environmental studies. More on that later.

Sue and I took off for Iceland, and spent ten days there, touring by car. It's a beautiful place, and we took 1,900 photos between us. Highlights were the city of Reykjavik, whale

watching, hiking on the sea shores, seeing glaciers, volcanoes and geothermal activity, and taking a Zodiac tour among ice floes on a lagoon at the foot of the Breidermerkurjokull glacier. We also learned how to pronounce the name of Eyjafjallajokull, the volcano that badly disrupted European air traffic in 2010.

On our return, we discovered that Chris had fallen off a roof and broken his leg two days before we left for Iceland, and he had kept it secret from us. More on that later.

July and August: Lots of visits to the cottage, and consequent swimming, canoeing and sailing.

Visit to Penetang and Midland with friends Steve and Marilyn to visit the tall ships.



September:

Brother Michael breaks his leg and collar bone when he is struck by a car on his bicycle, and spends several weeks in hospital and rehab centre. Not a good year for Mallinson men folk...

October: Arranged a visit to the Shaw Festival for 40 members of our Probus club to see "Our Betters" by Somerset Maugham.

November: Visit to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto with our Probus club.

December: Family Christmas party, with over 80 people attending.
Snow, snow and more snow...

Other Happenings:

We decided to invest in solar panels on our roof this year as, with the Ontario government's incentives, it seems to be a good investment that will pay itself back many times over. Accordingly, we signed a contract in May and then experienced an excruciatingly slow installment. The system had to be connected to the grid within 180 days of receiving approval from the Ontario Power Authority, and as the time passed without significant progress our stress levels went up. With a January 8th deadline looming and a lack of confidence in the commitment of our installer, we switched to another installer at the beginning of December. Within 10 days the installation was completed and connected to the grid. Since then, the panels have been accumulating layers of snow and not producing any power whatsoever. It looks like we will have to wait for a big thaw before we start getting any return on our investment.

We are otherwise managing to keep busy with hiking, concerts, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, plays, and visits with friends

James and Elsa:

James and Elsa had an eventful year that began with a move from Montreal back to Toronto, where Elsa had accepted a new position as editor-in-chief of Canadian Architect magazine. Canadian Architect is the trade magazine for architects in Canada and Elsa's new role has provided her with a wonderful opportunity to meet with architects all over the country and be a voice for issues of importance to the profession. She is enjoying the work immensely and leaves most mornings with a smile on her face. Upon returning to Toronto, James found work with a mid-sized architecture firm named LGA Architectural Partners. He



immediately set to work designing the first birth centre run by midwives in the province of Ontario. When he emerged 9 months later, the birth centre had remarkably been constructed and the client is now awaiting approval to begin deliveries of babies. The experience was akin to re-experiencing the trauma of birth, but feedback on the centre has thus far been very positive.

Outside of work, Elsa and James are enjoying married life. They continue to forage wild foods and had a particularly good year of mushroom and berry harvesting. The great finds this year were ramps (wild leeks), chicken mushrooms (pictured at left, looks like chicken, feels like chicken,

tastes like chicken), and hen-of-the-woods (heavenly rich flavour). They have been enjoying the many activities available to them in downtown Toronto, playing ice hockey, dancing capoeira and cycling whenever the weather allows.

Their cat Bandalero is still adorable (James' word, not mine) and is very happy to be back in Toronto where he seems



to have gained the upper hand on the other cats in the neighbourhood. The cats in Montreal had a brutishness about them that had shaken his confidence.

Rebecca passed her final program exam/ defence for her Masters Degree in Environmental Studies at the end of January, and had her major research paper published by York University's Sustainable Energy Institute (SEI) at the end of March, which was quite a compliment to her effort. You can find it on-line at

<http://sei.info.yorku.ca/files/2013/03/electricity-conservation-policy-ontario.pdf> if you would like to read it.

She also presented her paper at an Energy Conservation conference in Toronto, at a York U SEI student research event, and at a Lunch 'n Learn at a local electricity utility.

After graduating in June, Rebecca started working as a Policy Researcher at the Toronto Atmospheric Fund at the



beginning of July. She has since had her contract extended twice and will now continue on until June. Having passed her Zumba instructor training last year, in November Rebecca began leading occasional routines in the Zumba class of a friend, and is scheduled to teach her first full class (as a substitute) in February. Rebecca is still living in her lovely little apartment in Toronto with her lovely American roommate Emily. Just before Christmas, an ice storm caused power outages all over Toronto, in the middle of Rebecca's making of chocolate truffles for Christmas presents, and she and Emily ended up melting chocolate over candles late into the night to retrieve the situation.



Chris moved back downtown to once again share the apartment that he used to live in with his friend Sean. Despite having his hand in bandages after a bad cut followed by surgery, he spent some time staying with us and designing and building his own desk and bedside cabinet for his room in the apartment. He also auditioned for several voice-acting roles, and took an improv acting course. After June, Chris spent most of the year hobbling around on one leg after he broke the other in a freak fall off a slippery metal roof in cottage country. At the same time, he broke his nose when he made contact with the logs lying on the ground at the bottom of the drop, but had the presence of mind and the courage to re-set it himself immediately. As this happened only two days before Sue and I were due to fly to Iceland, Chris deliberately (and considerably) did not tell anyone else



in the family until after we had gone, and we only heard about it on our return. He was out of commission for the summer, but decided to design and build a raft for the cottage as a therapeutic project. When his leg was sufficiently healed, he was able to find a renovation job with a talented crew that has kept him busy since September.

Sue is still very involved with her Canadian Federation of University Women chapter, handling membership and their member directory (handing over and moving on next year!) and leading weekly hikes. The retired female teachers of Park Street Collegiate (who call themselves the "Old Bags") continue to meet every month for lunch. The school itself was demolished in November in preparation for the building of a new school. Sue's reading list is expanding with her membership in two book clubs.

I, **David**, am definitely enjoying retirement in Orillia where there always seems to be lots to do. I am still handling membership for our Probus club, and find that this helps to keep me busy, particularly in the fall.

In the first part of the year, I created a new web site (www.terraquiz.net), a geographical quiz, but so far it has not been a success in terms of traffic or advertising income, and I may not renew the domain when it comes up for renewal later in the year. My other web site (www.practicalcottager.com) has had more success in the past year than it had in the previous three years, and is now paying for itself. I am also continuing to hone my web development skills on the web site for our Probus club (www.lakecountryprobus.com) by making frequent technical improvements.

Apart from this, I keep busy with home renovations and some furniture construction. Lately, I have been staining and varnishing the parts for an oval table. The top is probably an antique, but I designed and cut out the legs some years ago and hope to see the whole effort finished shortly.

Well, it is now January 15, and we have had a break in the amount of snow falling with a thaw in the last few days. We were able to get on our roof and clear off 22 of the 40 solar panels, so we will at last be earning some income from them.



We hope you all have a healthy and prosperous 2014, with best wishes from

David, Sue, James, Elsa, Rebecca and Chris.

Iceland



Hallgrímskirkja Church



Black Volcanic Sand Beach



Arctic Terns



Fjallsjökull Glacier, part of the massive Vatnajökull ice cap



Floes on Jokulsarlon Lagoon (note volcanic ash)



Country Church



Dressed up for the zodiac ride



Skogarfoss Waterfall



Seascape at Dyrhólaey

Back in Canada



Tall ship in Midland



Sue with friends Margaret & Bonnie



David on cross-country skis



Sue blowing snow off the driveway



Bowes Family with Chris



Devin pouring maple sap



Morgan pushing a hill?



Paige with maple syrup



Rachel learned to knit