

That's what it feels like, it feels like we are hibernating. Maybe it's the weekend, we have completed lots of tasks that have been on our lists for ages and we are planning new adventures but just now it feels like we are drawing breath. I am sitting here in the dining room, its pitch dark at 5:30, the bright lights turn the windows into mirrors and I am listening to Simon Mayo on Scala Radio, he is rather good, typing away it all feels very cocooned and peaceful at the same time.

Anyway the last time I wrote we were off swimming in the sounds of the South Island, Steph covered some of the time since then in her last letter and now I am trying to remember what happened as we slid from the bright sunlight into winter.

We do rather seem to have gone native. It's something of a surprise, I never thought we would end up here but here we are and now we are dual citizens and I have two passports. I am not sure we ever really planned that, there really isn't much reason to become a citizen, the difference from a permanent resident is minimal, we already could vote, so unless we wanted to represent New Zealand at the



Olympics or stand for parliament then there really wasn't much need to become a citizen. Probably the only real advantage is that we no longer come under the Ministry of Immigration



and as such cannot be deported if we commit a crime. I have explained this to people and they seem to infer from that that I expected to go on some kind of crime spree. So like I said, its no big deal, or so I thought. I have to say that when we went to the ceremony and got our passports I found myself strangely affected and when I mentioned it in passing at work everyone was openly congratulating me and the whole floor applauded.

We have also been on our first Maori lessons. Everyone here gets some exposure to Maori at school and we had notice that whenever we tried to use a Maori word Jess,

who is currently in school here, would roll her eyes and correct our clumsy pronunciation. We have spent eight weeks and in many ways I think we have just about made it to what



everyone here knows in primary school, we can sing the alphabet song (only 15 letters in the Maori alphabet, 10 consonants and 5 vowels) and we can count, we hike up the local trails and count the steps in Maori, people have to wait because we are quite slow, at counting, but they smile and are kind and supportive.

We have also learnt our Mihi. What is a Mihi? Well its quite simple and at the same time its quite complex. The teaching style was unusual to my eye, our teacher arrived in shorts and no shoes, remember it's the middle of winter, and I don't mean that he took his shoes off he had no shoes in the room that I could see. He combined teaching words and pronunciation with sitting in the middle of the circle and explaining what it was like to grow up speaking

Maori. The whole bi-culturalism thing here is relatively new. Maori language was not encouraged for years, I talked to someone whose father was in the army and as such was forbidden to speak Maori. Then in the 80's and 90's NZ started to encourage the language Te Reo Maori and the culture. Our teacher grew up in one of the





first total immersion schools; he didn't learn English until he was a teenager.

The language, Te Reo Maori, itself is quite interesting. Like I said it's only got 15 letters, everything is pronounced, unlike English, if it's on the page it gets pronounced. Words always end in a vowel. But word meanings are a bit slippery, words seem to have many diverse meanings.

So, after eight weeks we could do what most schoolkids could do and sing the alphabet song, but we had also learnt our Mihi, which is our greeting. Our greeting describes who we are. Where you were born, where you are now, where are your people, which mountain was near you, where your nearest river is, how do you connect to your Iwi, your people, and how do you connect to your land. It was quite scary as I really had no reference points in this language, but everyone is so forgiving and supportive, if you try then they smile.

As the winter draws in, we do still go out, but it's to more sheltered events. We went to the Food Show at the local arena, it's a great





place to wander and graze for the day and we went out after work to the Wellington Jazz festival, which was very low key but fun, we sat in sofas on the front row above a pub watching three saxophonists sipping craft beer.

Of course the real shelter here will be in the form of the new house, well what can I say about the progress, slow, very

slow. We have got consent from the council to build the house, now we need detailed engineering plans so that we can get a quote from a builder. At that point we will know if we can afford to build the house, or if it is worth building. The thing is our engineer said he would have the plans done in a few weeks and now three months later that does not look likely, in fact we are going to have to part company and find another engineer, hope-





fully more luck with this one. But even still its frustrating to seem to be becalmed.

Although it is wintery, often cold and rainy, we still get bright clear sunny and sometimes warm days. On those days we cycle through the bays to the cinema at Petone, sit in sofa with coffee and watch, well whatever is on, its really about the cycle. We have seen some very obscure things like “One Last Deal”, a Finnish film in Finnish with subtitles; handily Finnish is quite a verbose language which means there is loads of time to read the subtitles. We have also seen the mainstream blockbusters of “Yesterday” and “Toy Story 4”. Its always such a pleasure to scoot back along our little winding road in the sun to a Sunday roast.

Speaking of roasts, we have also had people over for the midwinter meal. The huge roast meal that nobody wants at Christmas in the middle of summer. Steph even tried



her hand a making pork pies, we sampled them against the competition from the local butcher. It was great fun, we watched “The Full Monty” af-

terwards.

We have done a little travelling; we went up to Auckland to see Professor Brian Cox. Very unusual, as he himself said it did seem odd that thousands of people turn out on a Saturday evening for a lecture on Cosmology. Odd but strangely pleasurable.

The cricket world cup has just concluded the final between England and New Zealand.

Which brings me back to the two passports, talk about a Tebbit Test. People at work asked if I minded which team won and before the final I was unsure who I was going to cheer on, its seems strange that I didn't know but when Jimmy Neesham smashed a six in the final over and I was convinced that it was enough for the Kiwis to win it turned out it was New Zealand I was cheering. I guess in the end the Kiwis were lucky to make the final and England were lucky to be awarded the trophy.

With all this talking about winter makes me think that the



winters here are not really very cold, and this one is particularly mild but we are planning to go back to the UK for a visit in December, now that really will be cold.

