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I always seem to start off these annual newsletters by saying what a busy year it's been and how life generally gets more hectic. Well, this year has been different, for one very good reason – Jane. We have been together for 14 months now, and living together since just before last Christmas, and it has been one of the happiest years of my life. I am still very much in love with her, and I'm constantly surprised that the feeling seems to be mutual. Yes, I still work too much, but it's so much easier to go home at a reasonable hour and do things outside work when there's someone to go home to and do things with. This doesn't mean that I have been idle at work this year – things seem still to have got done, and it's actually been a very productive year, with several papers submitted, including an exciting one that will appear in early January, and which I can't really say much more about because of Journal embargo policies...



Jane in the Mourne mountains, Northern Ireland

Jane was really thrown in at the deep-end, as at the last minute she decided to join me in Islip for Christmas 2006 with the rest of my family, which must be tough for anyone, but she seems to have survived. I've been able to meet her family more slowly and in shorter doses, but I'm looking forward to spending Christmas Eve (the traditional day of festivities in Denmark) with her mother's side of the family this year. We were back in Denmark for New Year 2007, and had a pleasant evening with Patrizia D'Ettore, Mauro Patricelli and old friend Waseem Baloch, who is now working just across the sound in Sweden. Jane spent the last few months of 2006 and the first of 2007 shuttling between Copenhagen and London for her work, so I joined her in London for several weekends, and at the same time managed to meet up with Seirian Sumner and Reuben in mid January (while having my mobile phone stolen at the same time). Jane's period as a nomad came to an end in February, so we finally had a

housewarming party in Nansensgade 40 on Shrove Tuesday, which was combined with my usual pancake and candle party. Exactly one month later we moved out of that flat and into our current flat. This is a nice, big, airy, penthouse apartment, with a large glazed balcony, which at the same time gives a good view of the city and the sky and makes the place intolerably warm in the heat of summer. This flat will also only be a temporary let, as we only have a contract 'til next August, but we should be there for the first half of 2008 in any case, if you want to visit. If you want to write, and are uncertain of the address, you can always send things to my work address, which shouldn't change substantially.



Robert and Iris (plus family and witnesses) outside the town hall in Leuven, having just tied the knot.

I managed to do quite a bit of European travelling in 2007, both associated with work, and for pleasure. This kicked off with a trip to the Tvärminne field station, near Helsinki, at the end of March, where I took place in the first meeting of a NordForsk network of which our research group is a partner. Easter was then spent in the

U.K., after which I had a period back in Denmark for fieldwork. The end of June was particularly hectic, as Jane and I went to Budapest for a long weekend (thanks to András Tartally and Enikő Tóth), partly to see Tori Amos in concert. We would have loved to have stayed longer and visit Gyüri and other Hungarian friends, but we had to press on to an important appointment in Belgium. Robert Esnouf, my oldest friend (32 years so far), and Iris Geens got married in Leuven on the 29th June, and they did me the honour of asking me to be one of the witnesses. It was great to meet up with Roberts' family again, some of whom I haven't seen for decades, and also to drop in on Johan Billen and Tom Wenseleers for a surprise visit to their lab while I was there. There is no rest for the wicked, so no sooner had we returned from Belgium than I was off again for a week, this time on my own to a butterfly conference in a wonderful villa in Frescati, just outside Rome. Much of the next month was spent doing fieldwork in Denmark, which unfortunately meant that I missed the wedding of Jonathan Beale and Janice Knowles in early August. Jane and I did take a proper holiday in mid August, however, spending a great week in Northern Ireland travelling from B&B to B&B in a hire car, and then spending another week in Islip. My final trip of the year was another NordForsk meeting, this time in Tartu in Estonia. We enjoyed sub-zero temperatures, snow and a visit to the Setu nation museum on the trip, as well as making some valuable contacts among our Estonian hosts.

Apart from the travelling, 2007 has been a year with many high points, but also a few lows. Back in the spring I had to spend a couple of months getting a dental problem sorted out, which eventually meant losing a wisdom tooth (hopefully without the associated wisdom) and having root canal work. One of the most enjoyable occasions of the year, on the other hand, was Jane's grandfather's 93rd birthday, where he invited family and friends for a sunset cruise aboard the "Sagafjord" floating restaurant on Roskilde Fjord. In mid November we had a bit of a scare when Jane had to be admitted to hospital for emergency surgery – it turned out to be a "simple" hernia resulting from a gall-bladder operation she had 7 years ago, but it was rather worrying at the time. She is now almost completely recovered, and even the scar is starting to become less colourful. The saddest moment of the year came the following week, when my uncle Mike passed away, fol-

lowing a short battle with cancer. Unfortunately I couldn't make the funeral, because of the conference in Tartu, but my thoughts are still with my cousins, Sue and Andy, and with my Dad for having lost such a vivacious character as uncle Mike far too early. Life continues 'though, and the same week came the joyous news of the birth of Robert and Iris' son Aidan, who I look forward to meeting in person over the New Year.



Jane's grandfather fires the salute to mark sunset, and his birthday, as the colours are struck

There is a lot to look forward to in 2008, particularly another year with Jane, but also planned trips to South Africa and Belgium for conferences – and who knows, maybe meeting up with some of those who I've not seen in 2007. In the meantime, I hope you'll have a great Christmas 2007, and that 2008 will be the best year yet.

David



Panoramic view of the Giant's causeway, Northern Ireland