

“Are you busy” said Johan one lazy Saturday afternoon in spring.

“Not especially” I replied.

“Well I have something that will keep you very busy”.

Ohh how right Johan was. He wanted me to go and see a plot of land in Plimmerton. Why would we want to see some land? I don't want to buy land, and I certainly don't want to build a house. Which is well up there with my predictions like “there is no way that Steph is going to get a job in New Zealand, its not going to happen”. If there is an opposite to Nostradamus then I am it.

The land in Plimmerton was OK. The view was amazing. Its actually on the Tasman Sea rather than the inlet so the waves crash on the shore. It has to be said that Johan had ulterior motives; he could not afford the whole plot on his

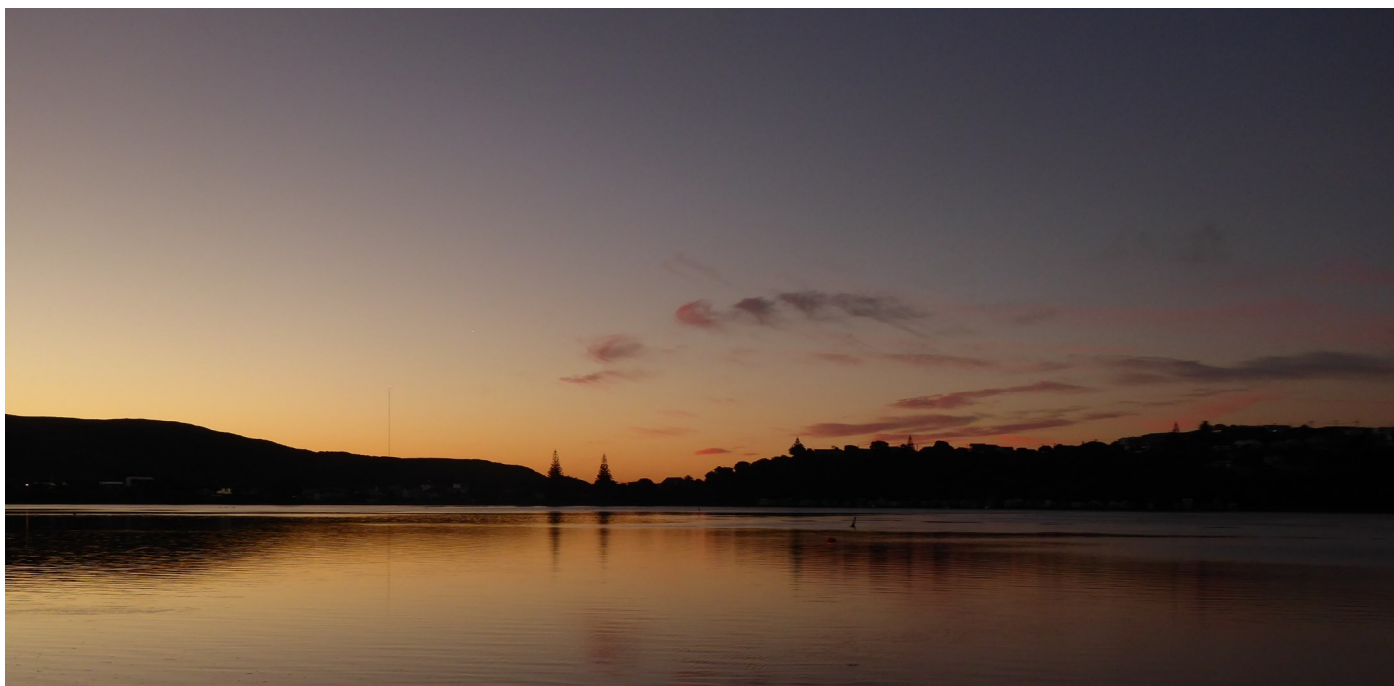


own and wanted us to go in with him. Like I said I didn't want to build a house but the more we thought about it the more it became apparent we had to do something.

We have a house in the UK, but its an old house and it take a lot of maintenance and we cannot rent it out easily. The market in the UK is finally up a bit so we could actually sell it. Brexit was made the UK a spikey polarised place, we may well go back and live but I think we want it to get whatever is driving this authoritarianism out of its system, so maybe not an immediate return. OK so it would be good if we could sell in the UK but that does not mean we should build here. Well I think I have mentioned before that New Zealand thinks it's a Pacific Island, which technically it is, but its colder than most. Most of the housing here is uninsulated, single glazed and not centrally heated. You can get properties like this but they are pre-



mium places and cost more. Also we have spent the last four years living on the beach, and we rather like judging the time of



year by the water fowl we can see.

So if we want a double glazed, insulated, heated property on the beach basically we need to build ourselves or forget the idea. So Johan's idea actually makes sense.

Porirua city council had other ideas, they didn't want two properties on that land so that was that, game over. Or was it?

Johan is nothing if not tenacious. He found another plot: Eastbourne this time. At first we were a bit apprehensive, largely because its in a different direction from where we currently live. Eastbourne is on the east side of Wellington harbour opposite Wellington, there is one road that runs along the shoreline in and out. In fact someone told me a tale of years ago when the local dairy was robbed and after the robbers left they called the police who just waited



at the end of the road and arrested them as they tried to leave. There is a good bus service, its 40 to 60 minutes into the CBD, pretty much what we have



now. The alternative is to cycle 5 minutes and then catch the ferry across the harbour, what a way to commute. Eastbourne itself is a nice little village with a couple of restaurants and even a pub.

The view is equally good. Given that the Plimmerton idea has given us pause for thought, we were more on board from the word go. And as it turns out Lower Hutt city council were far more accommodating and so we have now bought the land, yes we currently own the smallest camp site in Wellington. We are as they say at the start line, now we just have to sell the UK, design a house, get

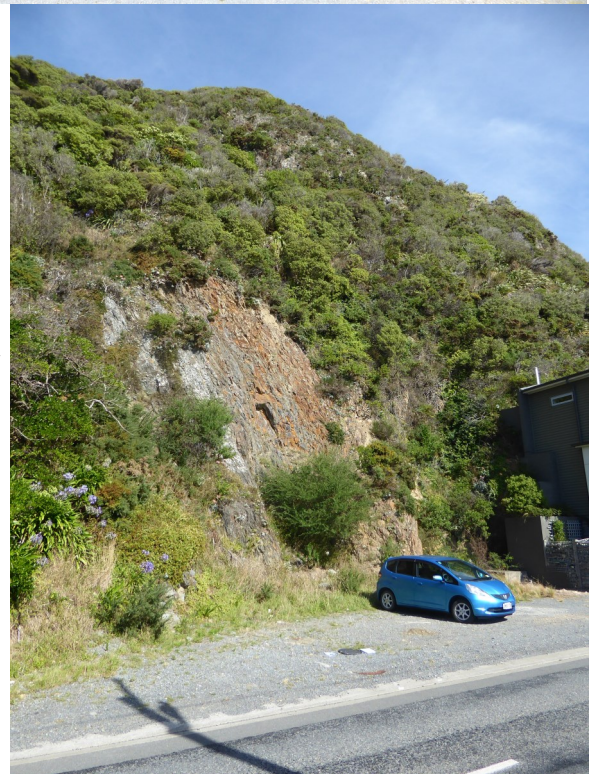




the design approved and then find a builder to build it and have it build – simples – what could go wrong.

We went out for dinner with a number of people from Steph's work and I sat next to Kerry who is in the Navy, he gets to serve on a real ship occasionally. He was very interesting to talk to; it really is a different world. I'm not really sure about the armed services in other countries but he was saying that in New Zealand 25% of the personnel are women – that

seems very high to me. We were discussing our prospective new house, and Benjamin asked "What is the big idea behind what we are trying to build?" What an excellent question. Not sure we had really thought about it beyond heating and insulation. So now we exist on a diet of "Grand Designs" and "The House 100K Built" and every other house building program. Slowly we are starting to



find things that are important. We want a bath with a view down the beach; we want to be able to see out from the kitchen. It makes sense we love living on the beach at the moment and we have specifically bought a seafront piece of land, its all about the view. Yes the plan is to live in the view.

From watching all the house building programs, I know that plans need to be fluid and that you never end up with what you plan but the general idea is to get as much light as possible into the house and to be able to see and hear the sea from everywhere, the bath, the bed and the kitchen.

I know that this is a big and complex thing. Its going to take a huge amount of organisation this year and it will dominate our lives for that year, hopefully it will be done in a year, but life also has to go on and other things will continue to happen.

We also got a very nice invitation to attend the Epps' citizen ceremony. It was very nice, apparently there was a record number people getting their





citizenship. New Zealand is a bit unusual, in a lot of ways but this particular bit is that as a Permanent Resident Visa holder we pretty much have the same rights as a citizen, the only real different is that we would get a passport as such the only people who actually become citizens are people who want to make a statement and to hold a passport. We are eligible in six months time, we can hold both UK and New Zealand passports, and at the moment I think we are leaning towards becoming citizens.

We have been back over the hill to see John to frame pictures, its been ages since we have been and it was good to get back into it. Johan and Antoinette had some pictures that they could not get framed so we said we would have a go. One was a self-portrait by Johan's daughter Francis. John did comment that artists never think about the framers when they produce art, the canvas wasn't square and she had painted all the way



to the edge meaning that we had to cut it to square it up and also try to lose the minimum amount of the picture to the frame. It is a bit of pressure framing for other people and also working with an original rather than a print but I think we did an OK job. Stupidly I didn't take a picture of the final result but I will the next time we see it. We also framed another cross stitch from Steph's sister Caroline, so now we have a pair of them.