

Winter had seemed like hibernation with recovery from eye operations and impromptu departures from my bike. Spring has arrived and it does feel like emerging into the sun. Handily enough we also had lots of visitors to explore with.

Barbara from the US, who we met years ago when on holiday in China, arrived with a couple of friends, Julie also from the US and Maria from Sweden. We met up with Barbara when I was working out in California but that appears to be over a decade ago. She has been talking about coming out to NZ for most of the time we have been here and this year its finally happening. They arrived on the same day as WOW – World of Wearable Art – we already had tickets so they decided to come along as well. It's a Wellington thing, its really quite hard to describe and they don't allow photography so I'll just have to try my best.

It's a show of cloths design around some given themes. Wearable is sometimes a stretch, yes technically the garments are being worn but they are not really the sort of thing that



people would generally wear, its more mobile art installation really. The supreme award winner was a man pulling a hand cart and then when he stopped turning a crank to crank up a soldier. Maybe just take a look

<https://www.worldofwearableart.com/2018/09/2018-award-winners/>

They were a great bunch, and its fun to explore your own city by showing people around. We went to Weta cave, Te Papa. Maria had managed to do a year of school in California and it was fascinating to stroll around Miramar and listen to her story of how she had recently re-established contact with her “US mother”. It turns out now I look I don’t have a photo of them, I must get better at this.

Lorna and Louisa arrived next, Lorna is the daughter of one of Steph’s cohort of OTs. They were also good fun but completely different from the other group. With Barbara et al we went out exploring with them, Lorna and Louisa had their own car and had their own list of things they wanted to do. It was good to be able to provide some home comforts for them and catch up with all the





UK gossip.

Greenhill, our old UK house had been rumbling along all winter, things were progressing, allegedly, however like the plans for the



new house it was difficult to see any progress. Then all of a sudden in October everything started to speed up. We did have some difficulties getting the title deeds with the correct stamps but finally, finally the house has been sold. Everyone seems to think that selling Greenhill indicates we will be staying in NZ. It really wasn't about that. I guess we are both enjoying work and we are better paid



here than we would be in the UK so yes we will stay here to work, but beyond that we still don't know what the plan is but either way we needed to sell

Greenhill. Its expensive and difficult to maintain from over here and the way the property market is in the current Brexit environment we needed to get rid of it. I have learnt that having assets is one thing, but being able to liquidate them is a whole other ball game. Now we no longer have the hassle.

The next group to arrive was Caroline, Steph's sister, and Margaret and Gwenda. Their visit was slightly different, we would spend a weekend with them here in Wellington and then we would meet up again with them later in the month up north in the Coromandel. Also they didn't stay with us, they were in a B&B in Day's Bay, a 10 minute cycle away. Caroline arrived with goodies, Yorkshire Tea Bags and my new ruck sack, for some reason Amazon would not deliver that item to New Zealand. We had a sunny walk along the front finding our feet with another group, Gwenda had lost her husband and we trying travelling



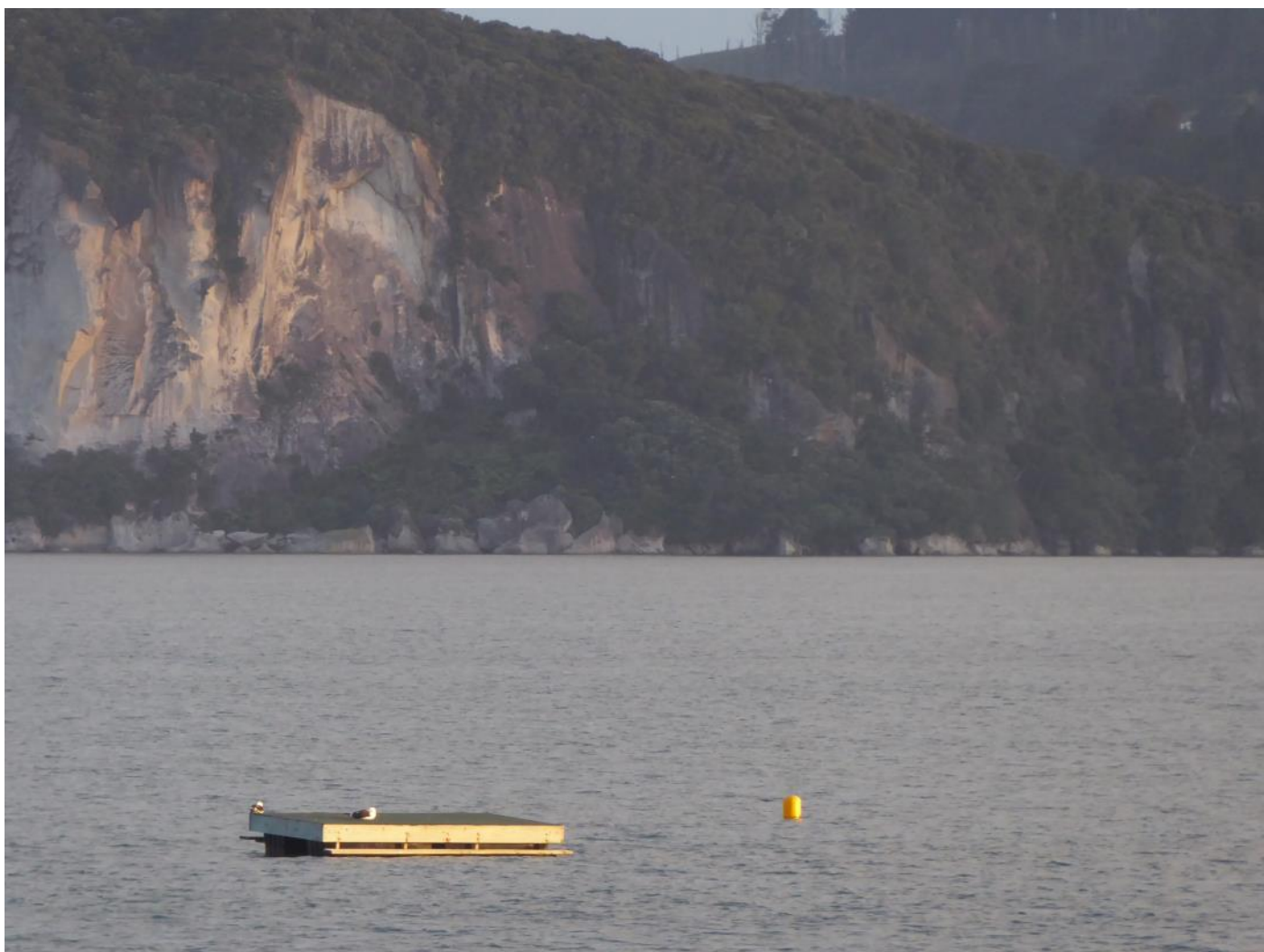


“solo” for the first time, Margaret we had met when she came out here with Caroline last time. This holiday is the start of Caroline’s retirement world tour, which starts now when she retired and seems to end sometime next spring, northern hemisphere spring that is. Everyone seems to be retiring, even we have given some thought to retiring, but still have no real plans in that direction.



We went to Te Papa again, but its so big and varied there is always something new to see, Steph even went in to see a cake decorating event. Sort of like WOW for the cake world.

The Coromandel is great, we were there for my birthday last year and enjoyed it, that time we were on the west



coast, this time the east coast so Caroline can dive. The weather was a little dodgy, giving us an opportunity to play cards. It did clear up enough for us to go on a boat ride and also so we could swim out to the float in the sea. For some reason I've always thought that swimming out to a float in the sea is very James Bond, I imagine him doing it in the Mediterranean. I've never done it and I have so little upper body strength I was not sure I'd be able to pull myself up but I did manage and lay there in the sun watching Steph swim out.

The boat ride was great we went all the way around to Ca-



thedral Cave, weaving in and out of the rocks and coves.

Then, as if it was ganged together with Greenhill, at last there was some movement on our new house here in NZ. At long last, almost a year after the start of applying for permission we had finally got it. We now have legally binding ability to build our house, now we just have to work out if we can afford to build it, that is the task for the start of 2019.

In amongst all the exploring the traditional slide towards



Christmas also started, for us this means the Sunday evening ritual of a roast dinner and Strictly Come Dancing, it's the small things that make me smile.



Another part of Christmas is Steph's advent tree. Sometimes I do wonder if I will always be able to find presents to fill the tree, but it always seems to get filled and this year I had only got a few things in Canberra but one Saturday pretty much got the rest sorted. I guess the key is to keep lists of ideas as they occur to me during the year.



Also adding to the theme of exploring our own city one of the advent tree presents was a walking tour seeing some of the street

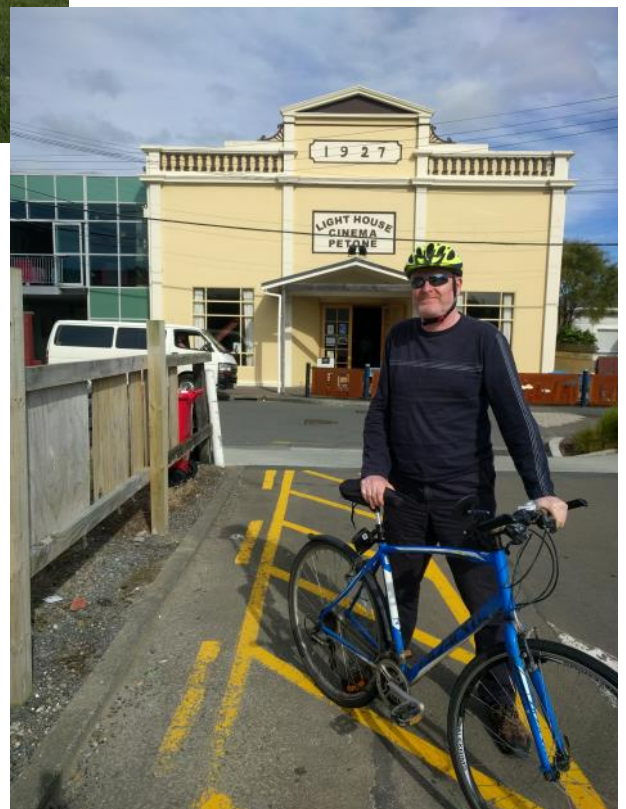


art for the first time and also looking up at the buildings rather than hurrying past. Another was a Great Santa Run, though technically we walked the 5 KM along the front one sunny evening, though some people did take it very seriously.



We did do some real exercise, we did our beloved cycle though the bays to the little

cinema in Petone. We watched “Anna and the Apocalypse”, the best zombie comedy Christmas musical that I’ve seen, granted not a big field of competition. Having Christmas in the middle of summer does mean that work does rather wind down in De-





cember and does not really get going full throttle until February really. We seem to have any number of Christmas parties and pub quizzes but its all good fun and eventually we break up and have just over two weeks off.

Then the next group arrived, this time Helen, Steph's niece, and Pam. They were lovely. They arrived on Christmas Eve and we went up to Zealandia for one of their evening twilight walks. Ki-



wis are nocturnal so we need to go as it gets dark if we are going to see them. We were in luck. I have to say we were in luck last time so maybe we are just lucky. Last time the Kiwi looked like a strange three legged animal, moving





around using both legs and its beak, this time it was running head up looking like a teddy bear running with its hands behind its back. It was a great thing to do.



Christmas Day was presents and then we all went round to Johan and Antoinette's for a sprawling lunch, the original plan was to have Christmas in our new house, however its going to take a bit longer than we hoped. The new plan is next year and that also may well be a bit optimistic.



Then back home for a very gossipy game of canasta with Helen Pan and our neighbour Fleur.

After Christmas we all went north to Napier in Hawkes Bay. We had a big



house with an outdoor area and a barbeque, essential kit for our New Year's Eve. This visit was a bit of a relay, Helen and Pam



headed off to a concert and Bunny, my sister, and Allan arrived.

We potted around and cycled down as many of

the hundreds of KM of cycles paths around here as we could and ended up at cinemas watching “Bohemian Rhapsody” and also “A Star is Born” all very musical. We did have a traditional, for us, barbeque on New Years Eve and even played Bunny's canasta variant, and I won.





Bunny tells me gloating isn't attractive so I probably shouldn't have mentioned it but I could not resist.

Now we are getting sorted out for returning to work next week. It does feel as though this year has been a bit of a haul trying to get things lined up so we can start with the new house next year, hopefully we are ready to get going now. As if to complete the chapter of last year, I can see from the tracking that our container, with the contents of the UK house, has arrived in the country so we will have Christmas all over again when we get to open it in January.



Stephs added notes

We seem to have been on holiday for ever so I have time to read Derek's thoughts and add mine before it goes out. All of a sudden summer is here – all the doors open and finally no duvet needed.

We do have a photo of WOW as Wellington goes WOW mad. Shops and spaces show costumes from previous

shows and this one. Having had several one day trips for work I have got to know the ones at the airport well. When we went to Te Papa we had current models showing off and being adorable. Over 60,000 people come to sell out shows so do not need to do the promotion. This year was Derek's first visit and I brought him it as a Birthday present. Due to his poor sight I had an 'insider' at work who told me the day the tickets went on sale. We were close to the stage so could see the 'bubble wrap' of one costume BUT you could not see the 'Busby Berkeley' effect of the dancing. Having 3 in our 2 bedroomed house was cosy and manageable for a short period. It definitely made me long for our 3 bed new house!

Lorna and Louisa were a joy, we do not often share space with 'young things'. They are just so easy with skype – we book times and have a routine. They are just on their phones so if they feel like a chat they have one. Things to learn.

Selling Greenhill seemed partly an anti-climax. Not being in the country and not actually physically being involved and not actually having the money in a New Zealand bank account makes it a little unreal. Lessons to tell the next generation – we had 20 years of pure joy of living in Greenhill. We loved that house but even before we came to New Zealand it was getting too big. Trying New Zea-



land definitely make possession of all kinds less important. So then when it came to selling the house we never brought thinking about ease of selling. OK lots of changes since we brought – the banks really do not want to lend money. But if you can buy something you like and that will also be great for resell. We do get exciting reports from people who now pass Greenhill and tell us they are having a full new roof – but why it did not leak!! Then I think we dropped the price, they will do everything now and then have the joy of it all the time they live there.

Caroline, Margaret and Gwenda were easy company. It was lovely meeting and them going off to holiday and then seeing them at the end of their holiday. The place we staying on the Coromandel was wonderful, pool, spa and a view of the sea. Great time to go as again over Christmas the population triples. I am sure you do not get the pool to



yourself over that period!

We mentioned that we had done the Santa Run to Antoinette and it lead to an adorable Christmas Eve treat. Her three year old grandson was here from South Africa. He thought Santa was not real, only in books. We were going to see him on Christmas Day so wanted to be heavily disguised. He had been told Santa could be male or female and might be in a rush. So I was Santa and Derek an elf. He has been shy on our first meeting but the whole family had been involved in setting the scene. He had to decide what my reindeer might eat. He sat on my knee and told me what he wanted for Christmas. On Christmas Day he was telling everybody Santa was real and had visited. One of the best 15 minutes of Christmas!!!!

In Napier we were also charmed by John and his vintage



car as he told of the history of the area. He had forgotten we could have played in his dress up box and worn period clothes,

but even without definitely a recommended activity.

Its hard to talk about next year as that means thinking about work. Having had 2 weeks off I am just not thinking about it. I do love my job and have great excitement as recruited 2 new team members who start at the end of January. It feels like with house building and service development it is going to be a full on 2019. Currently so chilled that all that is to come.

Hope you have all things to look forward to in 2019. Take care of yourselves and each other. Love Steph