

Its Labour Day weekend, like most countries we get most of our public holidays in the summer, so Labour Day is the first public holiday in spring and even though tradi-



tionally the weather is rubbish it does mark the start of it getting better. Steph wrote the last letter so it has been a while for me, I am sitting here at the dining room table on a Saturday evening trying to find out where I was up to while Steph cooks dinner. I will write some and then we will eat and watch a film – oh yes we are wild things on a Saturday, but to be fair all through the winter we have been playing virtual cards with friends and family in the UK on weekend evenings and sometimes even going out so this is the first time I can remember being free on a Saturday for months.

Now I orientate myself, last time I was writing the world was sliding into this strange twilight that is lockdown. I have been so lucky, and I really do appreciate it. I live in New Zealand that seems to have come through it pretty well so far, and also I get to be in a bubble with Steph and that seems to go pretty well but I am sure that many other people have a much more scary, isolated and depressing

experience. Its tough, its not a normal time.

As we went into lockdown Steph was looking around for another job, she had finally tired of Veterans' Affairs.



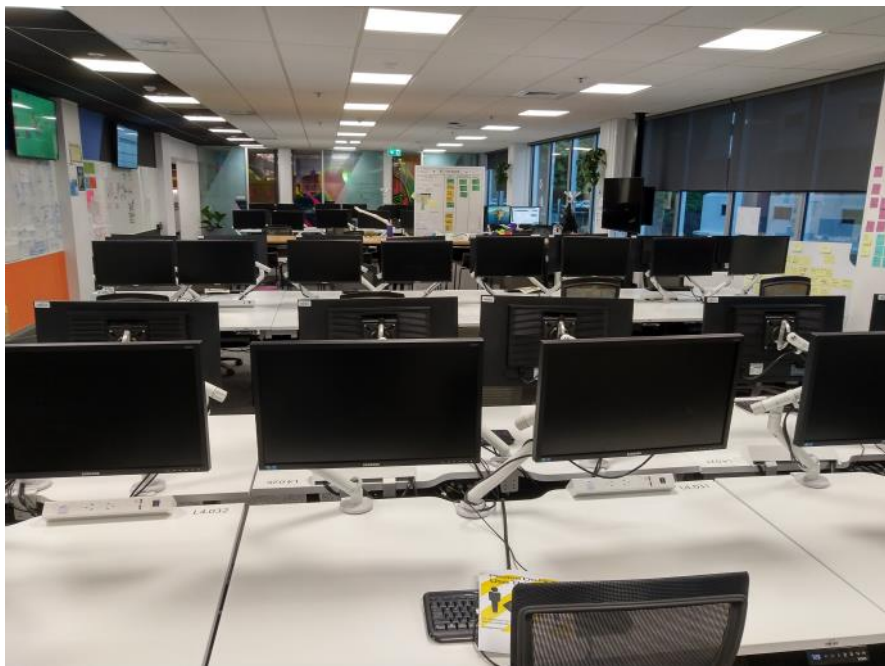
The new job is managing a rehab team in unit in a suburb of Wellington, a suburb on top of a hill, hence the new folding electric bike. Well there wasn't much point in starting the new role in lockdown but with its end she has transitioned from one job to the other. She loves it. And its so nice to see her so excited by Occupational Therapy again, she loves organising and creating activities for the residents, who knew there were so many ways of making pom-poms? It has also sparked her on to work on her own craft projects, the dining room chairs that I am sitting on have all been re-covered now and the knitting machine it out again. The bike is working out just fine, though sometimes when I am slogging in- to the wind on the way





home on my manual bike, Steph will go on ahead to “put the kettle on”.

My work is sort of gradually getting back to a more predictable cadence, we are free to work



from home as much as we want. I usually try and go into the office three days out of my four day week. It has to be said that I am in the minority, and the office is less than half full, its not uncommon for me to arrive to an empty office, though to be fair more people are starting to come back in. I do wonder how long the bank will continue to pay for office space its not using.



If you don't live here, this must seem weird, and I know that it could all go to custard very quickly, but as it stands life here has pretty much returned to normal – ish. The borders are closed, which means we cannot go to another country – well we can, but we need to pay for \$3,000 of quarantine when we get back. But other than that

everything else is as it was before, no masks, rugby with 40,000+ in the stadium, we can go to the cinema and restaurants. Sorry I am not trying to gloat just trying to explain what its like here, because it seems so different when we talk to people abroad. It does seem chaotic, and difficult for most of Europe.

We did have a bit of a shock last month when there was some new cases in the community, and going into lockdown for the second time was harder than the first time but we seem to have traced all the cases and at the moment we are clear again.

The other part of our life that has been restarted is sorting out somewhere to live. We had just decided to sell our land and buy a house when lockdown happened and put a pause to the process. Now we are back looking, and we are not alone, in fact there is something of a property boom going on over here at the moment. In fact we have been watching Location, Location, Location and are quite envious of the UK property market. This was the original reason behind building our own house, the housing stock



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over here is poor and because there isn't enough supply for the demand prices are high. The usual process of selling a house over here at the moment is by tender, the buyer will complete the contract with the price they want to pay and then seal there bids, all the envelopes are opened on the specified date and if your bid is accepted then you have just bought a house, well subject to any conditions you stipulate on the contract. Well that's the theory. In practice if you put any conditions on your offer you will not get picked, so that means all due diligence must be done beforehand, otherwise an unconditional offer means you contractually agree to buy the house. It can cost up to \$1,000 to do the due diligence, one of our tenders had 20 envelopes in it, we didn't get picked – by about \$60,000. Recently this has got even worse, last week we went to see a house for tender and 3 hours after we saw it the tender date was moved from 3 weeks in the future to be the next day – someone had just asked how much cash was needed to take the property off the market



immediately. So most of our weekends are taken up with visiting house after house. Mostly this is done on a Sunday, where we spend the days with tens of other people wandering around houses. We are getting better at spotting a house we would live in and our offers are getting nearer the final price so at some point I am confident we will get a house. At some point.

The rhythm of the week is that we get emailed all the new listings every day as we go through the week. Its not like the UK in that you just organise a viewing, over here they have “open homes” that are pretty much always on a Sunday so we try and work out a running order whereby we can get between each property, the slots are usually 30 mins or an hour. If we have enough to make it worthwhile we drive up the coast and spend all Sunday viewing. If something is interesting has come up then we spend the following week organising a building inspection and then finance. If nothing is found and its not sold then maybe put in a bid, rinse and repeat.

We have seen so many houses they all blur into each other, I think we are getting better at spotting good houses and there have been some we would have really wanted to win, and in amongst them some very odd houses. A particular single building split in two with the land cross leased to the point where the agent didn't know which bit of garden was for which house does stick in the mind. The main bit that stuck in my mind was the background music the

agent was playing included “You can’t always get what you want”. Splendid.

To break up the succession of houses we are exploring the area that we are looking in. The area is the Kapiti Coast. Its 50 KM north of Wellington, on the main train line so its about a one hour commute, which sounds a lot but its about one hour from Eastbourne, also as it stands I can work from home more often going forward. The place has a very beach / holiday vibe so when we stop work it will be a nice place to live. There are two main towns, Paraparaumu and slightly further out Waikanae. There are beach and hill walks and also lots of cycling, there is a new expressway which has its own ded-



icated and lit cycle path which means we can cycle between the towns and also down though Queen Elizabeth Park.

We currently have two prospective houses in progress but its an odd situation we need to want the houses, after all it’s a lot of money, but we are so unlikely to get any particular one we cannot get



too attached, after all we have been through due diligence on nine previous houses and its all too easy to get discouraged after successive failures.



We are trying to split our time between houses and getting fit again. Domestic holidays are where it appears to be at this year, not a complete surprise given the borders are closed and we are planning to do some hiking and cycling on the South Island – we can manage to cope with a ferry crossing. Our local lodge that used to cater exclusively for the cruise ship passengers has now had to admit “walk ins”, cruise ships being a bit absent at the moment, we thought it would be a good hill climb practice, however the gradient was a little too steep to cycle up. The view was pretty good when we finally made it.

This weekend we went to The Food Show, it is usually on in autumn (April, May) but it was postponed this year, they rescheduled it and we managed to go, it was very quiet. Fewer exhibi-





tors and fewer people attending. I went as a volunteer for Steph's work helping some of the residents be able to go. It was great fun, slightly scary and a bit out of my comfort zone, we managed to loose one of the residents three times but all was good in the end and we felt we had earned our sit



down and a drink on the way home.

Christmas, it seems so long ago that we flew around the world last year. Whatever happens this year we will

be staying at home – now we just have to decide where home will be by then.

