

2025 started with another milestone, Christine's 70th birthday. Over the past several years I sometimes wondered if we'd ever see this moment and here she is as loud as ever. The family decided to have a surprise party and we 'borrowed' Kelly's parents house in the White Mountains. I did the hard work of coming up with the idea and the kids did the simple task of organizing everything. Christine wasn't in the perfect frame of mind on the day, it was all "why do we have to go all the way to New Hampshire in the cold, I don't ski, it'll be boring, whine, moan, whinge . . ." Needless to say she had a blast, we had to pry her out of the hot tub at the end of the weekend.



Greg Bobby
 Steve, Kelly, Aunty Pauline, Ellie, Audrey, Birthday Girl, Michelangelo, Andy, Kieran, Erin
 Calvin James Lyanna

I had my 70th birthday in March (yes, I know I don't look a day over 26, but it's true) and also had a surprise: two of my kids remembered to call me to wish me happy birthday! What joy, almost as big a surprise as Christine's birthday weekend with a veritable feast, ample victuals, cake, family and loads of pressies. Maybe they are saving it up for a really special 71st surprise party for me, I can't wait to jump into that hot tub.

As you all know, Christine always has some bit or other falling off. This year she had a mole removed from her forehead. She claimed the resulting scar made her look like Harry Potter and she now has magical powers. I presume she means to power to talk people into a coma, but that's not particularly new. I think the scar looks more like a map of North Korea, but I would never dare tell her that, due to my fear of comas. The scar is fading but unfortunately not in parallel with her ability to talk.

In the Spring we went to Europe for a while. We started in Italy doing the usual tourist stuff. I decided to get into the culture by not responding to shouts of "MICHAEL!" and insisting on being called Michelangelo instead. We'd be wandering the city and Christine would resort to the the old favorite shout of "MICHAEL!". I'd turn around, cup my ear and stare blankly at the sky and whistle. "Oh for #@&*s sake, MICHELANGELO!". "Yes, dear?" What great fun! The Italians must have loved it.

Then we went to see the David statue and I decided that when I get out of the shower in the morning and glance in the mirror, I look the spitting image of Michelangelo's David. Well, obviously I'm not as well endowed, if you know what I mean (who is?), but apart from that the similarity is astounding. So from then on, I asked to be referred to as 'David'. Apparently that was a step too #@&*ing far and I can sod off right now. Fair enough. I was still smarting from this blatant disregard of my feelings a few

days later in the Uffizi Museum when we came across an exhibit of the great Florentine leader Lorenzo the Magnificent. As I was smiling, thinking what a great name, I got the “No! Not a #@&*ing chance! Don’t even go there!”. So alas, Michael the Magnificent was not to be. As an aside, Lorenzo’s father had the fantastic name of Piero the Gouty and his son had an even better name, Piero the Unfortunate. I agree that ‘Michael the Magnificent’ is pushing it a bit, but I think ‘Michael the Unfortunate’ is a much more suitable nickname considering my situation.

Italy was a blast. The Italians were super friendly, the weather was perfect and the food was good (if you don’t like pasta, you’d hate it though). You know what they say about ‘when in Rome . . .’, so I even ordered the famous lampredotto, a tripe sandwich. The waiter said “you do know it’s made from a cow’s stomach, sir?”, “Oh yeah, bring it on Tony”. It was ok, kinda chewy. Luckily I like pasta.

The crowds in Rome were manageable but the strange thing is that all the tourists face away from the famous sites. They are all taking selfies and not actually looking at the monuments. There must be millions of pictures showing huge blurred faces blocking the best bits of the Trevi Fountain. I didn’t take any selfies, so was I really there? According to social media, I was not.

Florence was way more crowded and it was quite annoying having tourists staring at their phones bumping into you in the street. A pet peeve of mine until the time I was trying to navigate around the city with google maps and bumped into a local. Yep, I’m part of the problem. Which I already know as Christine constantly reminds me.

We then headed over to England for various activities. My favorite was the famous Gentlemen’s Weekend. A walk in the North Yorkshire Moors with a bunch of kids I went to school with 52 years ago! It’s an annual occurrence that started by hiking dozens of miles in a death march across the Scottish Highlands and now decades later it’s a bunch of hobbled bald fogeys struggling to do a pub crawl around Whitby. Of the two organizers, one can’t walk downhill (bad knees) and one can’t walk uphill (dicky ticker) but luckily everyone is quite capable of sitting on their fat asses and drinking vast quantities of warm English beer. It’s surprising how old all the guys looked, while I still retain my boyish good looks and athletic ability and I have the amazing dexterity to walk both up and down hills. Well, at least until the sixth or seventh pub.

Christine is doing fine after many years of health issues. It’s great not to be driving into Mass General in Boston every week. The latest issue is her insomnia, which may sound trivial, but not for those who suffer from it. And definitely not for those married to someone who has it. Every morning I ask with a “how was your night’s sleep?” and either a 👍, 👎 or 🤔

It’s not like I need to ask really, it’s obvious due to the initial conversation, “Would you like a coffee dear?”. If I get a “Oooh, I’d love a coffee and a lovely long chat about nothing for the next hour”, that’s definitely a rare good night’s sleep. A simple “Yes please” means an meh night and a “#@&*ing right I #@&*ing do!”, well you can guess what that implies. And it’s definitely my fault for snoring too much.

Here’s hoping your 2026 is filled with many restful nights.

Have a Buon Natale, from Christina and Il Magnifico