

## **A Year of Big Occasions**

2 birthdays, 2 weddings and a funeral- what a rollercoaster of emotions this year!

The year of our 60<sup>th</sup> Birthdays began with a February celebration with 40 of Charles' friends for Sunday Lunch. He made a speech telling the story of his life, his faith and the ways in which his family influenced his hobbies. At the time I thought it sounded like his obituary.

We invited our 6 (Mark with Ruth, Paul with Hannah, Ruth with Tim) to a French holiday house in May. This was a very special time for all and was the first time they had relaxed together. It became clear that they shared with us a love of good food from French markets, cooking, competitive games, swimming and country walks. Our pool was maintained by a local who shared his abundant fresh cherries as well. Joyce celebrated in July, renewing friendships- unfortunately it was not a hot barbecue pool party but indoors buffet.

Joyce has enjoyed days out with her St Nics' Housegroup friends in the footsteps of CS Lewis in Oxford and sharing a meal on the day of her birthday. Their gift of a rose, 'Compassion,' was a wonderful contribution to the new long border, designed to mask the fence. Joyce's spring project was digging a 75metre long trench to increase drainage. She has just planted the final tree- Lane's Prince Albert Apple.

On a Day trip to 4 Kingdoms Adventure Park in April, Joyce's Syrian refugee family were introduced to the delights of stroking rabbits, with shrieks when they wriggled. She has become their unofficial Grannie, invited to birthday parties, besides teaching English and setting holiday homework. In the past 2 years West Berkshire Action for Refugees has sent over 2000 boxes of clothes and food to aid centres across Europe and the Mediterranean. The warehouse had to close in August and the final van load went off with Hope and Aid Direct. The whole team, with all 3 local families and the trustees, enjoyed a sunny swim party in July. It was the last for the year as the pump broke and repairs were delayed. All sorted now, ready for 2018 parties.

Charles was diagnosed with Liver disease in February, just after his birthday. His medication seemed to be having a positive effect but he was admitted to hospital in July for a week. He was released on the morning of the wedding of my niece, Claire, with Ben. Sadly he was in hospital again in October and Joyce attended Michael and Katherine's wedding alone.

In August Charles had the energy to enjoy his birthday treat with a weekend in York and day on the Flying Scotsman on the Settle-Carlisle railway. Stunning sunshine, then cold drizzle, was reminiscent of the Pennine Way expedition in his youth.

We have been well supported by friends and family and especially by our friend Revd Will Hunter Smart and members of St Nics, Newbury. So often the sermons spoke into our situation and prayers, cards and messages arrived to encourage us. 'My Rock, My Refuge', Daily readings in the Psalms, by Tim Keller, has been an amazing blessing this year, frequently being just the word I needed.

Charles spent 3 weeks in Kings College Hospital, being assessed for a Liver Transplant, appreciating long conversations with family and friends. He became too weak to undergo the operation and died peacefully on November 16<sup>th</sup> surrounded by his family. Will arrived in time to give a closing prayer and Charles slipped away after the Amen.

His Funeral was a fitting celebration of his life, attended by over 250 friends, including 3 Rectors of St Nics. We buried his ashes in the St Nics Memorial Garden last weekend and were reminded that Jesus is the Light of the World (a new installation by our friend Ben Norman), and continues to speak hope into our darkness.

Love from Joyce.

Memories and photos can be found at [zealey.org](http://zealey.org)





