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Happy Christmas!

I write this, at the end of October, in a state of euphoria, excitement and thankfulness: euphoria - through having welcomed the choir of King's College, Cambridge, here six weeks ago; excitement - because of all the marvellous things that are 'going on' here - not least the superb singing of the Trinity choirs and also my Princeton Singers; and thankfulness - at remembering the many joys of this wonderful year ... which I now relate to you, dear friend/relation, should you have a couple of hours to wade through this epistle.

November 1984

Drove three hours to Hartford, Connecticut, (pronounced 'kernetiku') to join 200 clergy and organists from all over the USA in a conference of diocesan liturgical and music commissions. (Sounds pretty heavy - but it was great fun and most illuminating), I thought I was going to be late - it was further than I thought - but arrived exactly in time for dinner; (I must remember that if God is God He's in charge of everything - including traffic lights). I walked into the dining room - all the tables were full - didn't know a soul, there was one space, so I filled it; my neighbor (American, as English readers will realize - neighbours over here are 'non-U') turned to me and said, "It's John Bertalot, isn't it?" Apparently he'd taken part in the RSCM course I'd directed at Princeton University in 1981!

I learned a lot during those 3 packed days - in one of the books I bought (on discipline) the writer said that most adolescents 'crash' on a feeling of inferiority - physical, mental or whatever; this stays with some folk for a very long time - some have it for the whole of their lives - needlessly.

One of our extra-curricular activities was to watch the Presidential election results come in on TV. Several conference members told me, privately, that they hoped Reagan would win. I was interested to see that, when his win was announced, his victory was greeted with hoots of derision. I have a lot to learn about the political scene over here!

For THANKSGIVING (a big American Feast) I welcomed Tony Murphy to my home for a few days. Tony (for the benefit of new readers) has featured in most of my Newsletters; he was in my choir at Blackburn Cathedral and now is a student at Nottingham University - but taking a few months off to work with the Teen-Challenge program here in the USA. (A Christian based drug rehabilitation scheme which claims an 86% success rate; apparently Government sponsored programs can claim only 10% success. The power of the Trinity is in the forefront of the T.C. program - you can't be associated with it for very long without knowing that God is alive, well and very interested in each one of His children - if they let Him).

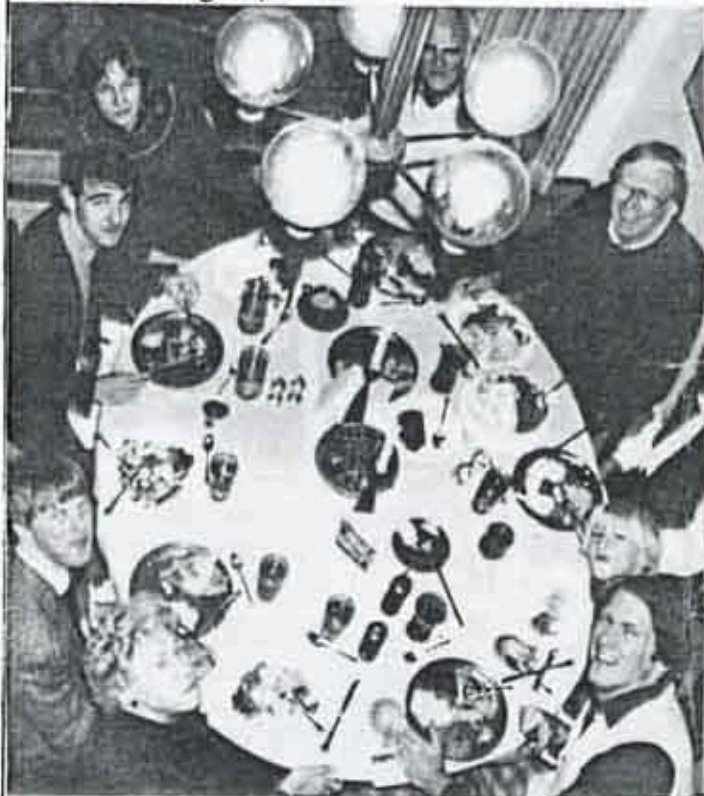
One feature of my life in Princeton which ever blesses me is being invited to dinner in the gracious homes of friends. I took Tony to tea with "Mitch" and Jean Matthews -



a dear Trinity couple who quasi 'adopted' me. (Mitch is a retired Admiral in the US Navy). That was a lovely relaxed time. On another

occasion (after Tony left) I was invited to another home for dinner where one of the guests tried to engage me in conversation about the significance of smiles on mediaeval French sculpture; I fear I was not able to contribute much on that felicitous subject!

Tony and I spent a few days in Washington DC with friends and enjoyed a supa Thanksgiving Dinner with the family of David Hamrin - a friend of Tony's whom he met over here in '81 and who shares Tony's interest in music as well as things spiritual. To sit round the



circular table with Hamrin grandparents, parents and children made me feel that "This is what America is all about."

Note from a sermon in November:
"We give to God what we cannot keep,
that He may give us what we cannot earn."

Posted all my overseas Christmas Newsletters - surface. I learned that some reached England the following week - others arrived during the course of the next few months - the last arriving at the end of February!

December

Trinity Church's Annual General Meeting is always a Good Time (held after morning service). Here, before several hundred members of the congregation, matters of life and death, service to the community and worship, education and finance are presented by erudite, witty and eloquent members of staff and congregation. It is a great place to be - everyone is so closely involved. A choirman told me that her small son asked her if she knew what 'hallaved' meant; when she told him he said, "That's right, because that's what JB told me!"

Dec 10 received a supa letter from Don Hinshaw (publisher) accepting one of my choral pieces - an arrangement of "Lord of the dance" to new words. I was thrilled, and planned to have it sung at the RSCM course I would be directing in Charleston, South Carolina, in the summer.

One Christian friend in England wrote to say that she found it impossible to read my Newsletter because everything was "Golly, Super" and life wasn't like that. Well, I don't write about things that 'go wrong' - they are shared with one or two friends privately. But, to redress the balance, a crushing moment came to all of us at Trinity this month when we learnt that the 14-year old son of one of our Family had been killed in a biking accident. He had been a member of our choir and his funeral in Trinity was a most moving and deeply spiritual experience for us all. In his sermon the Rector said, "We cannot die for the dead, but we must live for them."

Christmas Day was spent with two lovely Trinity families who invited me to their homes to share their love and joy. I was blest. At the second party I tried to get them to play "This is an Orange" which left them in hysterics - if you don't know of this party-stopper (I've never yet finished a game) please ask me!

At a staff Christmas party there began a trail of blessing for me which is ongoing: one of our colleagues is a student at Princeton Theological Seminary - Don Fox. I asked him where he would be going when he graduates this summer. "I'm going to minister in the Waldensian Church in Italy." "What an extraordinary co-incidence!" said I, "my grandfather was a member of that church. I know very little about him - can you see what you can find out about my family when you go there next?" "Sure!". said Don, "I'm going there next month." So I sat back to wait.

January 1985

It was such a joy to receive several telephone calls from England wishing me a happy new year. Letters from friends and relations come to me throughout the year as a result of sending this Newsletter - most come pretty soon afterwards, but there are a lot which spread themselves over the whole year - I had one only a couple of weeks ago from England thanking me for last year's! By the way, I'd be grateful if friends would kindly pass this letter around their friends - it looks as tho' this will be a bumper edition and I may have to cut down on numbers 'cos of cost.

It was a great joy to be asked to play an organ solo in the home of Bill Scheide for the Princeton Music Club - a private club made up of local leading musicians. A joy, because (i) I was able to meet many local colleagues for the first time, and (ii) cos Bill has in his lovely home one of the only



two authentic portraits of JS Bach - the other being in Leipzig! All went well and I was later invited to join the illustrious ensemble. Wow!

[Perceptive readers will have noticed the absence of WAs so far - there must be another word which will do? What about EGAD? ["Exhilarating Gasp of Admiration and Delight"]]

This month also saw the 20th wedding anniversary of Don & Sally Edwards; Don is Jr. Warden at Trinity and Sally has been Choir Mum for many years. We celebrated with a Eucharist in Trinity followed by a great



party for some of their friends in their lovely home. Joy and music (the latter thru their supa stereo) flowed everywhere.

February

Took the Men, Boys & Girls choir and the Girls(only) choir to New York to sing a.m. service in St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Avenue, with their own choir directed by Jim Litton (my predecessor at Trinity). A glorious service with packed congregation of some 2000. Then we went (on our own) to sing Evensong at St. John the Divine Cathedral -

a VAST building comparable to Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. There we sang to the Lord in the company of 10,000 angels and a few of the faithful - but it was a very good time - pyrotechnics from choirs and the supa organ,



Irene Willis with JB at St. John Divine console.

and much joy, for me, in the singing of the set of responses I wrote for my Mother's 70th birthday 10 years previously.

Received a letter from cousin Sheila in England to say that Mum's cousin, "Tinkie", was in hospital - she is our last surviving senior relative and cousin Doug and I visited her last August - she was frail but full of gracious joy.

Popped down to Florida (I love America!) to conduct a massed choirs' festival in Orlando Cathedral. That was a great experience, not only from working with such enthusiastic singers and being welcomed by Murray and Hazel Somerville (Murray is cathedral organist) but also enjoying the experience of smelling fresh cut grass in the middle of winter!

12 Feb - pound sank to \$1.08.

17 Feb: conducted a "Come & Sing Verdi's Requiem" with the Princeton Musical Amateurs.

This was an amazing experience - having some 200 singers and pretty full orchestra with four superb soloists, who met for three hours just to sing thru this work. It was my task to make them all believe they could do it (the soloists were the only ones well prepared) and then actually do it. It was a most EGAD time and went wonderfully well. It left me flat on my back for the next 36 hours, but it was worth it.

Feb 22: telephone call from cousin Joan in London to say that our senior cousin Tinkie had just died - peacefully. Joan's call to me was very precious - waves of Family cross the Atlantic for those few minutes; Tinkie had blessed us all during her long life and her death was no less a source of deep blessing. We thank God for every memory of her.

28 Feb: Don Fox (see Christmas) bounced into the church office waving a sheet of paper which he gave me. On it were printed the names of the priests of the Waldensian Church in Italy - and at the bottom, in glorious isolation was the name RENZO BERTALOT, Secretary of the Italian Bible Society in Rome who had studied (co-incidence upon co-incidence) at Princeton Theological Seminary (immediately opposite Trinity Church) 30 years ago - at the same time I was at Oxford. I determined to write to the Rev. R.B. to ask him if we were related.

March

A happy visitor on 10th was Philip Crozier; Phil joined Blackburn Cathedral choir in my early days there - I can still remember his father asking if I'd take Phil - and then he went on to study music at Cardiff University and also the Royal Northern College of Music where I was also teaching at that time. He came to Trinity to give us an organ recital, having recently moved to Montreal, where he got married. He played brilliantly and we asked him back later in the year to give us another recital. (That was attended by a

number of graduate organ students from Westminster Choir College here in Princeton, who gave Phil a standing ovation. EGAD! We've asked him back next year for another recital.

Letter from Renzo Bertalot in Rome: "Yes, we are related - I remember a photograph of your grandparents hanging over our sofa in my childhood home. We are cousins." EGAD!

April

One of the major items in this year's activities was planning for the Bicentennial Celebrations for the Diocese of New Jersey. I became closely involved with this - co-chairing the music program. We paid several visits to the Garden State Arts Center, some 50 miles from Princeton, where the service would be held. It is an ENORMOUS out-door theatre, holding 5000 people, with vast stage and every facility imaginable. We planned to have a choir of 300 drawn from churches all over the diocese, brass, organ, etc etc. Planning was great fun - the service (see May) was fantastic.



Revs. Jerry Doublisky & Ron Jaynes with JB outside the Garden State Arts Center, New Jersey.

I have jolly nice neighbors: we don't see each other too often (I'm rarely in in the daytime) but when we do, it's good; sometimes I find part of my front lawn cut - that's nice. On 20 April I asked Karen Thompson (# 9) if she knew of someone who would cut down one of the trees in front of my house which cast a pall of gloom. A couple of hours later I went outside to discover John Thompson hard at work with chain saw demolishing the hunk. EGAD! That's real neighborly.



May

This is a cousins' year: Caroline Bertalot, wife of cousin Robert (a dentist in N.Wales) spent a happy few days with me, meeting some of my Princeton friends, buying presents for her children at TOYS R US, where she found a



puppet eagle, and attending our Trinity Spring Concert which was super! We sang Durufle's Requiem with orchestra and received a standing ovation. Some said it was the best concert ever given by our choirs. It was good.

8th: 40th anniversary of V.E. Day - saw The Queen arrive at Westminster Abbey on TV (live) - a nostalgic moment.

Another nostalgic moment (extended) came when I began to put all my old family photos, which have been hanging around in boxes for years, into an album. I was amazed to find photographs going back 80 years - including one of my Mother aged 1. To have so many family memories within the covers of one album is strangely moving, covering, as it does, over three quarters of a century.

16th - Ascension Day: Diocesan Bicentennial Service at the Garden State Arts' Center. A totally WOW experience. My co-music chair and I had been rehearsing choirs throughout the diocese before the event, but we all only came together on The Day, plus superb brass. The high point, for me, was warming up the 5000 congregation immediately before the service - they responded marvellously, so well in fact that when the Bishop began the service with "The Lord is risen", everyone bellaved back

at him "The Lord is risen indeeeeed" so strongly that he took several moments to recover!

The Archbishop of York preached; he said, "The Christian faith is like a meal; many people have tasted the first course, but few go on to the main dish." Yes, indeed.

June

Six months of anticipation were brought to beautiful fruition when my new-found cousin Renzo Bertalot spent a few days with me. He was in the USA for some conferences - he told me that this was the first time he had returned to the USA since studying at Princeton! He brought with him photographs of his Italian family (he's a grandfather, even tho' only two years older than I) and we spent a wonderful time drawing up a family



tree - he telling me of my great-great-great grandfather and many of the Bertalot family which is spread through Italy and France. I also learnt, much to my surprise, that he pronounces our name 'Bertalot'; the French pronunciation having crept in through my grandparents who lived for some time in France. So now I have a whole set of new

relations - and plan to visit some of them next summer. EGAD and WOW!

In the middle of the month I popped over to England to see my English cousins (on my Mother's side) for a family conference.



Cousins Llewellyn & Joan, Dick & Sheila sorting through family photographs in Reigate.

Whilst there I took the opportunity to visit some friends whom I haven't seen for ages - including Billy Rivers (aet 86) and his lovely wife Judy. Billy resigned his commission in 1930 (!) to farm in Burma. I knew him more recently (circa 1958) when he was public relations officer of the Royal School of Church Music. He is a 'life and soul of the party' chap, and has been so kind to me.

I knew that his son was called Nelson, and wondered why. It was only during my stay with the Rivers that I learnt that Billy's great grandfather and his great-great grandfather had served aboard HMS Victory with Nelson, and that he has a number of historic souvenirs. Both his relations are shown on the well-known etching of the death of Nelson. This I found amazing.

Another friend of many years with whom I stayed was Edward (Ted) Roberts. Ted had



Billy: "That's my great-grandfather with Nelson!"

been chairman of the council of the RSCM for many years and, again, had been so kind to me on a number of occasions. He had retired as Bishop of Ely a few years ago and now lives on the Isle of Wight with his wife,



Diane, who is High Sheriff of the Isle (i.e. The Queen's representative). Ted said that when he follows Diane on her official duties he feels like Dennis Thatcher! One of the high spots of this wonderful visit to U.K. came on the morning I left the Roberts' lovely home, for the bishop brought me tea in bed. Aye me!

Readers of the Bertalot Newsletter will know that my cousin Doug spends part of the summer holidays with me. This year he planned to come to the USA (his first visit). I had been busy for many months planning a pretty hectic schedule and suggested that he might like to give a photo of himself dressed in his school uniform to our hosts over here.

He agreed, and so I called in at his school, Christ's Hospital, and snapped him looking pensive in the school quad, wearing the 16th century uniform which all the boys wear. We thought that the Americans would love it.



They did.

Blackburn was, of course, on my list to visit, and I spent a MOST hectic 24 hours racing round seeing as many dear friends as I could. That WAS exhausting, but very super.

On the way back to cousin Sheila's I called in for a quick lunch at Richard and Sal Hares' home near Wakefield. Richard is Bishop of Pontefract, and the miraculous is 'normal Christian living' to him. Knowing this I asked him, casually, what his latest



miracle was. "I have a 10-year old niece who was deaf. Two weeks ago we prayed for her and now she can hear perfectly!"

!allelujah!

I also spent a delightful time in Leicester, visiting Peter White and Doreen - Peter is cathedral organist of Leicester and a contemporary of mine at Cambridge, and staying the night with his 'boss' Alan and Sylvia Warren. Alan is Provost (Dean) of Leicester



and also a contemporary of mine at Corpus, Cambridge. We enjoyed a wonderful evening talking about auld tymes (he sang one of the kings in Anahel and the Night Visitors which I conducted during my last year at Cambridge.)

One morning, in Reigate, cousin Dick leaned over the breakfast table and said to me, "You may shake my hand, if you like." "Why?" "It shook the hand of the Queen Mother last week when she visited my London office!"



July

And so back to the USA. Don Kruger, a member of my Trinity choir and also Princeton Singers who had just graduated from Princeton

University, planned to spend a further two years in Princeton studying at Westminster Choir College. He asked if he could stay with me - yes, of course. His youthful frame came in very handy when we began to attack



the jungle at the back of the house - where I have a privet hedge which has NEVER been trimmed and which is over 20 ft high!

I enjoyed a supa two weeks in the Carolinas, first at Charleston, directing the RSCM course there; we had 60 boys and 30 choir-masters from all over the USA and they formed a very splendid choir. Four of my Trinity trebles participated, as did Don Kruger, and we enjoyed some great practices with many talented people, in that lovely old city.

The final service of the course was held 200 miles away in Charlotte, North Carolina; this was the opening service of the American Guild of Organists' Convention - and that was super all the way. My newly published anthem "Jesus Christ is Lord" (see Dec 10) was sung and everyone was very pleased.

Peter Conté, a young organist from Philly, accompanied the course brilliantly; his improvisations were phantastique and left us breathless. The really hard work was the

organising, which was done by a team led by Ben Hutto, who was about to leave his post as organist of Charleston Cathedral to take an even more attractive post in Charlotte. He had been in Charleston a number of years and knew everybody. It was impossible to walk down the street with him without him meeting at least one person he knew, and greeting them, instantly, by name. EGAD!



JB, Ben Hutto, David Lowry (i/c AGO convention) and Chaplain Alex Viola after opening service.

I gave three talks to the delegates of the AGO Convention - 'The Role of the Christian Church Musician' (a pre-dinner speech which they seemed to enjoy), 'Bach number symbolism' and 'How to train kids in choirs'. That fortnight was FUN!

But during it I received two telephone calls - one from Trinity Church office to say that Mitch Matthews (see Nov) had died suddenly, and another from a friend in Scotland to say that another dear friend in England had died. I'd stayed with her the previous summer and had known her and her husband (who'd sung in my choir at Blackburn) for many years. The loss of these very dear friends who had showered me with love was hard to bear. Eternity is only around the next corner - live THIS day as if thy last.

At the end of July cousin Doug arrived from England for a 5½ week stay. There is NO WAY I can even begin to tell you of the joys of this vacation which we shared, in part, with Don Kruger and with Mac Schafer, who was a member of my youth choir last year.

We toured the East coast of the USA from Boston in the north to Florida in the south. We stayed with friends who owned lakeside summer cottages (Doug proved a dab hand with a sail boat) -

we 'did' New York from top to bottom, going up most of the skyscrapers (so it seemed) and spending a fair amount of time on ferries -

we were given a private tour of the U.S. Capitol in Washington DC, where Mac's uncle is deputy chief of security (the high spot of that visit was all three of us sitting, in turn, in Tip O'Neil's Speaker's chair - that's the equivalent of sitting on the throne in the House of Lords! What made it even better was being seen by all 'the other' tourists, who weren't allowed on the floor of the House, but were gathered in the balcony, looking down at us!) -

We took part in a live Christian TV show - spent three fabulous days at Walt Disney World where it rained EVERY afternoon -

we saw the Space Shuttle about to be launched at Kennedy Space Center -

we bathed at Daytona Beach (the finest beach on the East Coast) where Don's grandmother lives - most thoughtfully,-

and, equally thoughtfully, enjoyed the hospitality of Don's brother's family in West Palm Beach where we visited a water park - a park with waterslides which the younger members of the party enjoyed for an hour, until I was almost frog-marched by them to join in. Golly, that was FUN - why did I waste that first hour?

I don't know how we survived that vacation - it was EGAD all the way, made doubly blessed by the warmth of welcome of all our generous hosts. THANK YOU, all.

One of the things that Doug and I wanted to do was to retrace the steps that his eldest brother, Andy (who is also my Godson) and I had taken when we came over here for a month in 1976. And so often I would say, "Andy and I were here in '76". "Let's take a photo" said Doug. So we did:



September

The day after Doug left I welcomed two more guests from England, Revd Ray and Joan Probart. Ray is Rector of Parbold, a village near Blackburn, and both of them had been spiritually supporting to me, especially in my last few years at Blackburn. It was such a joy to show them this part of the USA. I found myself at the top of the World Trade Center (110 stories) for the second time in five days - having taken Doug there at the end of his vacation.

When I first came to Princeton nearly three years ago I told the folk at Trinity that the choir of King's College, Cambridge, were planning a visit here. This finally came true this month when we sponsored a concert by this, the world's finest choir, in Princeton University Chapel (similar in size to King's).

Princeton is used to superlatives, but even our highest expectations were exceeded by this visit which we had been planning in detail for a whole year. Their singing, under



the inspired leadership of Stephen Cleobury, was beyond compare and attracted a packed chapel. Our Trinity choirs were there in force and sat open-mouthed, as did I, for I had forgotten how excellent true excellence was.

But the visit was also remarkable for their personal attributes; every member of that



King's choristers outside Trinity music dept.

distinguished body was immediately 'approachable' - there was no 'holy aura' of 'we are the greatest'. The choir was hosted by some of our own choir parents, all of whom had a great time with their guests. Stephen and Penny and their two daughters stayed with me - the whole King's Experience affected all who saw and heard them. Their magic remains, and is influencing all our Trinity choirs to make even greater strides to excellence than they had before. Choir practices are a joy and a challenge to us all as we see standards rising weekly. This is A GOOD place to be.

October

Hurricane Gloria having bypassed Princeton, (Praise the Lord) we realized afresh how fortunate we are to enjoy the Good Life in this blessed country. Life continues: I composed a little something for the insitution of the new Bishop of Kentucky - the choirs flourish with new singers and ever-new enthusiasm, including my Princeton Singers who are SLIPA.

Stephen & Perry Clebury



Yet another member of our parish met an untimely death - a surgeon at Princeton Hospital in his mid 40s whose private plane crashed when on the way to his daughter's college; his funeral in the University Chapel was most moving - absolutely packed (2000) - it was a privilege to be enabled to take part in such an occasion.

Last weekend I conducted a youth choir festival in St. John's Cathedral, Rhode Island, when my "Christopher's Carol" was sung - godson Chris will be 8 next month - the elder son of Phil & Joan Hurvick of Blackburn.

Next weekend I lead a Retreat for students from Westminster Choir College - a new experience for me; the next day our men, boys' and girls' choir sings two services in Philadelphia; three days later Vincent Waterhouse (secretary of the RSCM) flies from England to take me out to lunch - he'll be doing one or two other things whilst he's over here; the following week I attend the annual conference of diocesan music and liturgical commissions in Minnesota - we look forward at Trinity to having an Advent Carol Service a la Blackburn with lots of omdles and walkabout. 1986 sees me going to Charlotte again to give them a day; on training kids in choirs;

I look forward to giving the students at WCC 30 lectures on English Church Music. The RSCM course beckons in July followed by a conference of the American Anglican Musicians in Atlanta followed in its turn by the American Guild of Organists' Convention in Detroit (Olivier Messaien is writing a work for it). And then, of course, there is August when cousin Doug and I hope to spend some time visiting my new-found cousins in Italy, and also seeing Don and Elizabeth Fox in Turin, who found them for me. We also hope to see more friends in England - so stand by for a letter!

Early in 1986 cousin Peter, who lives in Zambia, marries Noreen, whom we all welcome into The Family.

It will be a particular joy to welcome Keith and Ruth Bond over here in the Spring: Keith was a colleague at the Royal Northern College of Music and also sub organist of Blackburn Cathedral when I was there; Ruth tried to keep my paperwork in order. Keith will be playing at Trinity and lecturing at WCC as well as making a mini recital tour of this part of the USA, including Washington.

I'm compiling a new address book; it may be that some of my friends from whom I haven't heard for some time, have moved. I'm keen that my Newsletter does reach all who want to receive it - so, dear friends, I need to hear from all of you, please, with complete addresses and postcode, so that the Newsletter may continue to wing its way to you. Thanx.

May the love which has blest so many of us this year in our lives and in memories of those who are no longer with us, continue to be very near each one of us. Our greatest treasure is those we love and those who love us; may this love increase until that day comes when we shall see Love Himself, face to face.

My love ~~~~~
CHRISTMAS 1985 **John Bertalot**