



DECEMBER 2008 UPDATE

Once upon a Christmas memory ...

CHIRSTMASTIME IS UPON US AGAIN. AND, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK, BUT I LIKE IT, I really do. Yeah, it's the Silly Season. And yeah, it's corny and crass and commercialised-to-death. But there's still something about this time of year that makes me feel good ...

I like the coloured lights and fake snow and pretty plastic pinetrees. I like the canned Christmas tunes that blast away at frazzled shoppers in every mall. I like the Santas who look all hot-and-sweaty in their long red underwear and gumboots and stuffy white beards. And I like the smiles that break out on the faces of my grandchildren.

I like Christmas parades and Nativity plays and those endless look-the-same Christmas cards. I like barbecues and well-sauced sausages, and strawberries and ice-cream, and happy-clappy TV programmes. I like being dragged out of bed on December 25 to watch kids and grownups rip the wrapping off chosen-with-love gifts.

And I like, perhaps most of all, the memories. Because Christmas is a nostalgic time of year, eh. And I (like you, I imagine) have a bundle of recollections from Christmases long gone ...

I remember the thruppences and sixpences that my dear old Nana used to hide in our Christmas puddings – and how excited I got, as a very small boy, hunting for these little silver treasures in each carefully-chewed mouthful.

I remember the year I got a Hornby train, a wind-up model with a key ... and the year, somewhat later, when I got my very first, second-hand, lovingly-repainted two-wheeler ... and the year, even later than that, when I got a patched-up canvas kayak, and I just knew that I was the luckiest boy in the world.

I remember the carolling our youth group used to do from the back of someone's truck ... with me banging away on an old piano, and my sister strumming a ukulele or playing the spoons, and our fun-loving friends all singing their teenage hearts out as we rolled through those fortunate Hamilton streets.

I remember the Christmases that came along as our three kids came along ... and the mad, noisy, tummyful, love-you-heaps, spoil-you-rotten days that we all enjoyed too much.

And I remember, rather more recently, our visit to Bethlehem, on that skinny old sand-dune called Israel, where Christmas No.1 took place more than 2000 years ago ...

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO BETHLEHEM? IT'S NOT THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR TOURIST spot right now. And I've gotta warn you: forget about *'Silent Night, Holy Night'* ... and forget about rolling green hills, fat white sheep, and sleepy shepherds.

Talk to anyone who's done the trip and they'll tell you: Bethlehem's a disappointment at first. It's a noisy, bustling, dry-as-dust Palestinian town, about 10 kms by road from Jerusalem. And, far from *"sleep in heavenly peace"* – this nervous Middle-Eastern trouble-spot is watched over night and day by wide-awake soldiers armed with automatic weapons.

We wandered down crowded streets past untold cars and buses all honking their flippin' horns. We dodged donkey-carts, tried not to step in donkey-droppings, and ducked past souvenir shops crammed with olive-wood camels and nativity sets. We climbed a hill in the middle of town, and eventually we found it: an Orthodox cathedral that marks the supposed birthplace of Jesus. It's an ancient edifice: dark, towering ceilings ... stained glass ... dangling lights, candles and icons – a bit spooky, actually. And I remember thinking it could do with a good scrub.

We did what everyone else was doing, and joined a queue that led single-file behind the altar and down under the cathedral into a quiet little cave that was dimly lit by silver lamps. And embedded in the floor of the cave was a star – a simple memorial to the King who was born here.

But wait! If you plan on making this pilgrimage yourself, there's something you need to know. Before you can enter that cave you must meet one condition: you must duck your head. The doorway's so low that even short guys like me can't go in unless you're willing to bow.

Which is kind of appropriate, I reckon – don't you agree? I mean, there's a time in this world for standing tall. But there's also a time to get on your knees.

After all, when we send cards and sing about the baby in the manger, we're not just spouting Christmassy cheer. We're talking about that old, old story which millions still believe is true. We're talking about that incredible night when God made a baby ball of himself and dropped into our flesh-and-blood world. We're talking about the Creator choosing to live among us!

THERE'S ONE OTHER THING THAT CHRISTMAS DOES: IT MAKES ME FEEL GRATEFUL. AND that's appropriate, too, as I write Grapevine's final newsletter for the year.

I want to thank you for being such faithful friends – I honestly don't know where we'd be without you. I want to thank you for your partnership in this family-friendly project – we owe you, truly, big-time! And I want to thank you for your generosity through the past 12 months – countless households throughout New Zealand have been blessed-to-bits as a result of your commitment and ours!

As a more personal level, 2008's been a tough one for me and Robyn and our daughter – in fact, the entire John Cooney Clan. And while we're aware that many Kiwis suffer as much, and often far worse, we're keenly looking forward to a better year ahead. And we're oh-so-grateful for the love and support that Grapevine's big, nationwide 'family' offered *us* in our time of need. Again, our heartfelt thanks!

Well, that's it for another 12 months. But don't panic: we'll be back in January. In the meantime, the team at Grapequarters join me in wishing you a very Happy Christmas ...



If you've ALREADY DONATED to our 2008 Christmas Appeal, **THANKS SO MUCH** for the part you've played in getting us this far.

If you felt able to give again and help overcome this Appeal's slow-start, we'd obviously be delighted.

Every amount (large or small) will enable us to put more great mags into Kiwi homes this coming year ...



CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2008

You could win a lovely

\$250

CHRISTMAS HAMPER!

Every donation received during November & December – no matter how big or small – qualifies you for an entry in our lucky draw ...



This is an annual appeal, you may recall. Last year's was successful. So was the year before. And we're hoping that, this year, our Nov/Dec donations will beat all previous records. In fact, we're daring to hope that we'll reach a new target – of **\$70,000**.

However, we've had a SLOW-START through the month of November, and there's a long, long way still to go.

You're invited to make a very special pre-Christmas effort for a very special cause. \$70,000 will be a fantastic achievement. And, with what we've got planned for the next 12 months, we're going to *need* every cent. But the only way we'll **reach that target** is if each supporter makes a bumper Christmas donation!

IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE SO, PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING **\$100** TOWARDS OUR CHRISTMAS APPEAL.

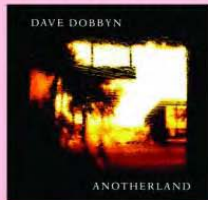
If \$100 is too big a stretch, please just give whatever you can. Your 2008 CHRISTMAS DONATION, large or small, will enable us to put more great magazines into more Kiwi homes this coming year!

We'd also like to offer you these

GREAT-VALUE CHRISTMAS STOCKING STUFFERS:

Donate **\$100 or more**, and you can choose one of these top-rated new-release MUSIC CDs or KIDS DVD which we'll send you FREE as a 'thank-you' from us!

Or, better still ... Donate **\$300 or more**, and you can choose any three of these CDs or DVD



A stunning musical treat for you, or a fun movie for your kids!

PLEASE RETURN THIS WHOLE PAGE (WITH YOUR DONATION) IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED



Yes – I'm happy to support the GRAPEVINE TEAM

Name _____

Address _____

Here's my December gift of \$100 \$_____ (another amount)
Please enter me in the draw for your Christmas Hamper.

If your donation is \$100 or more, you can also claim your CD/DVD:

DONATE \$100 or more, and choose 1 (tick):	<input type="checkbox"/> ROB GUEST	<input type="checkbox"/> COCKTAIL LOVERS	<input type="checkbox"/> DAVE DOBBYN	<input type="checkbox"/> UNFORGETTABLE	<input type="checkbox"/> HORTON HEARS A WHO!
DONATE \$300 or more, and choose 3 (tick):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Payment method: My cheque is enclosed
 Please charge my credit card: Visa/Mastercard/Diners/Amex (circle)
Card no.....
Signature..... Expiry Date.....

Credit card donations: please visit our website www.grapevine.org.nz
or call 09-813-4956 or 0800-47-27-38 toll free
Automatic \$30 phone donations: call our donation line on 0900-47-27-38

Donations to Grapevine are tax-deductible. Interim receipts are issued for all postal donations.
Final tax receipts are issued in April each year.

GO [CLICK HERE](#) to make a donation