

Holiday Greetings at the end of 2005

Our Walden Woods Farm year in review

Our annual greetings. Somehow it is past the time we usually intend to have this letter at least started if not completed and actually sent virtually (with a few snail-mails) to you; but, alas we are late for at least the third year in a row. This newsy-letter follows the usual headings format that we began with a few years ago; however, the 'chooks' subheading is new. Anyway, we now extend our once-a-year greetings and best wishes to you from our humble rural life and property of 220 acres/89 hectares. The property had great November rain and all the dams finally re-filled; but now, the hot and rainless days are here again (?more drought setting in?) when it should be the warm to hot summer with rain.

At home and our farm work. As usual Doug and Mister were totally occupied with tasks at Walden Woods Farm, particularly with two vineyard plots but also our new 'chook-egg business' which has taken them to town weekly to deliver organically certified eggs (See more about the chooks below).



The house garden and the orchard were to be a bigger focus this year; however, that plan has not really happened. There are certainly more tomato plants than last year -- over 100 -- and a few other traditional summer vegetable favourites and childhood edible memories. Again, we had family visitors in 2005 -- Meg (Doug's sister) and Larry [They live in San Antonio, TX] were here for about a week in March and helped with grape picking, crushing and pressing; Lucille and Cindy (Nadine's mother and niece; they live in silicon valley, CA) were here in September for nearly three weeks and were to be part of the wine bottling process (but! see below); and, long time

friends originally in Victoria, Carol and Neil [they live on the Gold Coast, Qld now], stopped by in June for one short night and part of a couple of days. We have our sixth living conifer tree ready for planting out at the Christmas tree corner of our driveway; that means, six Christmases at Walden Woods Farm!

Vines and wine. The second commercial vintage harvest (nearly 800 kilograms of grapes) happened in mid-March and was followed by pre-dawn, very early morning grape-drive for crushing and pressing (about 400 litres of juice) at Scott's [our winemaker, Wright-Robertson of Glencoe] about an hours drive North of Armidale. After a few months in our stainless steel (1200 litres) tank on the lees and yeast with several racking-offs, we planned to bottle the wine in September while Nadine's family was here... we tried but this didn't happen. There was a saga from September to December with: 1) ordering bottles, bottle closures and a rental capping machine; 2) trying to do Stelvin screw caps instead of corks; 3) then ordering Diam corks [real cork but ground-up and reformed with a TCA (cork taint) preventative]; 4) trying to do 'softer' filtering because our wine is very light, but the filter hoses and fittings just would not seal air out after three hours of fiddling; 5) Scott deciding to buy a new filtering system for our wine and his use too, with the ordering and delivering process taking at least 8 weeks from a winery supplier and then some parts were not sent!; 6) us driving again on 22nd December to Scott's to finally bottle before Christmas and the end of 2005 - only to find that the company had sent the wrong filter inserts for three of the four inline filters!; 7) on the day, Scott driving to Glen Innes (15+ minutes each way) 3 times for various filters and at 6:30pm finally completing the bottling and corking with a result of 459 bottles of *Pinot grigio* [last year 144 bottles]. Now we will leave the wine resting on it's side [because of corks; not with metal screw caps] for about two months before giving bottles to our pickers and selling to friends, neighbours, colleagues and the broader community. The UNE Booloominbah coffee/wine bar and eatery will be our only commercial outlet this year like last year -- they sell by the glass and bottle -- and we will provide one of our new, fancy marketing posters [see photo] for 'Bool' to display at the bar area.

During 2005, Doug planted and replanted some *Pinot grigio* vines and Cindy was here to help with this task. We now have a total of 1300 vines; but, we may plant Pg to a maximum of 1500 to 2000.

Then, we will probably plant a red wine grape – still considering a unique variety for planting to give us a nice wine and a small, family winery marketing edge.

Doug became very involved in all the planning and holding of the first New England Wine Show this year (mid-October; details at: www.newenglandwineshow.com.au). He was asked to be the Chief Steward of the Show; that means that he: worked with the Chief Judge to decide on the order of wines for tasting the varieties/classes; trained all the volunteer stewards (like me) for opening and pouring wines; decided on the layout of the wine set-up room and



supervised all the unpacking and displaying of bottles; decided on the layout and arrangement of the judges' tasting room; demonstrated and supervised the cycles of pouring wines for the 3 judges and 3 associate judges to then blind taste each of 30+ classes of wine [180+ entries] over a day and a half; etc. We stayed in a historic bed and breakfast house in Glen Innes for 4 nights to be part of all aspects of the Wine Show from beginning to end (Saturday night dinner and ball with awards). Doug will be Chief Steward again for 2006 and all the re-planning is already well underway, including changes to the entry from being an 'open' show to a regional show. Everyone was so pleased with Doug's work and role. I will again take some annual leave days and work as a steward and particularly with Mark (another local viticulturalist) entering all judges' scores on computer over the 1 ½ to 2 days of tasting and judging; I loved being involved. This is a wonderful initiative for such a new wine region that is really just developing in terms of both growing grapes here and making wines within the region, as well as some grapes going further a field to be converted to vino.

Chooks. In mid-February we became 'parents' of 50 day-old Isa Brown chickens and 4 baby Guinea

fowl. We lost a few little ones early on as is usual with natural systems either plant or animal. The Isa Browns began laying eggs in June and by July the required egg testing and designs for carton labels and marketing signs were approved so we began selling certified organic eggs to the *Food for Thought* shop – Doug and Mister take cartons of eggs to town every Tuesday and Friday and all are pre-sold to regular customers, with one elderly woman saying that she could never eat an egg by itself before having ours! The Guineas are gone now – they are certainly the ADHD (attention deficient, hyperactive disorder) members of the poultry family! They pranced on their toes rather than walked, constantly upset the Isa Browns and kept flying onto the roof of the Chook Palace and beyond; so, one by one they suffered lead-poisoning and became edible items at the dinner table! The flavour of the meat seemed to be similar to a combination of pheasant and quail. We bought them for their fancy appearance with black and white dotted feathers and because Doug said I couldn't have a peacock; I have quite a collection of the striking feathers in a basket as room decoration.

'Slowfood society' of Donald Road. In 2005 we held five slowfood meals including an inside fancy white tablecloth luncheon, a Saturday brunch and three outside rustic BBQ pizza days. Early on Doug found a local family with pigs and piglets and he laid claim to one female piglet at 10 weeks of age. She became the focal point of a wood-fired roasted whole weaner pig slowfood tablecloth-luncheon with other dishes such as cold black-squid pasta with three sauces, roasted winter vegetables, steamed carrot & broccoli, baked Granny Smith apples with red onions, chocolate/chocolate cake plus 3 Muscadet white wines and 4 Nebbiolo red wines. We had 9 'vino' guests sharing the foods and blind-tasted wines. The three wood-fired pizza meals were a late afternoon pizza selection for our 2005 harvest pickers including Meg and Larry, a September Sunday pizza lunch when Lucille and Cindy were here with neighbours and town friends sharing the day, and a November Sunday pizza plus lunch for our TAFE viticulture study group and TAFE teacher Ian from Orange [he travels to Armidale once a month for Friday evening and all day Saturday classes with us]. As we expected, the all-time favourite pizza – the bianco [white] version – continued to be the favourite option for new pizzaites and seasoned pizzaites. The white pizza has Doug's thin double-OO-Italian-flour dough base topped with King Island double cream and

then paper thin slices of prosciutto, which cooks in 2 minutes. Then as the crispy prosciutto comes out of the wood-fired oven, bits of just picked wild rocket leaves are scattered across the top – slice and eat! The double cream melts into the dough as it heats in the very hot oven. Finally, on Christmas Eve morning Max and Margaret joined us for a special brunch of eggs and eggs, our's poached and scrambled, with infused flavouring from an Italian Alba winter white truffle (at a cost of Aus\$6000.00 a kilogram). Of course, eggs are served with Champagne [Larmandier-Bernier Brut Blanc de Blanc Vertus 1er cru NV; not \$6000.00 a litre!]. After a stroll around the two vineyards – House and Millies – we had brunch dessert of panettone slices [Italian Christmas cake], torrone mandorle pieces [Italian almond nougat] and freshly brewed French vanilla scented coffee.

Nadine and UNE. At the beginning of 2005, I completed eight months of study leave that focused on starting to write a book about the cycle of food that families can be involved in – I wrote about 40,000 words. In late 2004 I wrote a short, commissioned article about children's contemporary consuming lifestyles for the online journal *Australian Health Consumer* [at www.chf.org.au] and this writing lead to being asked to write an 'Everyday learning about...' booklet (5000 words) for the professional organisation Early Childhood Australia. I started with a title of 'Everyday learning about my body and my stomach' and when submitted the end of November the title became *Everyday learning about healthy bodies* which will be available early in 2006.

From 1st March, I was back at Uni fulltime teaching [all the students I work with are distance education learners or external not on-campus], coordinating several units of study, and completing the *Understanding Attrition...beginning students...* research project report for submitting to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) and the Academic Board's Teaching & Learning Committee for consideration of all our recommendations and strategies. In semester 1, I taught Professional Workplace Culture & Learning [a Doctor of Education (EdD) unit with students all over the world], Early Childhood Leadership: Administration [with 5 days of professional experience/practicum], and Young Children Developing & Learning [advanced child development] then in semester 2 (from July), I taught Leadership again, Young Children Exploring their World [all the sciences in

an everyday, everywhere context], and Early Childhood Practicum 2 [15 days professional experience in the field].

From mid-June I took on the Acting Course Coordinator role for the EdD while Neil the Coordinator was on study leave. There were lots of EdD applications for 2006 and the prospective postgraduate students were from all over the world – around Australia, Ecuador, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Bhutan, etc. The application process is rather time consuming for the Course Coordinator as it involves finding relevant principal and associate supervisors for each student's later research component and then gaining all their signatures as well as the Heads of School signatures from the 3 schools in our Faculty. There are numerous Commonwealth Government codes for students' areas of research that link to federal government funding for universities; the Coordinator has to decide on codings linked to the proposed student's working title/topic and abstract for research investigation following four coursework units of study. In 2006 after Neil returns from study leave and we debrief about the EdD actions and issues, I will return to coordination of the Early Childhood (teacher) Education courses [a third year Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) and a fourth year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), plus a small number of master and doctoral students – we keep working on and hoping to increase post-grads...]. You may recall that our move to Armidale and UNE was linked to my taking on the Foundation Program Director (Courses Coordinator) of ECE position in 1998, when ECE began here.

Farewell for the year. We do wish each of you ongoing health and a healthy, active lifestyle in 2006. As usual, we provide our points of contact to ensure that you can find us... Walden Woods Farm, 469 Donald Road, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia 2350; phone: 02 or 2(international) 6772 8922; email: dhume@northnet.com.au

fondly, Nadine and Doug

