

VOL XXVII, No. 1 NEWSLETTER JUNE 2016

AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former officials of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to other UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of 57 associations similar to ours and an essential source of advice on pension-related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes.

This newsletter has been printed and posted with funds from the AAFICS membership.

Dear AAFICS Members,

It has been a long year for the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund and for us, the retirees. From May 2015, a “new, Improved Pension Administration System” (IPAS), in other words a new IT system, has been introduced at the UN Pension Fund, and right from the start the new baby had colic, nappy rash and teething trouble. Surviving spouses have waited many long months for their benefits to start up. We have had at least three such cases in Australia, with a widow in her 90’s waiting for the processing to be completed. Major delays have also occurred in paying first pension benefits after the date of retirement. Kate Gordon, former official of UNHCR, recounts her experience further on in this newsletter. Even normal administrative processes such as registering changes of address and changes in banking instructions, the quarterly notifications of how much we are paid, and the annual declaration of income from the Fund, have not been going smoothly. Data on the UN Pension Fund’s website is mostly now out-of-date, despite one of the intentions of IPAS being to provide us with up-to-date personal information so that we can use the website rather than getting in touch with the Pension Fund secretariat.

Any one trying to send an email request to the UN Pension Fund secretariat received an automatic response saying their email was placed in a queue and would be dealt with at some stage. Then the automatic response became more and more erratic, in one case arriving almost a year after the original emailed query. Fortunately the existing retirees, of whom there are around 72,000 worldwide, and 500 plus in Australia, received their payments regularly and on time.

One can only feel sorry for the staff of the UN Pension Fund. Whenever we have been able to get in touch with one of them personally to ask for help, the issue has been expedited, and usually reached a good conclusion. The CEO of the UN Pension Fund, Sergio Arvizu, wrote to us several times to say that either things were not so bad as rumoured, or that things were about to get better. United Nations Staff associations ran a highly critical counter information campaign, which some among us thought to be too strong. FAFICS, the Federation of retirees’ associations to which we belong, kept a watching brief in New York and provided us with the occasional reassurance that things would indeed improve.

At the same time, disquiet grew about the delays of the Representative of the Secretary General in charge of Investments for the UN Pension Fund, Ms Carol Boykin, in filling five key top grade posts in investments. Fortunately, the Investment Advisory Committee, made up of volunteer experts of international standing, has been meeting on a quarterly basis and like the Board of the UN Pension Fund, has clearly said that the Investments Management Division under Ms Boykin has a primary objective – to reach 3.5% real rate of return on the investments. The tactical advice

of the Investment Advisory Committee served the UN Pension Fund and its investments very well during the Global Financial Crisis of 2007. At the meeting of the Board of the UN Pension Fund which will take place in Vienna in July this year, there will be a discussion on the Fund's investment policy. We will be sure to report on this to you.

AAFICS has 277 members around Australia. We have had nearly a dozen new members join and of course, inevitably we have lost some good dear friends. Before the end of 2015 the UN Pension Fund contacted AAFICS with a list of 9 names of people who had not returned their 2014 Certificates of Entitlement. It was easy to find those who are on our membership list, and they were alerted before their monthly benefits were suspended. This alone is a good reason to join AAFICS!

AAFICS state coordinators were as prompt as ever to follow up on members' requests for assistance or information and arranged social gatherings, always very welcome. At the most recent Queensland gathering of AAFICS members, a proposal was made to contact two Australian Federal senators who had been nominated for a lengthy study tour to the United Nations in New York. AAFICS would like to brief the senators on some of the issues at the Pension Fund, and encourage them to ask questions. It would also be a great thing if the senators met Australian officials working at the UN in New York and learned more about their experiences. When the July 2 federal elections are over, we will get back to work on this proposal.

Mary Johnson will be representing AAFICS at the annual Council of the Federation of Associations of International Civil Servants (FAFICS, to which we belong). The CEO of the UN Pension Fund and the Representative of the Secretary General responsible for Investments will be at the FAFICS Council, for a day of explanation and discussion, on Monday 11 July in Vienna.

Contributions to this newsletter have come from the NSW mob: Kate Gordon, Bob and Leslie Pigott, Kelvin Widdows, Margaret Zito, Tom Joel, and Mary Johnson

With best wishes to you all and be sure to stay in touch!

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. **The Certificate of entitlement** from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund will be sent to all of us (except those who retired in the last 12 months) sometime soon (June or July). All you have to do is sign it and post it back to the UN Pension Fund in New York as soon as you can. If you haven't received your Certificate by the end of July, get in touch with your AAFICS State Coordinator (all our names are at the end of this newsletter, with contact emails). In any case, the Pension Fund will send out another round of Certificates to those who haven't answered in the following months, so you will have another chance to sign and return it. The Certificate is a very important piece of paper – when you sign it and post it back to the UN Pension Fund, you ensure that your monthly benefit will continue to be paid. Mishaps do occur, as we well know. Sometimes the postal services let us down; sometimes we are away on a long holiday or are in hospital when the Certificate turns up and then gets lost among the accumulation of papers. Don't worry too much, just get in touch and we will help you sort things out.

2. **Your UN Pension Fund Retiree number** is changing. Up till now, we all have had a Retiree number attached to our UN Pension benefit. This began with a capital R/ followed by some numbers and was shown on all correspondence and payment notifications from the UN Pension Fund. In a letter dated April 2016, the CEO of the UN Pension Fund informed each of us of a new means of identification – a **Unique Identification Number or UID**. Please review any instructions you may have written out about your personal financial arrangements, relevant to your spouse and the survivor's benefit payable by the UN Pension Fund, as you may need to replace the old R/.... number with your new UID.

3. Get ready to use the **UN Pension Fund's web-based information system**. It is called the **Members Self Service** and from the time it comes into being, it is increasingly unlikely that you will be able to talk to a person if you ring New York or expect a reply to your email. Self-service is the order of the day. Originally expected to start at the end of May and now delayed, it will give you access to information about your own pension benefit. Look for www.unjspf.org –and be ready with your UID and answers to security questions. This will lead to you being provided a password. We hope the self service website will enable each of us to check our banking details, current address, exchange rates, three-monthly notification of benefits (i.e. your pay slip) and whether your Certificate of entitlement has been received, etc.

We have asked, but not yet been told, how UN retirees who don't use emails are going to have access to information.

TRIALS The case of Macoun versus the Australian Tax Office.

At the end-of-the year AAFICS NSW meeting followed by lunch, the members discussed the disappointing outcome of the case at the High Court of Australia brought by Andrew Macoun against the ATO. The discussion was prefaced by an introduction from Kelvin Widdows, former official of the ILO and UNJSPF Legal Services.

Kelvin Widdows briefly explained the background to the unanimous decision of the full High Court (of five judges) in December to reject an appeal by Mr Macoun, a World Bank retiree, contesting the power of the ATO to tax his periodic pension benefit from the Bank in Australia on the grounds that under Australian legislation the pension benefit was immune from national income tax. AAFICS had closely followed the litigation from early on, though never formally in any way joined in the proceedings, and provided material to the Bank retiree's legal team. While the Bank pension scheme is very similar to ours, there are differences; however AAFICS, at its 2014 annual meeting, had found the schemes sufficiently identical to provide a subvention towards the Bank retiree's legal costs, and individual AAFICS members had made personal donations. In the end, the ATO agreed to pay the appellant's legal costs, or a substantial proportion of them, so that these donors have now received significant reimbursements from the appellant.

The history of the litigation is that Mr Macoun enjoyed a favourable decision from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the first instance; the tribunal decided that the pension benefit was an 'emolument' (the term used in the relevant legislation relating to International civil servants' immunity from national taxation, as required under international conventions to which Australia is a party). The tribunal found that, like

salary, the pension benefits flowing from service in the organisation were immune from Australian income tax. The ATO then appealed to the full Federal Court which unanimously decided that the retirement benefit was not an ‘emolument’; it was not a right which vested during the course of service, rather, it was a right which arose on retirement and thus had an insufficient connection with active service to be related to salary and emoluments in the way argued by Mr Macoun. One of the three judges, however, considered that while interpretation of the legislation led to this inevitable conclusion, possibly Australia was in breach of its international obligations by not providing for such exemption. His finding was based on case law from Spain and India (provided by AAFICS) which declared international civil service retirement income as exempt from their national taxation, based on a more generous interpretation of the term emolument. This was, however, an issue on which the ATO counsel seemed not prepared to mount significant argument. It was probably this ostensible failure in the ATO’s case which led to the High Court agreeing to a request by the retiree to appeal the Federal Court decision to the full High Court, a relatively unusual result.

The High Court unanimously affirmed the Federal Court’s decision in favour of the ATO. The court found that the pension benefit was not an ‘emolument’ as it arose at a date after separation from service and not during the period of active service, like salary and related allowances; until separation it was some kind of inchoate entitlement which ‘vested’ in the future. This was confirmed by the structure of the Australian legislation which separated the immunities of serving officials based on the need for functional independence from governmental intrusion, from the far more limited immunities accorded to ‘former officials’, in which taxation from pension benefits was absent.

The ATO at this hearing managed to address the international law issue, providing substantive evidence of case law from the Netherlands and other jurisdictions which determined that pension benefits were not covered by the term ‘emolument’ under international law. The High Court judges found that these decisions showed a greater depth of consideration and legal analysis than had the Spanish decisions relied on by the appellants, referred to above. These judgments also introduced significant material from the preparatory work leading to adoption of the international conventions on privileges and immunities of international officials, which pointed to the deliberate absence of taxation immunity for former officials under the convention regime.

In the discussion which followed Kelvin’s presentation, it was agreed that the High Court judgment effectively foreclosed any further legal challenges to the Australian legislation on this issue. If there were to be any change, it would have to come through a policy change by government to exempt former international civil servants from income tax and consequential legislation of some kind. The meeting concluded that individuals might like to canvas their local federal member on the issue, pending consideration.

.....AND TRIBULATIONS

Kate Gordon, former UNHCR official gives us a picture of current communications with the UN Pension Fund.

Kate writes: After 41 years working, not all for the UN, I was really looking forward to retiring at the end of November 2015.

I had returned to Australia in 2011 for family reasons and was fortunate enough to pick up a national officer’s post in the UNHCR office in Canberra as Pacific Liaison

Officer. Prior to my return back to Australia I had been posted with UNHCR in Georgia, Sri Lanka, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Geneva with shorter term posts to Albania and Croatia. I had also worked for UNDP in Mongolia for nearly 3 years in the early 1990s.

Feeling isolated in far-flung Australia, my flight to go to Geneva for the pre-retirement seminar in March 2015 was already purchased when I had to cancel due to cyclone Pam in Vanuatu. I did find some online videos from previous seminars useful though.

In August 2015, on a leave trip to Europe which included a visit back to Geneva I took the opportunity to visit the UNJSPF office in Geneva for any crucial information I might need. UNHCR's back office had moved to Budapest several years ago so connecting with UNHCR HR staff was not on the schedule. At that time there was no hint that a new UNJSPF IT system was delaying the commencement of newly retired pension entitlements. I only learned through some Staff Council correspondence and from UNHCR colleagues nearing retirement on return to Australia the seriousness of the delays for pension payments for new retirees. There were stories that Geneva based former staff were facing eviction due to their inability to pay the rent or mortgage. I subsequently learned that some colleagues had been waiting 12 months for their first pension payment.

With this in mind, I ensured that all necessary paperwork was submitted on time, including the necessary re-submission of all recruitment documents including birth, marriage, divorce certificates etc.!

I called the UNJSPF office in Geneva in December 2015 to enquire when I might receive my first pension payment and was told that it would be probably 6 months but was requested to call back in January to check the status. I duly complied but in January 2016 the same telephone number used in December and advertised on the UNJSPF website was no longer "valid". After several weeks of trying to call I eventually got a recorded message that said I should send an email which would be answered in the queue. I duly complied again but have never received a reply to that message. Several weeks later I did eventually succeed in speaking to a live body in Geneva. I was curious to know how far my entitlement had moved in the queue and an indication of a possible first payment date for financial planning purposes. I was requested to be patient and understanding. I replied that I was very patient and understanding having worked in the system for so long, but my creditors were not so understanding and incredulous that the UN was unable to pay entitlements on time.

Out of the blue in mid-April 2016, a sum of money appeared in my bank account. Two weeks later I received a letter in the mail articulating my future monthly payments and a new Retiree number which is still of no use as the system for new retirees after July 2015 will not be live until "late spring" 2016 (i.e. autumn in the southern hemisphere). So the need to submit for a calculation/estimate for the Two Track system will have passed the 6 month deadline before the system goes live.

Former UNHCR colleagues retiring before me have still not received their first pension payment. I believe that if I had not been proactive, lobbying and engaging the good offices of AAFICS I also would still not have my first payment.

Mary asks: DO YOU HAVE AN OPINION ON...The United Nations Pension Fund has over US \$ 60 billion, invested worldwide. Last year AAFICS put forward a question regarding divesting the Fund of carbon-heavy investments to the Representative of the UN Secretary General who is responsible for the investments of

the Fund. The answer from the RSG, Carol Boykin, revealed she preferred influencing such companies to improve technologies to deal with carbon pollution rather than selling off the Pension Funds shares in them.

Other influential sovereign wealth and superannuation funds such as Norway's gigantic trust fund divested from 73 companies in 2015 for ethical and governance reasons. Norway takes an increasingly strict stance against vesting in fossil fuels and particularly coal mining. This includes BHP, where the Norway Fund is a top five shareholder.

The Australian Council of Superannuation Investors, whose members are 30 of the largest non-profit funds has recently held meetings with at least 130 of Australia's top 200 list companies which have put on the agenda environmental, social and governance concerns – specifically carbon risks, bribery and corruption, human rights and executive pay. Australian health industry fund HESTA which manages \$32 billion, followed by several other Australian super funds, announced last year that it had divested Transfield Services shares (Transfield operates the immigration detention camps in Nauru and Manus Island and has since changed its name to Broadspectrum Limited).

But perhaps most of us would agree with the view that first and foremost the UN Pension Fund should protect its financial returns on its investments rather than chase governance and environmental issues? Given the difficult global economic environment, where low interest rates, low inflation and even deflation seem likely to persist for a long time, it is not easy for large pension funds to maintain their annual rates of return. In the case of the UN Pension Fund, it is the long-term real rate of return of 3.5% that we have always kept under vigilant watch. We would not like the UN Pension Fund to adopt a more risky investment strategy in order to chase a better rate of return, would we?

Please send Mary any comments and questions about the management of the Pension Fund and its investments to her email: mcg.johnson@gmail.com

Your comments and questions will be very useful during the 11 July meeting in Vienna with the senior staff of the UN Pension Fund and the Investment Management Division.

How it all started: The letter below is one of the first pieces in the AAFICS archives.

Phone - 337.5839

212 Old South Head Road,
VAUCLUSE. 2030.
~~26 September, 1980.~~

Dear

I belong to a small group of retired U.N. staff members and members of AFICS who have started the nucleus of an informal association of ex U.N. staff in Australia.

It would, in principle, be an association part of, or affiliated with, AFICS New York.

The main purposes are social and supportive, with our common U.N. background and partly, perhaps very importantly, representation of our interests with Government authorities, particularly regarding the taxation of pensions.

Would you be interested in joining us? Get-togethers would, by necessity, be rare as we are so dispersed, but groups living near each other in cities, etc. could meet by arrangement.

As a group, there would be about 40 retired U.N. staff in Australia now; we would have a better chance in putting our case to Taxation, Joint Pension Fund and other Authorities and, if necessary, joining in common action.

A small yearly charge for postage would have to be made. Would \$3.00 be acceptable? With your permission, we would send you a list of names and addresses of ex U.N. staff retired in Australia. Please tell us if you would not wish to have your name on such a list.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Suggestions welcome, as are names of other ex U.N. staff you may know

Dr. J. H. Hirshman
(ex W.H.O.)

(Other members of our small nucleus are
Dr. H.T. Carroll (ex FAO) and Mr. Norman Wake (ex FAO).)

MORE DISPATCHES FROM THE FIELD

from Bill Pigott's hoard of writings and jottings, made during a 21 year career with WHO, which took him to Nepal, to WHO HQ in Geneva, back to Nepal as WHO Rep and on to Cambodia as WHO Rep.

1: "Instant Forestry" - Geneva, October 1985

Today, from an office on the seventh floor of WHO Headquarters in Geneva, I watched a group of workmen create a mini-forest – into a deep hole they placed three or four large trees by the WHO restaurant.

As a field staff member of WHO, I could not help but observe the difference between my experience at country level, (where a tree is planted as a seed, -transplanted when small – and then nurtured and protected for years until it takes root and is large enough to survive the weather, the goats and other hazards) and in Geneva, where a tree can be taken in its grown state and shifted from one place to another and create an instant change in the environment.

I wondered what this “instant forestry” does to people’s perception of the time taken for growth and change – as WHO HQ staff look out of their windows and notice a beautiful copse of large trees which were not there yesterday, and at the same time gather information and discuss fundamental changes at country level, which are similar in many ways to the sowing of seeds and the growing of trees.

2: Farewell Nepal, by Leslie and Bill Pigott in the UN Womens Organisation Mirror, November 1986

Dear Friends, after nearly six years in Nepal, we leave with very mixed feelings, having had so many rich experiences. Our particular memories will be of Uma Roy playing her sitar in the Rana palace where our UNICEF friends the Glennie's lived; learning yoga from Montanette Bennett; our boys learning rock climbing from mountaineering friends; sunrise breakfasts at Nagarkot with hot croissants, coffee and a mountain view; day treks, our favourite being the ridge walk from the Nagarkot road down to Changu Narayan; visitors - family, old friends and new (at one stage we even rented a house next door to accommodate many visitors); the local community of fine people with whom we worked and spent many an evening; the international community from which we have made lasting friendships.

We've watched the valley change its different robes of various colours season after season: the snow-capped peaks as they first appear as an apparition following monsoon; the green-ness, the clouds, the velvet look of Champa Devi in monsoon; the contrast of yellow mustard seed in flower against the green; the gold of wheat or rice prior to harvest; climbing Pulchowk hill in winter to 'touch' the snow!!

We've really enjoyed trekking - from 5 days to 3 weeks - from 5 star Mountain Travel and Nepal Himal to 'tea-housing' it on several occasions. If there was a best, perhaps it was Langtang in the spring. Visiting Chitwan National Park on three occasions provided sights of wild life and the terai. Festivals, including Laxmi Puja, Gai Jatra at Bhaktapur, Lhosar at Boudha and additional adventures on holiday from Nepal in places such as Sri Lanka, Kashmir and Ladakh. We've loved buying carpets, brass, baskets and jewellery. We've enjoyed performances by HAMS (Bill was the Pirate King in guess which Gilbert and Sullivan?), touring theatre groups and local theatre. There is a never ending supply of reading material here with the British Council and AWON libraries and many bookshops. Schooling has been a precious experience for the boys - shared with children from 15 or more nationalities - with an introduction to Nepali culture, visits to many local attractions, school treks, music performances and each now learning an instrument.

Bill's work has been a rich and rewarding experience - his role was defined as helping his Nepalese colleagues to learn to do things for themselves. Leslie's work at the CIWEC clinic has enabled her to return to nursing in a supportive and rewarding environment. Involvement in school and UNWO committees has added another set of rich experiences, involvement and friendships with people beyond our immediate circle of friends.

Yes, we do recall some dark moments - house-hunting and that first month in a hotel with 3 small boys, illness - the diarrhoea and our youngest's asthma, the terrible days following our 4 year old Michael's fall from a balcony onto his head, fracturing his skull - just six months following our arrival; feeling trapped in the valley in the first 6 months without our own transport. However moments have all been learning experiences and we know we have grown from them all. We won't mind leaving behind the 6 day working week, the leaking roof, the mouldy shoes and shortages of gas, but we always enjoyed the candlelight of those early days of alternate days of electricity before the Khulikhani dam was open. To newcomers we would say that, even though the first 6 months can be traumatic and strange, there is such a range of opportunities and activities to be involved in as individuals and families. We asked each other what we would miss: Leslie will miss being in touch with the 'life in the streets' - beauty, sometimes rawness, interactions between people, animals and events in the town - at all levels and at all times. Bill will miss the involvement in a work/community setting which is small and easily encompassed and the richness of the culture. David, Michael and Peter will miss trekking, friends, our dogs, mountains and temples. What a privilege it has been to be living in Nepal.

Bhutan, September 1997:

Notes on a visit, by Bill Pigott

It is quite an extra-ordinary place. I am here for the Regional Committee Meeting of the WHO South East Asian Region. We arrived on Thursday 4 September and will be back in Kathmandu by 9 am on Saturday 13 September. We had been invited to bring family members, so I am here with Leslie and our youngest son Peter, who is with us for the six months between finishing high school in the UK and starting University in Australia.

We travelled on the Drukair flight from Kathmandu, arriving in Paro is by way of an spectacular approach through a narrow valley, flying quite close to its steep sides with views of the splendid houses with which we were to become familiar with over the next few days. Some 35 of the passengers on the flight are here for the WHO Regional Committee Meeting, some delegates and the rest WHO staff from the regional office, including the Regional Director; and of course 3/5 of the Pigott family. We are received by the District Governor, who hands each one a white silk kartha (or scarf). We are ushered to one of several colourful tents with pine needle covered floors and tea is served. The white tents have large appliquéd dragons, mandalas and other Buddhist symbols on their roofs and walls. Newly picked apples are in a large wooden bowl on each low table. Passports are collected for immigration. We are ushered to cars, our luggage is already on board, and set off in convoy for the two hour trip to Thimpu, Police vehicle with flashing red light in front and an ambulance at the rear. Not since first flying into Nepal in 1970 have I had this feeling of being somewhere so completely different: -the houses with their ornate windows and decorated walls, their solid square shape, elegant roof lines, and their

tall vertical prayer flags: -the mountains with their pines, their ruggedness, and the tumbling rivers we drive alongside.

In Thimpu we are driven through the town, half way up a mountain, to the Royal Guest House, a traditional Bhutanese building set among pine trees, high above Thimpu. Our room has wood panelled walls and ceiling and exposed wooden beams. The beds are covered with traditional Bhutanese weavings. The carved windows look out onto a small pine forest. We are called to 'welcome tea' with the WHO Regional Director, the Deputy Minister, and the Secretary of Health and Education, Sangay Ngedup (we later find out he is brother to the King's four wives.) That evening the Secretary hosts us for dinner; a circle of singers sing their welcome. We smile as we notice one with her 'all terrain' shoes peeping out under her kira (long Bhutanese dress). The music group plays: - a Bhutan guitar or damnyen, a hammered string instrument, the yangchen with its more chinese sound; and the bamboo flute or lim. We all have interesting conversations with the Bhutanese we meet. Dasho Sangay, our host, tells us about the concept of "gross national happiness", the importance given to health and education, the decisions not to try to build big all-encompassing medical centres while it is still cost effective for the Government to pay the costs of sending people out for specialist treatment. He tells of their annual conferences for the Health and now for the Education sector, in which everyone's ideas are sought to improve the effectiveness of their work (I check later with people in the field. Yes, they do feel their ideas are listened to and acted upon). At the end of the evening, we are informed that our programme calls for us to leave at 6 am for a three day 'field trip' to Bumthang.

We do indeed set off at 6 a.m. We cross three passes all above 3000 m. The first is the Docha La at 3116 m., with its chorten, or stupa, around which the road splits, and its tall vertical prayer flags, as well as prayer flags adorning the trees. Our breath is taken away, not by the altitude, but by the wonderful mountain view, a panorama with its low sunlit clouds in the valley through which we will pass several hours later. The road is narrow and winding and the driving is slow. We marvel at the Dzong (Fortress) built high above the river crossing at Wangdie Phodrang. At the barrier before the bridge, the young policeman asks "where is your road permit.." but we were not given any papers. We do not even have our passports, which were whisked away on arrival. We seem to be so official we don't need an identity or papers. I explain that we are here for the WHO meeting. He lets us pass. I note he speaks Nepali. "Meeting ma" he says as he waves us through. Later we are held up for an hour or so by a landslide, waiting in a queue of a dozen or so vehicles while a front loader very deftly creates a way through the fallen hillside.

We wind around valleys, climbing ever higher from the Wangdi river crossing at 1300m to the Peli La pass across the Black Mountains at 3390 m. and enter central Bhutan. We admire the 18th century stupa at Chendebji before we reach Tongsa with its wonderful 16th Century Dzong. We see it from afar, as we round a corner, then again as we wind up the valley towards it, then quite close as the road passes directly opposite on what is now quite a narrow valley. But immediately we move away, up another valley to cross a river, and then we see it as we approach it from a different angle. We drive on through the town and now we see it from above. As we climb higher on our way to Jakar, we see it from higher up and from the other side.. It is as if we have been circling it like a huge bird. Perched on a ridge above the river,

overlooked by a watch-tower high on the hillside above it, this Dzong is said to be the most impressive in Bhutan. The original building, which dates from 1543, has been added to many times and now houses both the district administration and the main monastic community of this region.

The next pass is the Yuto La at 3400 m., and beyond it the valley is more open, with spruce and pine cloaked hills, wonderful farmhouses and ancient villages, surrounded by pink fields of buckwheat in flower, fenced with woven bamboo. Soon after crossing our final pass, the Kiki La at 2900 m., we see the Choekor valley laid out before us, with its Dzong standing high above the village, which seems to be nestling up to it, but at the same time flowing down towards the river. Beyond, the fields creep up to the pine forests which reach beyond to the mountains. Again we see the pink patches of the buckwheat in flower. We stay at the Wangdichoeling Guest House, just behind the old palace.

In the capable hands of Dorje Wangchuck, Assistant District Administrator, we start our programme the next morning with a visit to the hospital and the district community health office. We visit Jampay Lhakhang, a Monastery said to date back to the 7th Century and then to Kuje Lhakhang, one of the most revered monasteries in Bhutan, built on a site which has had religious significance since the 8th century. We see the young monks rehearsing the masked dance in their 'multipurpose hall'. In the oldest of the buildings, we visit the temple built around the cave where the Guru Rinpoche meditated and left his body print see many statues, including different incarnations of the Buddha and one thousand 10 cm statues of the much revered Guru Rinpoche. We drive out through the pine forests to Mebartsho, to visit the pool in a tumbling river where Guru Rinpoche hid some of the Monastery's treasure, and lunch on fiddleheads and buckwheat pancakes at the Choelen Guest house. And later visit Jakar Dzong, the Fortress of the White Bird, with its commanding view of the valley. The sun comes out while we are there and illuminates the whole valley. Then to the apple juice factory, and on the way back to our guest house we stop to watch an Archery match. Archery is the national sport and clearly is taken very seriously. We take tea on the veranda outside our room and then Leslie and I walk to the 5 huge chortens with their water driven prayer wheels by the old palace of Wandichoeling, adjacent to the Guest house, beautiful in the evening light.

I am absolutely delighted with the whole day, the freshness, the tranquillity, the richness, and the depth of the spirituality of the holy places. Peter and Leslie seem to be just as enchanted as I am. I feel so privileged to have been able to bring Peter and Leslie. I say how special this all is for me, to be a WHO Rep and to get to do this. Peter suggests that I am more enchanted with the mountains and the scenery than he (he came with us to Nepal as a 2 yearold and from there moved with us to Switzerland). Perhaps, he says, it is because he has spent such a greater proportion of his life amongst such mountains, compared with where I spent my years, a greater proportion of which was by the sea. He says he feels the sea is for him what the mountains are for me. Maybe. I say that, with age and experience, I think my capacity to be delighted by the things I do and see, has grown. (I suspect it has something to do with a habit of seeking the joy of being, celebrating the wonder of things newly experienced.) He comments that for him to see things with us is different than if he was with people his own age. Of course! Leslie and I appreciate the geographical commentary Peter provides, as he points out the evidence of glaciations and other

things.. It has familiar rings with our visit to Ladakh as a family in the 1980's. We wonder whether this is just how Europe was 900 years ago, when the populations were small and the fields which surround the forts (or Dzongs) have not yet encroached on the forests. Bhutan only has a population of 600,000, and they are desperate to protect and maintain their unique culture.

Sunday, the following, is glorious and with a 7:15am we start our drive back to Thimpu, on a narrow, winding, but well maintained road, through pine clad mountains; from valley to valley, over high passes, through villages with their magnificent traditional houses, all surrounded by fields, - green with the new crops - or pink with flowering buckwheat. The road is high on the sides of steep valleys, at times down by the rivers, crossing them to climb to the next pass; each pass with a stupa and collections of tall prayer flags, which flutter energetically in winds that blow strongly at the pass. We stop at the village of Zugney, to see the Yatra weaving. We stop again at the Chendebji Chorten to take photographs. It too has a host of tall prayer flags on bamboo poles, fluttering joyfully in the strong breeze. We lunch by the stupa at Peli La, having climbed up through forests of great conifers draped with long fronds of lichen which are just like Khatas or prayer flags. As the afternoon wears on, we retrace our steps through a day of great brilliance, colours are so clean, so bright; ancient pines in the old forest so noble. We pass through areas with every conceivable variety of conifer.

The meeting starts on Monday and continues until Friday.. The agenda is interesting, and the meeting flows smoothly. There are culture shows in the evenings followed by dinner. Peter and Leslie are invited to all the dinners, and have their own programme during the day, an art school, an Archery competition, shopping. There are three other "WHO spouses", including one who was our neighbour in Switzerland.

The business of the meeting finishes early on Thursday and we have the afternoon free, so while Peter is off with Sonam for some archery, some of us visit the ancient Simtokha Dzong. Dating back to 1629, it is a most noble building with a great sense of peace and tranquillity. We also visit orchards where apples are being picked and packed for export. We buy some. On the way back to the guest house we stop at an "open" archery competition, which uses a 140m course and offers celebratory song and dance when a member of a team hits the target, and a playful mocking when a member of the opposing team misses.

That night we have a particularly memorable dinner in the courtyard of the Institute for Health Worker Training was. There is more circle dancing, to music provided by the singing of those who dance. Many of us are drawn into the dance. It is amazing how one picks up the rhythm without having to concentrate too much. As I join in, I think of all those other cultures for whom to dance in a circle is part of what they do. What a wonderful courtyard in which to do it.

After the closing ceremony one of the Bhutanese reads the legend of the four friendly brothers, which is illustrated on the thangka given to each of the delegates. The Buddhist parable has it that long ago, in the jungles of Varanasi, there lived four animals: an elephant, a monkey, a rabbit and a bird. These four animals lived a life of peaceful coexistence, bringing much happiness and harmony in the animal world. Soon, it is believed, that the spirit of love and harmonious existence permeated both

in the living world as in the high heavens. Thus, the four animals, each depending on its strength, are depicted as sitting on each other, reaching for the fruit of happiness and harmony, and offering the same to the Gods. Thuenpa Puenzhi symbolises the spirit of co-operation and peaceful coexistence: that the strong support the weak so that peace harmony and happiness prevail for all mankind.

Four of us have time at the end of the last day to visit the grand Thimpu Dzong. Leslie and Peter had seen it the previous evening. What a beautiful building! We are struck by the stone paved courtyards; the buildings with their solid white walls with their wide upper band of deep red, the paired gray windows, surmounted by four square beam ends; the openness of the courtyard; the rose garden over by the offices of the king; the huge hall where the monks learn, sleep and eat, with its huge Buddha statue and 2000 small brass statues of Buddha, each with the cloak of gold silk material, in glass fronted shelves covering the two side walls; the 36 massive pillars which support the high roof. The view as we leave, of those courtyards and the three central tower components, seen through the arch formed by the entrance pillars, each arch with a large bell hanging from from it, is breathtakingly beautiful and wonderfully tranquil. We can hear the chanting of the monks. We glimpse them rehearsing their masked dances. We are overwhelmed by the visit and all agree it is one of the most beautiful buildings in which we have been.

The sky has darkened and the rain continues as we reluctantly walk away from this evening experience to return to our guest houses to get ready for the final dinner. Our guide informs us that it rains because Thimpu is sorry to see us leave.

4: On the road in India November 1997

In November 1997, we spent just over two weeks in India. As the WHO Representative in Nepal, I was to attend the annual meeting of the WHO Country Representatives of the South East Asian Region in the WHO Regional Office in New Delhi, India. Leslie and I decided to drive ourselves there from Kathmandu in our own Landrover Discovery. We took three days for the trip there and an extra three days for the return, so that we could have a day or two in Jaipur and Deeg on the return trip. What a wonderful trip we had. I would never have believed that driving through the North of India could have been such a colourful and enjoyable adventure. It proved to be a veritable feast for the eyes and all the other senses. (which we unashamedly enriched with our own music tapes on the car stereo, Mozart and Vaughn Williams in the morning and Loreena McKennit or Dave Matthews later in the day). We had wonderful contact with our fellow travellers and those through whose towns and villages we passed. People were so helpful and always willing to give us direction when the signposts we needed were not there. So many images remain vivid in my mind, none the least of which was Leslie's comment on our return that it had been a highlight of her life. Wow. Now that is a privilege, to have been part of that.

Images such as:

- morning mists cut by shafts of sunlight as we drive through long arcades of trees that meet above the road like the nave of a gothic cathedral, such a nave as reaches for many kilometres, in fact for days. He was deemed to be a good king who planted trees along the ancient highways of India, because he gave shade to the

travellers, who in those days travelled by foot. So the most wonderful tunnels of trees hold the road on which we drive, giving perspective to the passing scene.

- the sunlight on the yellow of the flowering fields of mustard, from the plains right to the foothills of the Himalaya, with us for days;
- the colour and constant variety of the traffic on the roads on which we drive; the amazing array of people that gives colour to the journey, colours as if put together by an artist: a tractor towing a blue trailer full of elderly Sikhs, all in blue, with silvery blue beards; another two Sikhs, red turbaned on a red motor cycle; a bullock cart covered with men and women all dressed in variations of orange; bright eyed and scrubbed clean children on their way to school, filling to overflowing a rickshaw here, a horse drawn tonga or an ox cart there; small boys on top of a load of bricks on a large truck; ladies in their multiplicity of colours, packed into the back of a jeep, men standing across the back of another, confident enough of their hold on life to return our wave.. so many people images and they all acknowledge us with a wave of a gracious hand or a broad toothy smile;
- images of the glistening bodies of small boys by a pump having been washed, of people fishing or working in the fields; of a small boy languishing on the back of one of the herd of water buffaloes he is watching over;
- the wonderful colour and grace of the women, particularly in Rajasthan and the western part of Nepal; the sunlight making translucent their wonderful scarves or saris; the wind catching them to display more of their colour, their colour contrasting with whatever background is there.; - the new green of young crops, the brown of ploughed field, the rich collage of colour of the village marketplaces;
- the grace with which these women carry things on their heads, their bundles or their round clay water pots, sometimes two pots at a time, one on top of the other;

Such variety in the traffic itself, from hand wound wheel chair to combine harvester, on roads that on the whole were wide and in very good condition, although very crowded at times. We saw the whole range... people on foot, people with their sheep, their goats or their cattle, the man with a performing bear, a group with their camels; Elephants too, especially on the road between Jaipur and Amber; especially vivid are the images of the fine buck that stood on the road, splendid in the morning light, in Bardia national park in Nepal; the sunlight on the early morning monkeys in Rajasthan and what could only be described as a conference of the monkeys on the road through Sariska National Park near Alwar. There were hundreds of bicycles, often hung with several metal milk cans. We commented how many bicycles are ridden by girls and women these days. There were motor scooters, motor bikes, often carrying a whole family; little three wheelers stuffed full of people, or even fuller of produce; the bicycle rickshaw loaded with the huge balls of deep red and beige wool in Amber, a line of bicycle rickshaws piled high with schoolchildren on their way home from school; large three wheelers, often at a crazy angle as they list to the left with an overflow of passengers who hang on the outside; small minibuses that do the same. Cars: the small Maruti-Suzuki cars that buzz in and out of the trucks like flies, the three white ones overtaking each other at the same time; the familiar Ambassadors, the many buses and the hundreds of Tata trucks, often overloaded, lurching from side to side with the bumps in the road, and the sad scenes of those that had fallen, lying there on their sides or on their backs with all four wheels in the air, like elephants who have done their duty and given up; and amongst all of these the innumerable wagons, drawn by bullocks in the north, camels in Rajasthan and all over by horses; loaded with people, with sugar cane on the way to the mill, with huge canvas enclosures of

grain, with high piles of straw, or empty of all but a driver who sleeps in the confidence that his faithful beast knows the way home. The variety is also in the fact that not all the traffic is on their left side of the road, even when there is a divided road.

We loved those graceful hand movements that emanate from the cabins of the trucks that bid us pass, or counsel us to remain where we are; such fine and graceful movements, more like those we usually see from the conductor of an orchestra.

We saw vehicles get stuck as enormous loads tried to pass through a space already occupied by another enormous load, like enormous sumo wrestlers locked in a hold; we learned to be Indian and dart to the very edge of the road to get around such events. When two truck drivers passing from opposite directions stopped for a chat; we learned that the truck is king, and the larger the load the more respect we would give. Not often did we have to almost get off the road to let one pass. We did learn the language of the drivers and found that it does make sense and that on the whole they are most helpful. The main hazard with this language is the interpretation of the flashing right direction indicator of a bus or truck, which can mean that the road ahead is clear to pass, or that another truck is approaching from the opposite direction with its right indicator flashing, or, less often, it seems, that the truck is actually about to turn right.

We were constantly amused by the workshop that appears around a broken down truck, which sits exactly where it came to a halt, and is repaired where it stands, even if that happens to be in the middle of the road. Driving after dark is the most hazardous, with unlit vehicles or ox carts crawling along the edge of the road, difficult to see when there are lights from oncoming vehicles. So we planned not to be driving at that time.

And then there are the places. Buildings that delighted us because of their shape or colour, the materials with which they are built or their decorations, or because of their grandeur and beauty. There were columns and shapes, arches that frame: rich tapestries of form and light, ancient Palaces in Jaipur, Amber and Deeg, and the farms and villages along the way.

There was some shopping.. wonderful things to see and feel, especially textiles and handicrafts, and each merchant a delight to interact with. Travelling in our own car eliminated any barrier to buying heavy or bulky items, so there are wooden bowls from "the Shop" in Connaught Place, Delhi, puppets and Blue Pottery from Jaipur and pieces of fabric from all over. So the Christmas shopping is done. Leslie was able to see the National Museum in Delhi and the Handicraft Museum which they say is one of the best of its kind and with which she was absolutely delighted.

Our pattern when on the road was to start early, to have with us a thermos of hot water and things with which to make tea or coffee for picnics along the way (our "survival kit now has a small electric jug and the stainless steel thermos that has been part of our travels over the last 20 years), and to finish the day's drive early enough for tea in the garden of the overnight stop, which, of course required a hotel with such a facility. So the memories we also have are of some splendid picnic sites, by rivers, or pulled off the road by the edge of a farmer's field, in the cool depth of a mango

orchard, or on a hill overlooking Jaipur. Of course, it was tea on our roof terrace in Kathmandu when we reached home at the end of the 2900 km round trip. We found our white Land Rover Discovery to be a most comfortable chariot and the only trouble we had was one puncture. It was useful, but not necessary to have 4 WD while driving through the seven or so rivers in the west of Nepal where the final bridges on the east-west highway are still to be completed.

One special footnote to this trip is that at the same time, 25 years previously, Leslie and I journeyed through Greece, Turkey and Italy, also in a white car, a journey which included our marriage at the end of 1972. In fact, coinciding with our wonderful day of shopping and wandering through rich and ancient palaces in Jaipur on 15 November 1997, we had 25 years earlier, on that very day, been in Istanbul and had gone to the bazaar and bought our wedding rings and the two rugs that we have in our bedroom.

It was a great adventure. We are pleased we were not put off by all those who doubted the sanity of such a trip. We have shown ourselves that we can still be travelling and enjoying adventure 25 years on and have confirmed that the colour of our world is its people.

Epilogue or after-thought: That same Landrover Discovery, nearly 20 years later, still serves us well, and has taken us on some equally wonderful journeys in Australia.

SIDE EFFECTS OF A DOUBLE LIFE

Margaret Zito writes

Unlike many of my female colleagues at FAO in Rome, I didn't acquire my Italian husband in Italy. I met and married Mario in Sydney where we first lived and where our eldest son was born. Mario had been living in Australia for a number of years, so he was familiar to some extent with the Australian way of life. Marrying an Australian girl in Australia meant that he was the partner who initially had to make the greater cultural adjustment.

Then we moved to Italy with our 11 month-old baby son. We were both young and full of enthusiasm for the opportunities that lay ahead. Mario threw himself full-time into his fledgling business, while I attempted to settle into my new life in Rome. It was a complete culture shock for me. Although the year was 1972, daily life in Rome seemed to be just emerging from the 1950's. I was dismayed to discover that certain conveniences I deemed essential, like disposable nappies, hadn't yet reached Italy's shores. Our dwelling on the 5th floor at Piazza Fiume had grand spacious rooms, but no lift. Carrying baby and shopping in my arms every day up and down those endless flights of stairs was a hefty challenge. Mario's elderly parents lived in Calabria, so we didn't have a family network as support.

It took me a while to learn things Italian-style. I would stand patiently in line at the back of shop queues, waiting my turn to be served, whilst others surged ahead. I would fumble my way at the markets with broken Italian, trying to mentally convert Pounds into Kilos, and Dollars into Lira, only to discover afterwards that I had paid triple the rate for a cauliflower. I was grateful for the kindness all Italians show to

little children, as they would stop me in the street to wave and smile at my son, or remark on his fair complexion. These little moments of social exchange brightened up my solitary days. It took almost two years before my Italian was good and fast enough for me to crack a joke or tell a funny story before the conversation had already moved on. This was a benchmark for me. When you can join in the banter and follow the jokes, you are no longer an outsider.

Back in Australia I had been working as a librarian at Fisher Library, University of Sydney. The skills of librarianship are applicable across borders, so I had hoped to find employment in one of Rome's numerous libraries. Unfortunately for me, in the 1970's most Italian libraries still seemed more akin to museums of collections, with librarians as the keepers. Classical studies were deemed essential for a library degree but contemporary library science topics didn't appear to have much place on the curriculum. The culture has changed since then of course - forty years on Italian librarianship is vibrant, modern and online. Rome also had small public libraries scattered around the city serving local communities but they were not well resourced and had restricted opening hours. So one of the major impacts of living in Italy for me was that instead of relying on a local library I began to buy my own books. I ended up collecting thousands of volumes over the years.

By the time I first joined FAO in 1977 I had become fully "italianized" with minimal contact with English-speakers, apart from family or friends visiting Rome. In those days a 5 minute phone call home to Sydney cost a fortune and was a rare event. Our three children all attended the local primary school and could speak the Roman dialect. Our home was in a semi-rural village outside Rome, which due to its isolation was a close-knit community, and where I was known as "la straniera" (the foreigner). I didn't feel foreign, except when it suited me e.g. if there was a social more I didn't care to follow, I would justify my behaviour by being foreign. But I didn't have much in common with my kindly neighbours, who came mostly from rural backgrounds. I was happy that our children were able to spend their early years outside the city proper, in an environment where they could play with other children, ride their bikes up and down the street, and generally enjoy the freedoms I remembered from my own childhood in Sydney.

We eventually moved back inside Rome and I returned to work full time at the David Lubin Memorial Library at FAO. Previously I had tried a few Italian work experiences - the most alarming being in a public relations firm where the owner/manager would scream and throw objects when upset (never at me fortunately). It was a relief to abandon my solely Italian persona and recover my identity as an Australian librarian. I was very privileged and fortunate to be working at FAO in one of the world's largest and most prestigious agricultural libraries, alongside highly skilled professionals from around the world. Original staff numbers were 56, managing over 1 million volumes.

FAO HQ itself was a citadel, a fascinating microcosm of blended cultures, the international expatriate and the Italian. Spoken English was peppered with FAO-isms and Italian expressions, making it a language for the initiated. Inside the FAO buildings -Rome remained outside - queues were respected, deadlines were kept, and people often worked very long hours, but then lunch might occasionally be full-blown Italian style, relaxing with a colleague over several courses and a glass of wine at the restaurant across the road. Altogether my time at FAO spanned 34 years. For me it

was a period of intense work, change, constant development, great satisfactions, and many long-lasting friendships.

FAO's Home Leave entitlement also enabled me to strengthen our children's links with their Australian heritage and I am grateful that they could grow up knowing their Australian grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and vice versa. Each time I landed on the Fiumicino tarmac returning from Home Leave in Sydney, I would experience a flash of repulsion towards Italy. The feeling would quickly evaporate because I love Italy, but it was unsettling. It revealed that no matter how joyful the homecoming, the nostalgia of recent farewells still lay heavily.

So forty years later it was time to relocate Downunder.

And that's another story.

FINANCIAL REPORT of the TREASURER for the period 1 January 2015 to 31 May 2016.

Tom Joel reports: As at 31 May 2016 the accumulated capital of AAFICS was A\$ 27,108.51. This represents a small increase of A\$ 321.86 since the end of 2014.

Income Members Contributions and Interest

Over the period under review A\$ 1,260 was received in respect of contributions from nine new Members in 2015 with a further A\$ 420 received from three new Members so far this year. While the accumulated Capital has increased over the period low interest rates prevailing in Australia have resulted in lower earnings on funds invested, the interest earned during the period under review amounted to A\$ 720.14.

Expenditure

Total expenditure for the period amounted to A\$ 2,078.28. The largest item being our contribution to FAFICS which amounted to A\$ 1,207.68 for the two years 2015 and 2016. This contribution, assessed in US dollars, has increased due to the increase in membership and the depreciation of the Australian dollar against the US\$. During the period a payment of A\$ 5,000 was made to the Andrew Macoun Legal Defence Fund (AMLDF). After settlement of the costs related to the High Court challenge an amount of A\$ 4,204 has been refunded reducing the final cost to AAFICS to A\$ 796.

In conclusion the financial situation of AFFICS is sound, and financing the present level of activities is assured for the foreseeable future.

The UN Pension Fund website is at www.unjspf.org

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This newsletter is prepared by the AAFICS Committee of office bearers and is intended for AAFICS membership only.

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