

Becoming more Kiwi

Well here we are at the start of 10 days off at home, staycation. Steph here, filling in January to Easter 2019 after Derek covered one excellent weekend away. I was in Picton that Friday as a charity here had run the first Outward Bound course for people who had served. I was asked to represent Veterans' Affairs as I had the person who had done our bit of the organisation. It was a real honour to do and be so accepted by the group that went. They had all had an intense week of bonding and then I turn up at the end.

In all the excitement of the last two missives we seem to have missed three key events.

1/ 12th December 2018 we actually got resource consent. This means we can build our house. Since then it has seemed a little more real again, but then not!!!. We have talked to 5 builders and only two have quoted. One was just ridiculous – he got the size of the house wrong and his quote for just the build was much more than the house could be sold for once built! The other one looks OK. The builders are busy – one has been a builder in Wellington for 27 years and it has never been a busier time to be a



builder!! Another had never built a house for somebody who needed a mortgage!!!! This means builders are quoting August 2019 to October 2019 before they can start – to finish a year later.

So we get excited and have to develop a knowledgeable opinion on what we want to cover the outside of our house with. The builders all wanted the detailed drawings to give an exact quote – when they eventually get finished we will go to get a quote from another builder. As of today we are still awaiting detail drawings.

2/ 1st February 2019 The container was delivered to our storage unit. This is such an exciting experience. We had a list of items we wanted to find as we unpacked it. This included the ‘His Dark Material’ – 3 set of books by Phillip Pullman. We wanted to reread it as he has a new trilogy starting that link to these. WE FOUND THEM in 1000 books we brought. We did not find a cruet set – so have been out and brought one, after living here for 7 years J. We did not unpack everything as we had only insured the breakables – which did not break. The unit we have hired is much cheaper than owning Greenhill to provide the storage. It also has a little extra room so it means we have moved some things from our two bedroomed rental to the unit (e.g. Christmas decorations). We have found



real pleasure in some things we have brought to the house – Derek's desk chair, a new standard light and the daisy stool. Over our Easter break we will go back to the storage as we have found a couple more things we do not need in the rental.

3/ 18th February 2019 We actually got the money from Greenhill to where it needs to be. We have been watching the exchange rate since we sold. Every 1 cent in the exchange rate was \$2000 difference in how much money we got in New Zealand. Go and look at the graph about what the exchange rate has been doing since Dec 2018 – it is very exciting. It was the final stage in feeling like we have sold Greenhill. Such a relief and part of becoming more of a Kiwi. We now hear exciting information about the new owners replacing the roof, scaffolding all covering the building. So glad that is not us.

The exchange rate also plays a part in us moving pensions to New Zealand. We made the decision that we want to be able to call New Zealand our residence for retiring. Partly because we originally had planned to retire at 55, partly because Caroline (my sister) retired in 2019 and partly because any pensions we move to New Zealand get more and more taxed the longer we leave it. I think also the house feeling a little more real. We plan to both go to four days a week working once we have moved into the house – no rent no mortgage.

Me talking about retiring did have an impact on Pat, my boss deciding to retire. She started at Veterans' Affairs in business services and gradually went through as a case manager to the Manager Veterans' Services. She knows so many of the veterans and the history of how things were done and how they have come to be done. She did not want to leave and let people down. Her husband had retired in Nov 2018 and she has just left. She truly is one of the best managers/people I have worked for.

Sharon Elaine Bernadine Pat Marti



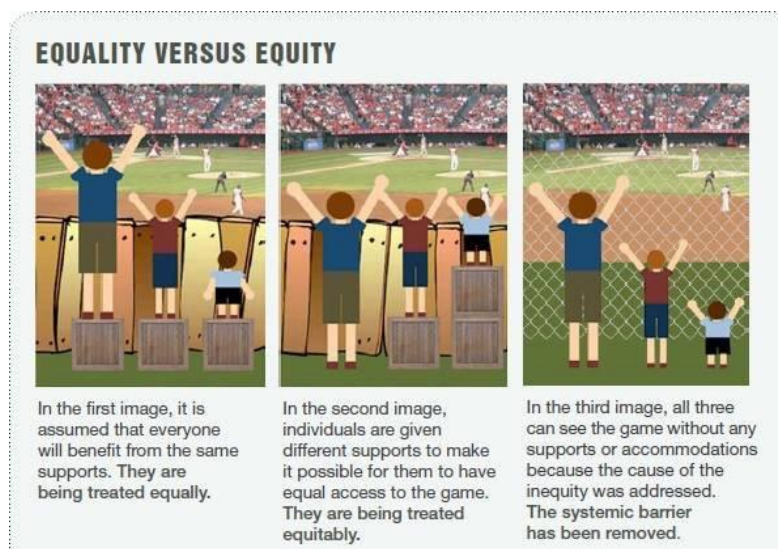
My work continues to be the most exciting job ever. Derek would say at the moment the too

engaging work. I knew that having two new staff coming on board in February 2019 would make the job harder until Easter. I am stopping over Easter. I am not even looking at my work phone. To be honest with Anzac day that is only 3 days of work! If by next weekend I want to then I have some numbers I want to look at. I would just like to get a little more in order before we enter a new phase – projects.

So I now have a team of four intelligent, autonomous, driven and varied staff. They describe us a group who respect each other to a degree that we can challenge each other and what the service should be. On top of that I have an Andre – a new policy person who has turned my world upside down. As a rule follower it sits well with me to follow an Act of parliament and the policy written under it. It frustrated me as at times I think it is stupid and does not support good rehabilitation. It was written around what is in insurance company policy, in a hurry. There was little to no international evidence about what it should look like at the time. Now Andre is principles focused – they are written at the front of the Act and

basically say we have to do what is sensible for the veteran. Put on top of that a change in thinking about equality and move to equity. Some people need more of a hand up to get to the same place – in New Zealand that is often Māori and Pacifica

but in the veterans world that can be the younger veterans. Then also consider liability of public funds. If that younger veteran does not get back to work the public will have to fund \$1.4million in his lifetime. All of a sudden it is clear why we might provide different services for this group of people if it may lead to them getting back to any work, or having a role in their community as that will reduce their health costs too. I have never thought of things in money – I want what is best for people but you



have additional power if you then describe that in money. And finally Sharon, Pats replacement. This is going to be exciting. She is a new set of eyes and she sees a system that was developed by policy. They completed some process mapping of how many people and stages were involved in paying a veteran back for the travel they did to an appointment we booked – it went all the way around a room. We are getting leaner but there is so much more we could stop doing. Sharon asks how we know this is how we do things. We had great process maps when we had the new Act (2014) BUT we do very little that way now and have not documented the new ways.



Right get me off work – I think I said earlier I am leaving it behind for Easter.

January was celebrating a couple of 50th Birthday and generally enjoying life outdoors in the sun.

In a spooky coincidence Monica booked the same house in Napier that we had rented over Christmas for her 50th. The house was walking distance to the winery she had booked for celebrating. The Winery then dropped a bomb shell and cancelled. Thankfully Mission Bay – next door could fit us in. Lunch as Mission Bay was wonderful – outdoors, overlooking the vines, great food. Great company. These are people we meet once a year on Christmas Eve at



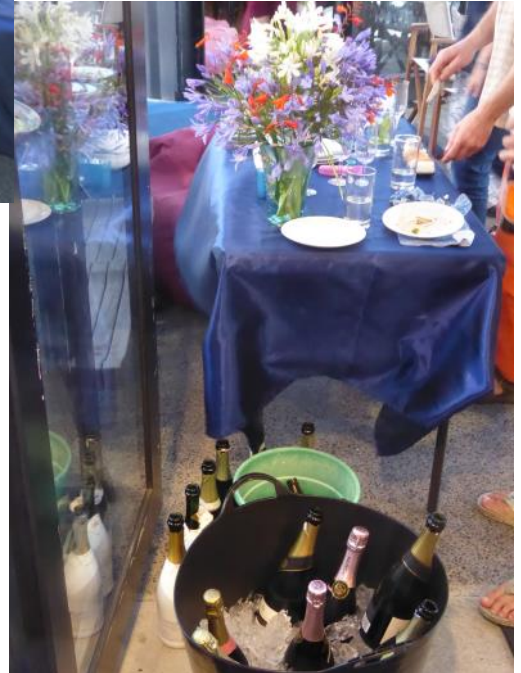


Monica's. Monica is from Sweden so they celebrate early and then chill.

Antoinette had been through a range of

ideas for her 50th. She asked her favourite café if they would open in the evening. They said yes and what a wonderful evening. We know the café well as it is at the marina, half way to the cinema on our favourite cycle. Everybody chipped in – sushi, fairy light, running around with the grandchild and great tales. We caught the bus, which was very easy and bubbles and sushi go well together. Prompted by a 50th Birthday present given to me we gave Antoinette 5 choices out of things we thought were her favourite things as a gift.

This caused great hilarity with her husband and daughter about our choices and guessing what Antoinette would choose. In the end it was easy, 5 massages were her choice.





Fleur, our neighbour and one of the people we are teaching bridge to is a real foody. She was going on a baking course so I brought the same caramel course for Derek as an advent tree present. This was after 3 failed



attempts to make caramel that ended in a cycle to the local shop to buy a jar. The course was after work and was great fun. My work colleagues were very impressed with the end results and caramel just seemed easy to make.



Summer in Wellington is about free events outside. In January the botanical gardens have concerts. Everything for jazz to an orchestra. We managed to go twice this year. The ideal is go early with a picnic, have a walk through the gardens and admire the flowers and sculptures that then get lit up as you slide into darkness.





We then have a local “Wild Food” festival. Anybody can enter a dish made from something foraged. I am tempted to enter but the standard is really high. Once the judges have had a go the leftovers are available to try. We

had some elderflower dessert but did not try the bugs that were still wiggling. They had a Samoan and Māori (Hangi) meal cooked in the ground. In both somebody spends a great deal to time making baskets to hold the food in – this sort of steams the food.

We know the key board player in the band who rock you while you chill and eat.



February comes and on a Thursday night after work you walk down the boardwalk and join in the salsa lesson and dance. They you just watch as the experts weave in a circle salsa dance, a fluidity we never match.

We have done more outdoors after work. Our favourite cycle is to the cinema, along the coast road. But we are lucky enough to have off road cycles to the lights house, from our door. We were introduced to a new route to the red rocks – a little more off road than we were are used to. There has been some frustrations, me repairing all the punctured tires in one go – 9 in total!!! We had five punctures over two days.



February we seemed to have lots of calm weather. Johan and Antoinette got up ridiculously early and go fishing, catching lots. This lead to several last minute invites for us to enjoy the catch of the day. Have you every eaten fish that fresh?

You may well have heard about our first ever terrorist attack – shooting at a Mosque in Christchurch. It was a real jolt as that just does not happen in New Zealand. I have a veteran who has post traumatic stress disorder. One of his coping techniques is carrying a card that says ‘I am safe I live in New Zealand’. This event sent him into crisis.

The response has been everything we would have hoped for. Jacinda said “they are our people” and the nation agreed. The Māori way is to start events with a greeting and even now they always include thoughts for our

Muslim people who have suffered. As it Anzac day this week I suspect it will be acknowledge then too.

Christchurch did cause a major outdoor music/food festival to relocate indoors. They had a week to find varied venues for 50 band to Cubaduba could go ahead. Cuba Street is bright and cheerful with independent shops. It has a famous fountain on it, buckets that tip and pour water into each other. It was poorly made so splashes passes by. The council repaired it so that stopped. There was public outcry and it was 'repaired' back to the original. The Christmas we arrived there was a social media flurry as one of the buckets were stolen. The nation was gripped – one night it turned back up having had flowers painted on the inside. Who stole it remains a secret.

We had never been to Cubaduba before and Antoinette was sing with her choir, now in the foyer of the Opera House. It was a stunning day so we took our bikes on the ferry and cycled home. Town was very busy but not sure how being in indoors



impacted on the event. We had bags searched to get into the venue but then it got busy and hot and they opened all the doors. I am not sure how the choir does it – they sing in several different languages. To me they sound fluent. It is a joyful sound, when we retire I may go and join a choir.

The week after we saw the choir again. This time in a wonderful oddity of a church. It was built in the 60's out of concrete. The acoustics were very warm. They built a housing estate around the church and they were going to knock it down – another outcry and it now lives shoulder to shoulder with houses.



We also started the process and much quicker than quoted are moving towards our citizenship. We had forms to fill in, a meeting to confirm who we are. Then we get a letter saying we are acceptable and we have a ceremony on 9th May. It is at the end of the day but work are delighted to give us the time off. Lucky for us it is a Thursday evening before our Friday off. Amazingly timing means we start an 8 week Māori course 2 days before we gain citizenship. Last stage will be passports.

This is a picture of the palm outside our bedroom window. I never knew they grew like this.



The passports may be useful as we have booked to visit the UK arriving in London on 20 December 2019. Both of our offices close for 2 weeks over Christmas and we get 6 public holidays, so it seems a natural time to come over. OK there is the weather thing, leaving summer to come to winter but then we got excited about things that happen at that time of the year.

We will spend Christmas in St Annes. On our wish list is going to 2 pantomimes, having crisp sunny walks, trying secret cinema and going to the January sales. Not certain where to buy clothes as we have taken the recommendation of many of have a stopover on the way back. Cheapest flights were Hong Kong, so we have 3 days to see how much it has changed.

Some time after 10th January we will have a week to 10 days down south. It is easier to fly to France from there in the winter and I have a visit for work.

Then I had a strong memory. In Jan/Feb we used to love going to a 'Mind Body and Soul' weekend. 2 nights in a hotel with a pool with oodles of classes. Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates and then things like 'get to know your angel'. Do you believe 8 years later and they still happen. It is 190 GBP for the weekend, breakfast and evening meal included. Unfortunately they do not have their calendar out yet for Jan/Feb so I have no idea where that might be or when. It would be a great place to meet up. If we book 10 places we get one free. I will keep you updated.



We have slept so much this break, a real chill. I have managed to upholster more of the dining room chairs. I cut out all the material and was thrilled to find out I guessed just the right amount of material when I brought it in the Philippines 2 years ago!!!

Still wonderful things at the end of our week off. We are going to play mini golf, to a play called 'The Children' and Sunday lunch our followed by a full orchestra improving the already fabulous "Empire Strikes Back" film. Not a bad finale.

Having just got back from the Anzac parade I can indeed say we remembered those who were lost in Christchurch.

Love to you all, see you this year or soon in to next.

Steph and Derek 25 April 2019

Ps news just in. We have won at the bridge club for the second time this year. We must be getting better.

