



From Beyond The Pond



2025 Edition

The Mallinsons, Orillia, Ontario, Canada

Dear All,

Happy New Year to everyone! Our year has started off with major snowfalls, and we still have three feet of snow on the ground. Temperatures have been correspondingly low, down to -24C at times.

David and Sue:

We continue to have enough activities to keep us busy all year, with hiking/snowshoeing at least once a week to keep us fit. My attendance at pickleball has dropped off, largely because so many people turn up for it that one spends a lot of time on the bench waiting for each game; though I should be returning there to burn off some of the extra pounds that I have gained over the Christmas period.

Sue also continues to work in the kitchen at the food bank on Thursdays, where they prepare ever more take-away meals for distribution to 'members', shelters and retirement homes.

Some of the highlights and lowlights of the year were:

- An ice storm at the end of March that devastated the trees in a broad band across our area, and forced us to do without power for three days. Sue's friend Verla turned up on our doorstep one morning when her house became so cold that she could not stay in it, so she and her cat stayed with us until the power came on again. Thanks to our two gas fires, camping stove and barbecue, we managed to stay alive and relatively warm.
- An historic building in downtown Orillia was set on fire by a homeless man and burned down completely, taking with it Sue's favourite clothing store, though it opened later in another location. The man was charged with arson.
- We enjoyed a visit to Elmvale Jungle Zoo with grandson Aiden in the summer. This small zoo is surprisingly good (though it does not compare to the one in Toronto) with many exotic animals, including

white lions, flamingos, tigers, kangaroos, mandrills and various types of macaws.

- After a Bowes family reunion in August, we were pleased to give niece Lisa, husband Mark and daughter Rachel a ride to North Bay where they picked up a rental car to continue their vacation in Ottawa and Quebec. While in North Bay, Sue and I visited the waterfront and the local Museum, which displayed many interesting local artifacts.
- In September, Sue and I took a two-week holiday in Scotland, the highlights of which were:



- Enjoying a pizza dinner in Edinburgh with Maria Buchan, a distant cousin. Maria's great-grandmother Maude was my paternal grandfather's sister, who we knew had married and disappeared to Scotland in the late 1800's, and who then lost touch with the rest of the family. Maria contacted James a few years ago as a result of DNA matching.
- A visit to the historic and interesting Edinburgh castle, along with hundreds of other tourists.
- A tour of the Royal Yacht Britannia, which has been retired and is now in Leith harbour on the outskirts of Edinburgh. We were surprised by the narrowness of the bed in the Queen's cabin.

My parents dined with the Queen (and a few others!) in 1961 when the Britannia visited The Gambia.

- A visit to the Culloden battlefield near Inverness, where the English finally vanquished the Jacobites in 1746.
- Driving to the Isle of Skye with overnight stays in several places, including Dunkeld, Inverness, and Balmacara, hiking in several spots on the way, and visiting the Eilean Donan castle.
- A stay at Elgol on the west side of Skye, reached by a long, sinuous, rolling and narrow one-lane road with frequent passing places.
- A beautiful hike up Glen Nevis, in the shadow of Ben Nevis.
- A trip on the Sir Walter Scott steamboat on Loch Katrine.

- Driving back to Edinburgh via Spean Bridge, Fort William, Oban, Callander, and Falkirk with several overnight stays. Near Falkirk, we also saw the unique Falkirk Wheel that connects the Forth & Clyde Canal to the Union Canal with a height difference of 35 metres between the two, and viewed the famous Kelpies, massive metal sculptures of two horses' heads.
- A panoramic view of the three Forth bridges, one of which we had crossed on the way to Inverness earlier.
- Together with Michael and Katherine, we attended a showing of Robin Lee's documentary *Four Trails* in October. Robin is my cousin Rowena's son who has lived in Hong Kong since birth. The Four Trails event is a grueling 298 km run over local trails in the hills of Hong Kong that takes place over the course of three days. Robin was named Best New Director in the 43rd Hong Kong film awards.
- Sue's longtime friend, Bonnie Bird, sadly died of cancer in November. Sue met Bonnie in the lineup for registration at the University of Guelph in 1966. Bonnie was instrumental in bringing Sue and me together, as she persuaded Sue to go with her on a hiking trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire in 1975, which was where we first met. Subsequently, she was the maid of honour at our wedding in 1977, and we have frequently met up for various activities with her and her husband Andreas over the years. She will be very much missed.
- We celebrated my 80th birthday in December, when our offspring arranged for a very pleasant party together with Michael's family at a workspace that Elsa uses; the owners also catered the event.



Home and Cottage:

The major task this year was to get the cottage, boathouse and woodshed all painted, which was accomplished in late spring, but not by us; we contracted with a man who paints places in his retirement.

Around the same time that the painter started his work, a tall tree by the gate was blown over during a windstorm but fortunately missed the cottage itself. If we had not buried our power lines a few years ago, they would certainly have been pulled down again. The tree had cracked down the middle some years ago, and on windy days you could see the crack opening and closing, so it's no surprise that it has finally succumbed.

James took the lead in fixing the walkway up to the second floor of the boathouse by replacing the railings and planking. Over the course of a weekend, he removed the planking on it, bought the necessary wood and screws, cut

the wood to size, replaced the railings, and laid down new planking, with help from Chris. It now feels far safer than the old walkway with its rotting wood.

At the end of the summer, we did not seem to be able to settle on a weekend for all of us to come up and close the cottage for the winter, so we hired a couple of guys to bring in and stack the dock before the lake froze up. Eventually, when we all were there to complete the final jobs, we found that the water system had frozen. With judicious use of heaters, we were able to thaw out the pump and finish the job of draining the necessary pipes.

A likely job for next year will be to replace the rotting pieces of the dock, and to replace the paving stones leading to the porch.

James, Elsa and Aiden:

James, Elsa and Aiden had an eventful 2025. In March they ventured on a 10-day holiday to Mexico City to visit some friends who had relocated there and marveled at the Aztec archaeological sites, "floating farm" chinampas, hundreds of museums, delicious food and vibrant street life. A highlight was travelling north of the city to visit the massive site of Teotihuacan and its enormous 2000-year-old pyramids. They felt like they only got a small taste of what Mexico City has to offer and plan to return.

Aiden continues to be a social kid and came home from school the other day very enthusiastic about having had the opportunity to help younger kids in his class figure out a science experiment. He talks all the time and loves to assist others and create harmony around him, which is quite heartwarming. Outside of school, Aiden is enjoying swimming lessons and ball hockey. He also discovered a love for downhill skiing,

which was aided by the enormous snowfall that Orillia and the nearby ski hills received. Aiden, Elsa and James enjoyed exploring Mount St. Louis early in the year and joined Elsa's brother's family at Mont Tremblant in Quebec this past Christmas.

Elsa's work at Canadian Architect magazine continues to be diverse and rewarding, although the past year has seen a decrease in the amount of activist journalism. The Ontario Science Centre and Ontario Place controversies have unfortunately progressed in the Ontario government's favour despite significant opposition to their redevelopment plans, but Elsa continues to be involved in advocacy for the repurposing of the sites' mid-century modern structures. Outside of the magazine Elsa has been acting chair of the advisory board of Building Equity in Architecture Toronto (BEA Toronto) which supports primarily women in establishing themselves in a historically male profession. She continues to contact dance and has

been pumping iron at the gym so that the formidable force of her mind has the muscles to match it.

Avid readers of this newsletter may recall that James spent a lot of time last year in the mud of a construction site in Ottawa arguing with contractors about foundation waterproofing. We're happy to report that James is still on that same site, in the mud, arguing with contractors about foundation waterproofing! Fortunately, the rest of the children's hospital has progressed in spite of this and recently topped out at seven stories of concrete and is still on schedule. When not in the mud, James continues to be devoted to his tai chi practice and singing with his office rock band.



Rebecca:

Rebecca had an eventful 2025. Her year started off well; the whole family visited us in Orillia in February to take full advantage of the record snow falls we had in 2025, and everyone enjoyed hiking and/or skiing, and generally frolicking in the snow.

Come spring, Rebecca resumed zipping around Toronto on her relatively new pedal-assist electric bicycle, including to and from serial silks classes and regular visits with James, Elsa and Aiden. In June, she was treated by James and Elsa to a wonderful performance of Cirque du Soleil's show, Ovo. She also performed in her own circus studio's aerial arts show in June, for which she choreographed a new routine and sewed herself a new costume.

In July, Rebecca attended the Mariposa Folk Festival with Sue, James, Elsa and Aiden, which has become something of an annual tradition. July also saw Rebecca, James and Aiden go canoe-camping in Algonquin Park with Raj, a friend of James' from university. Rebecca thoroughly enjoyed the trip, since she had not done any canoe camping since the summer she spent working as an Ontario Ranger in Quetico Provincial Park when she was 17.

Rebecca's August was *unintentionally* eventful. At the beginning of the month, the drain pipe under her kitchen sink partially disintegrated, redirecting dish water into her kitchen cupboard. Mid-month, Rebecca participated in nephew Aiden's 8th birthday party at an outdoor trampoline park, which was "super fun" until she rolled her ankle on an innocuous-seeming bounce and broke her fibula. James drove her to a local emergency room and waited with her for the X-Ray that scuppered any plans to join me and Sue on our hiking holiday in Scotland in September. At the end of August, Rebecca's oven experienced an electrical fire, which she put out by flipping the breakers and spraying it with her fire extinguisher. This unfortunately left everything in her apartment covered in a thin layer of fine yellow fire extinguisher powder. Cleaning up the mess while hobbling

around in an air cast was far from enjoyable, but she did get a brand-new stove out of the experience... which promptly produced massive green electrical sparks the first time she first turned it on. (The new stove was immediately repaired and now works fine). SO, instead of hiking in Scotland in September, Rebecca crutched to local parks, spread her picnic blanket on the grass, and read. She did lots of physiotherapy in the Fall to regain ankle strength and mobility, and was back in the circus studio before the end of September, but didn't recover quickly enough to perform in the studio's November aerial silks showcase. She has still not fully recovered her pre-break range of motion, but she continues to work on regaining strength and joint mobility, and hopes that 2026 will be less prone to calamity.

Chris:

Chris has been hard at work still on his latest video game "Speed Freeks", which has had a very challenging year unfortunately, relieved only by a visit to a conference in Croatia. He has moved back in with us for a while to save money and avoid firing some people on his team, though also wanted a change of pace from the city anyways, and is happy to spend time with us in Orillia - as are we with him. He has brought his little dog as well who absolutely adores the snow, and Chris has taken up skiing as to quote him directly: it's the most exciting thing he's done in his adult life. He plans to stay here until his next project is on the market, then may spend a few months working remotely in Europe with pup Lyon.



The state of the world continues to concern us, with the orange-haired, dangerous and corrupt buffoon to the south of us becoming ever more unpredictable and deranged. His pronouncements and actions become more and more bizarre each day, and we can only hope that Republican party supporters will finally wake up and recognize all the damage that he is causing to his country's well-being and reputation, and to the world's peace of mind.

As with last year, we wish everyone a belated Merry Christmas and an enjoyable 2026.

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



Sue on a CFUW hike



Clearing snow off the driveway



Ice storm effects



Fire-gutted building in downtown Orillia



Downed tree at the cottage



Dawn at the cottage



A warming fire at the cottage



Friends Bonnie Bird and Andreas Gada



On a CFUW hike



James building the new ramp for the boathouse



Edinburgh Castle



Edinburgh Castle at night



Meeting up with Maria Buchan



State dining room on RY Britannia



Royal Yacht Britannia



Eilean Donan Castle



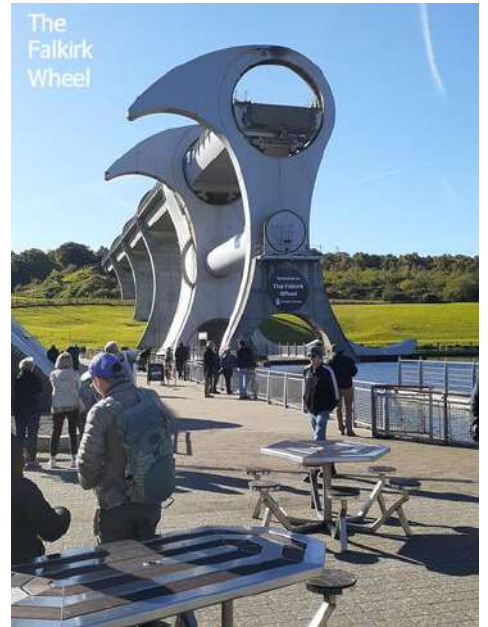
The road to Elgol,
Isle of Skye



Sue in Glen Nevis



On the Sir Walter Scott
steamboat, Lock Katrine



The Falkirk
Wheel



The Kelpies



Newly painted cottage



David in Glen Nevis

