

## *Christmas News , December 2021*

*From 2173 Tryon Road, North Saanich, BC. V8L 5H6*

Dear Friends

Our 2020 Christmas newsletter ends with the smell of roast duck wafting in from the kitchen. Rachel was here and we were having a lovely time. I did not say anything in the newsletter about Gill's Alzheimers or about my own health. The truth was that Gill's dementia was reaching the point I couldn't look after her properly at home and I had lost weight and was feeling tired and unwell. Neither did I mention that Gill had been on the waiting list for admission to a VIHA (government subsidized) dementia care home since September 2020 and was now, in December, about halfway up the list for admission to one of three 'preferred locations' down in the Fairfield region of Victoria. It looked as if Gill might get the offer of a bed in April or May and the plan was then to move her to whichever care home first came through with an offer. In Fairfield she would be close to where Al, Kjerstin, Bran, Jon , Frida, Quentin, Cathy and Claire all live. I would then sell the house and move down to Fairfield myself. This was Plan A.



*Jan. 6, our 66<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (photo by Al)*

In early January 2021 after Rachel had gone back to France I decided I couldn't go on looking after Gill at home. I could manage the shopping, cooking, laundry etc but Gill was more and more 'wibbly wobbly' (as she put it) and subject to falling and not being able to get back up. That was a problem and so were the disturbed nights. We had electronic devices to alert me if she got into scrapes but sometimes I was too whacked to wake up. Once when Rachel was here Gill got stuck on the floor beside her bed, unable to climb back in. I slept right through her cries for help! Luckily Rachel, upstairs in the red bedroom, heard her and came to the rescue. Things couldn't go on like this.

There was a private care facility, Sidney AllCare, a short drive away and they could take her at short notice. On Monday Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 2021, feeling horrible, I drove Gill there, accompanied by Al for moral support. Al and Quentin had gone in on the weekend and taken in furniture, pictures etc, to make her room more homelike. The move to Allcare was of course an interim measure, pending offer of a bed at a VIHA place. Keeping Gill there was very expensive but the staff did a good job of looking after her. I was allowed to visit her twice a week during the two-week quarantine period as an 'essential visitor', and once a week thereafter. Later, Al was also allowed to visit her as a 'designated visitor'. Gill seemed to be comfortable there, surrounded by her own things and with a view out onto a courtyard with a tree with bird feeders hanging from its branches. I missed her very much but knew it had been the right decision.



*January 2021. Gill at Sidney Allcare*

another year or two? By now, with my blood sugar coming under control and with encouragement from Al and Quentin (whose choice of careers in archaeology was a significant loss to Family Counselling) I had recovered enough mojo to do a complete U turn. I wrote to the two realtors telling them I was postponing selling the house indefinitely.

Life immediately became a lot simpler. Al and I had been making lists of pottery, pictures, furniture etc. that would be up for grabs when I moved out and had sent them round for the kids to put dibs on. These lists will still be useful one day, but for now the heat was off. Under Plan A I

Despite being relieved of the day-to-day work of being Gill's primary carer I was still not feeling well. I will not list my symptoms, suffice to say in February I went to my doctor, who ordered tests and came up with an unequivocal diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes. I started taking metformin and slowly began to feel better. Plan A however was still fixed firmly in my mind and in the third week of March I duly set about selling the house. Two realtors came and looked at it, did their homework, and came back with estimates of how much we should be asking for it – a rather staggering amount as it turned out. The thought of all that money was tempting indeed and I was looking forward to being able to share it out with our children (Gill would certainly have been in favour of this) but deep down I hated the idea of having to leave 2173 Tryon Road, home for the last 52 years. After all, many of my friends live up here in North Saanich, I have my pottery workshop all set up here and the big living room and piano for music groups, it would be very hard to duplicate all this in an apartment in downtown Victoria. I suppressed such insidious thoughts, my mind firmly set on selling up and moving.

In early April, after a long chat with Quentin, who has a way of seeing through to the essentials, I began to see my way clearer. I realized that I could probably still get VIHA to change Gillian's 'preferred locations' from the two places in Fairfield to two in Sidney without this affecting her position on the wait list. I phoned Val MacDonald, Gill's VIHA case manager. She was away but her deputy saw no problem with this, and the change was made. Just in the nick of time! On April 14<sup>th</sup>, after 7 months on the wait list, Gill's number came up, and she was offered a bed at 'Sidcare' (Sidney Care Home).

But what about Plan A? If she was going to end her days in Sidney, what was I doing selling the house?

Was I really too old and feeble to stay on at Tryon Rd for



had even sold the piano to Allison Piano who specialize in restoring and reselling high quality old instruments. The movers were actually on the way to get it when I phoned Katherine Allison and told her I wanted to keep it after all. She agreed to put the deal on hold and I sent her the money back. In late May, feeling much more upbeat, I found a good pianist, Iryna Graifer and with Michael Ray and Fran Rothman started playing baroque trio sonatas.

Gill's move from Allcare to Sidcare went smoothly though on arriving at her new home she noticed the sign at the front saying Sidney Care Home and said to me "Why am I going into a care home? I don't want to be put into a care home". It seems she had not understood that she was in a care home at Allcare - our sons had done such a good job of making her room homelike with her comfortable armchair and her mother's and her friends' pictures, and frequent visits from Al and me, she may just have thought she was still at home but in another part of the house. I was impressed with the way one of the nurses, Jessica, sat down with her in her new bedroom and gently, firmly, kindly explained that yes, she was in a care home because her doctors wanted her to be properly looked after.

I won't say much about Gillian's life over the following months except that Al and I both feel she was very well looked after and that Sidcare had a more friendly, relaxed feel to it than Allcare. Residents weren't expected to sit alone in their rooms but were brought together in recreation areas and dining rooms. Gill could still walk with a walker through much of the spring and Al, Quentin and I took her out for drives in the country. She enjoyed everything about the countryside, especially trips to sit in the churchyard at St Stephens. On and around the old graves in April and May there are masses of spring flowers, grape hyacinths, primroses and fawn lilies and beautiful trees coming into leaf. With the steady relaxation of covid restrictions it was now possible for Gill's friends to visit, chief among them Ellen Carey, Akiko Shewring and Pat Hutchings. Kjerstin came on May 25<sup>th</sup> with a birthday cake and we had a party out at the back in a garden-like area. Akiko bravely took Gill out for drives, though getting Gill in and out of the car was quite difficult.

Ever since Gill first went into care Rachel, Tina and Richard had been having regular Skype chats or Zoom meetings with her and this continued well into the summer. When Rachel was here in July she managed to set up a zoom meeting for Gill with her sister Pat in Australia. Even though Gill was sleepy and did not say much she appeared to be following what Pat was saying to her and Rachel could 'interpret' Gill's expressions for Pat's benefit. This made a big impression on Pat and she referred to it as a wonderful experience when I talked to her later. Pat herself has been going through tough times.



*Spring flowers in St Stephens churchyard*



*June 21. Rachel, Richard and Gill zooming at Sid Care*



*Pat in restaurant, Yankalilla*

Her second foot was amputated on April 25<sup>th</sup> and she was still in hospital in Castlemaine recovering from the operation when, on May 31<sup>st</sup>, her husband Stuart suddenly died from spinal sepsis. It was not until June 19<sup>th</sup> that I heard the news as Pat had been reluctant to pass it on for fear of upsetting her sis. Stuart's brother Peter and his wife Ann took over responsibility for Pat and she is now in a care facility in Yankalilla, close to where they live and they are doing everything they can to help her settle in. Her mind is still sharp, she can propel herself around in her wheelchair and she enjoys going out for meals in restaurants.

Sometime in the first week of July Gill's condition abruptly deteriorated, she lost the power of speech except for a very few words.

It was hard to know if she could still understand what people said to her. When Al and I tried to get her up out of her wheelchair she could not stay standing. Al noticed that it was her right leg that gave way. It seemed clear she had had a stroke and this was confirmed after her doctor visited her on July 19 and tested her reflexes, finding right side paralysis. Rachel flew over from France on July 20 and went to see Gill every day during her short stay. It was her idea to put a pillow under Gill's right arm to lift it up a bit as it was getting lymphedematous from lack of use. This worked but the overall decline was irreversible and Gill was having trouble chewing and swallowing solid food, which meant that the carers had to mince her food.

From early August onward, Tina made frequent visits from Mayne Island, sat with Gill and talked to her, thinking that even if Gill didn't respond, she might still be taking it in at some level and finding it comforting. And so it went on, with moments where we thought Gill was getting over some of the effects of the stroke, moving her right arm a bit and even smiling when we came to see her. To get a smile from her was to know she was still there. Richard and Sue came over from Vancouver to see her. Quentin, Al, Tina and I continued to visit but the country drives were no longer possible. Gill was now on hydromorphone, an opiate, to relieve any pain she might be feeling. As she could not speak, she could not say if she was uncomfortable, so they were playing it safe.



*Gill smiling at Al, after her stroke*

On Monday, Sept 13, I was phoned by Noelle, a senior nurse, to say that Gill was going into palliative care as she had stopped eating and drinking. On Wednesday I asked my doctor how much longer he thought she was likely to live and he said he guessed about 48 hours. On Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> Tina's partner Chris Panton flew over from London. Tina met him at the airport and they stopped in at SidCare before coming to spend the night at Tryon Rd. They were the last family members to see Gill alive. I got a phone call a bit before five on Friday morning, Sept 17<sup>th</sup>, to say Gill had died. The night staff had been checking on her every half hour and would have phoned me if they had thought her demise was imminent but she showed no such signs so they did not call and I was not at her bedside when she died. I got there a little after five and sat with her for a bit. They had tidied up the room and bed, brushed Gill's hair and put her teddy bear on her chest and



soft music on the CD player. The young Filipina night nurse said it was the most peaceful passing - she just stopped breathing.



**MACKIE, Gillian**

It is with deep regret that I announce the death of my dear wife Gillian Mackie at the age of 90. We emigrated from England in 1955 with the first two of what was to become five children and lived in Edmonton until 1968 when we moved to Victoria. Gillian already had a Master's degree in Zoology from Oxford but as the children grew up and began to leave home she enrolled as a part time student in Art History at the University of Victoria. This led to masters and doctoral degrees. Her PhD thesis won her the Governor General's gold medal. Gillian was a scholar of Early Christian art and iconography and her book *Early Christian Chapels in the West* (University of Toronto Press) is a standard reference. She taught several courses at Uvic with the infectious enthusiasm of one who really loves her subject. Gillian was an accomplished potter and some of her stoneware and porcelain pieces are in the permanent collections of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Maltwood Museum. She was an artist in everything she did whether it was quilting, potting, making clothing, cooking or gardening. She had a remarkable eye for colour, pattern and texture. Gillian was a devoted mother to Alexander, Christina, Richard, Rachel and Quentin and kept up for as long as she could with their doings and with those of her nine grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

A private memorial service for family and a few close friends will take place in late October.

- George Mackie

In the days that followed we often found ourselves asking what would Gill have wanted? All I knew was that she was in favour of cremation. Al and I had contacted an undertaker so I had a number to call the morning Gill died and they took over and subsequently steered us through the mass of paperwork that follows upon a death. The cremation took place on Wednesday the following week. I wrote an obit for the Times Colonist. Now we could start thinking about a memorial service. Rachel could get away near the end of October so we decided to wait till then.

I had watched videos of other funerals – Stuart's in Australia, Susan and Quentin Bone's in England. None of these was conducted according to Christian ritual. They were essentially secular events, celebrating the person's life rather than mourning their death and ushering them to the hereafter. Family members would share their memories and tell stories about the deceased person. Kjerstin is a former Unitarian chaplain and was willing to come out of retirement and conduct a memorial service along Unitarian lines for Gillian and this seemed like much the best way to do it. Al and Kjerstin put their heads together and came up with a list of places where Covid restrictions might still allow a memorial service gathering. First on the list was St Stephen's church where we had so often taken Gill for afternoon drives, but it seemed wildly unlikely they would agree to host a Unitarian service – not only were we not parishioners, we weren't churchgoers at all. And yet, when Kjerstin phoned the minister, the Ven. Dr Lon Towstego, she was told it was perfectly possible given our Anglican background. Depending on the numbers of people attending, it might have to be in the church hall, not the church. The minister himself would be present on principle but Kjerstin could officiate. The Unitarians were "not a wild lot" in Dr Towstego's opinion. He also said we could inter Gill's ashes in a grave in the churchyard. I knew Gill would

have been happy with this and I think it means a lot to all of us.

Having an ordained priest as part of the service appealed to me greatly. Gillian and I were both baptized and confirmed in the Anglican church and familiar with much of the liturgy, valuing the lovely old words from the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible. I found myself wishing we could have a traditional church funeral. After talking with Al, Kjerstin and Quentin, I asked Dr Towstego to conduct the entire service himself. Kjerstin was happy to hand the officiating



**Bob and Richard at St Stephens, Oct 29 (photo by Rachel)**

over to him. It turned out he was pleased to do it and, better still, was willing to open up the church for the service provided the number of attendees did not exceed the Covid seating capacity – there would be room for 25 people, seated 2 metres apart. I met with Lon Towstego on October 6<sup>th</sup> at St Stephens and presented him with a draft order of service – a week's hard work. A theology student, Leslie, in training for the ministry, was present and she would assist at the service. Lon wanted something added from the New Testament (I suggested Romans 12, 9-21) but otherwise he liked what I had set forth. There would be music before, during and after and tributes from Quentin and Tina. Chris extracted the music I wanted from YouTube. We settled on October 29<sup>th</sup> as the date for the funeral. Al and I met with the Cemetery Manager and chose a spot for the interment and learned how to work the sound system in the church.

Rachel flew over from France on Oct 24 and Bob Meech from England on the 26<sup>th</sup>, welcome company for me at a difficult time. After days of rain, October 29 dawned warm and sunny. Pat Hutchings went in early and arranged the flowers in the church and, following a suggestion from Bob, put a big, framed picture of Gill near the flowers where everyone would see it on entering the church. The congregation assembled at the church. The music began, and then the service, the introduction, the readings, tributes, commendation, dismissal all according to the prayer book. Quentin and Tina's tributes were the high points. I felt proud of our family. When the music finished, Leslie was there holding a shining cross on a tall pole up in front of her. She and Lon proceeded down the aisle. I joined them, holding the casket with the ashes. We reached the graveside, everyone gathered round, and Lon delivered the Committal. As he spoke the words "*We have but a short time to live. Like a flower we blossom and then wither; like a shadow we flee and never stay. In the midst of life we are in death*" I knelt beside the grave with the casket and as he said "*we now commit her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust*" I placed it in the grave. Rachel handed me some nerine lilies to put in there with her. And that was it.



**Oct 30. Gill's grave with flowers**

Good night dear Gill, may flights of angels guide thee to thy rest.

With love from

*George*