

Homeward Bound

07/08/14

It seems odd me writing the missive (Steph). I think I have the time but then lets just watch this space. I do not consider myself as eloquent as Derek, my artistic skills are in sculpture and hard substances, not words.

I echo so much in what he said last time. The really pleasure of the summer has been in meals with people, the routine of badminton, conversations with people you have known a life time. The disappointment in myself was not having those difficult conversations that you can have because you know people that well, I feel I let some fiends down.

I cannot express how much it meant to me to be 50 in the UK and have friends turning 50 too. So many people did special things for me and the gifts I was given were so thoughtful and beautiful. I have many thank you letters to



write, I hoped to do it in Laos and Cambodia with postcards and then we found it really difficult to buy any postcards so that was out. I planned an afternoon tea for my Birthday, only to be completely charmed to find Louise had planned a surprise afternoon tea the Sunday before – Then work produced one on the day itself! I have to say that now back in New Zealand I am actually Birthday'd out.

Working back in the NHS was reassuring, the MRI continues cutting edge treatment – but I also found far too many people in

hospital with a headache!!! It was quite thrilling to look for a work contract and find myself back in the job I left, 2.5 years ago – well in the office next door. Of course for me it lead to excitement at lunch time as I caught up with somebody else. It was great for them as I just knew what I was doing, although finding ward 5 did take me 45 minutes – I would ask for directions and be sent back to where I started. The MRI just has more consumables, if I want to wipe down a shower chair after use, I could find the right kind of cloth in the room I was in. It also has far more options for where recovering people can go.

This of course was also interesting from the other side, when Phyllis (Derek's) Mum had to go to hospital. I was excited to meet the occupational therapist on a Sunday but disappointing that they did not then think that she would need a key safe to let people into the house. Fascinating that she could have gone home before the weekend, if we paid for care – we ended up being the awkward relative who delayed discharge. The ward nursing staff we fantastic, very rehabilitation focused.

I then have to say this is our experience and that it seems even more of a postcode lottery – it very much depends where you live. Some very interesting discussions as in New Zealand we pay to see our GP (only 25 pounds) – this means some people wait too long and end up having to go to hospital but others do not waste the GP's time.

Moving away from work we went to France for excellent company and food. More tough times having to try and organise things and totally reorganise our life but another highlight.



Leaving the UK seemed a little more organised than the last time we left. I feel like we could not have organised what we had from New Zealand and that it is all just the start of change. It also feels like the right thing to do, I want to go back to New Zealand, for at least another 3 years. We have learnt so much this trip and loved the longer time period in the UK and for me working. I would hope the next visit would be less complicated, but we never expected what happened this time. I would still say I am British.

It was wonderful to have long flights to Laos, time to sleep, read and knit again – I am not sure when I ever thought I would have time to knit in the UK.

Our first week in Laos was quieter than I expected, part by design and part because we were unable to do the trekking we wanted to as it was the wet season and the paths were in fact rivers!! We did manage one trek and had 4 bodies of water that were classed as a river to cross – on logs and eventually the guide had to go and find a boat!

We filled our time with fabulous massages and trying different forms of transport. We



had been to Laos before so it was relaxed as we know how the system works and we got the fabulous food we expected. The people are so helpful and it feels “easy” and charming. One lady at a temple told us that she was pleased we had come to her country. Laos is changing as China has built roads and dams and is now mining here. This provides enforced opportunities. With the unsettled nature of the world it made me wonder if everybody were feeling the opportunity or would there eventually be civil unrest in this non-confrontational society!



Jenny met us after a week, without her luggage (still in Dubai). We have not holidayed together before but she seemed to ease into our “madder” ideas. Her second day and we caught 5 different types of bus to get us to an eco lodge – up a “main road” – that road was 10km and it took an hour through, mud and puddles that came up to the top of the wheels of the van! The first bus in the trip got a puncture, the middle one we ran to catch at the bus station and then it stopped around the corner as a girl on the bus had phoned her mates and they told us to wait as they had finished shopping and wanted that bus – 20 mins!!! Jenny’s compensation was elephants and a huge lizard in her room!



Jenny’s luggage met up with us to



fly off to Cambodia, a new country for us and a complete culture shock. Angkor Wat brings in the tourists and there were suddenly swarms of people, big cities and restaurants fighting for our business. We staying in a great hotel for 4 nights and enjoyed the reveal of the temples – there are just so many and all have different atmospheres and highlight. I will now be a heathen and say that it wins on being a “living” environment BUT it just did not wow me with that internal sensation that the Taj Mahal did!!!

Having travelled by local bus through Laos we had the revelation of our “flight” style bus down to Phnom Penh – allocated seats, internet, movie, no Laos music DVD (always the same DVD for 6 hours!!) – great time



to catch up with diary. Cambodia presented its differences during the drive, from being completely flat for 7 hours to houses being on higher stilts. Having just been to the two main tourist attractions I do not feel we got the real feel for Cambodia. There was more begging and more commercial tourism.



Phnom Penh is the other end from the glory of Angkor Wat – the trauma of Pol Pot, The Killing Fields and picking life back up after the slaughter of a nation. Jenny and I opted to mix it with the Royal Palace, while Derek was braver and went to S21- the detention centre (too raw for me).



This all happened in our lifetime, I actually remember bits – but not how the west really did not help the situation! The end of Cambodia brought with it more tenant problems, our New Zealand tenant stopped paying and looked like he might not move out L. Frantic e-mails and he went so we knew we had a house to come home to.

It was odd coming back to New Zealand – after our 3 weeks holidays we go back to the UK. We were met by Antoinette and Johan at the airport – 1am!!! They put us to bed in their house after we chatted to 3am. This appeared to sort out our jet lag. The first week was perfect spring sunshine and no wind. We had an extra day to unpack boxes, but we still took a week to get everything back in order. We are reminded how stunning New

Zealand are, how much people like to hug you when you get back to work and how much we both enjoyed our jobs here.

Two weeks back in New Zealand and this morning I lay in bed and appreciated that beauty again, like I do every day. It was the kingfisher this morning. We are both busy at work but it still feels fresh and exciting. We still feel like we have been away and forget how to do stuff – like how do we book holidays in this job. We have started to catch up with people but also find time to sit and watch the sunset from the deck. We have had to put the heating on from time to time and wear shorts at other times.

The final joy today (14/09/14) is finding out our tenants in Greenhill (main house in the UK) have moved out. I was worried that they were going to be difficult. Of course we now have quite a bit to sort out with the house.

We coming back confirmed as we want to maintain friendships and links, Next time we come back we want to be able to have those easy conversations of people who have known you for ever. So keep in touch and we will keep writing the missive.

Love Steph and Derek