

Dear all,

Happy New Year to you all, still feels like you cannot predict what type of year 2023 will be – more uncertainty. A friend said that she does not do New Year's resolutions but has a word for the year. For 2023 mine are “finding a new norm” and that is why you are getting Steph as the author for this New Zealand letter.



My father passed away on December 15th 2022. Much like my mother he kindly missed all Birthdays in the area and gave us a day to remember him on. We are so glad we went to spend time with him in June 2022 as from then he gradual lost his essence. The last few months were a really tough time for him and my step-mum Anne as she gradually had to become the carer. For Derek and I it raised decisions we had made long ago about moving to New Zealand and that funerals mean something very different in these times. We looked at flights back to France but there always seemed to be a reason to not go just yet. We always knew the French have cremations promptly and that we would not get back for the service, I had not thought that it might not be streamed.



So Derek and I lit all the fairy lights and candles and I read the service as it was happening in France. We talked about Dad and when Derek first met him. As I had the music from YouTube I am sure France was not having the adverts we got.

However much you know somebody is coming to the end of their life and that they will be better at peace, it does not change the impact at the end. We think about Dad often and a few tears most days and life goes on. I think when we next go to France there will be a whole new round of tears. Like all those who have passed before him they stay in our memories and the strangest things bring back intense emotions.

In early December we planned a party, it must be 5 years since our last December party. We did have a house warming when we moved in so it was not all new. We decorated the house and garage with Christmas decorations as we were not sure what the weather was



going to be like. We had friends staying and it was wonderful to have another foodie to enjoy the cooking with. It was an excellent way to catch up with some people who we had not seen since COVID and also our neighbours, who we do not often see and are very interesting people. Berna came for the first time and was such a great story teller. She has lived next door for 40 years – so saw our house being built. She in fact planted our lemon tree, before the boundary line and later fence went up – with the tree being in our garden!!!!

We also caught up on a bit of culture with half empty audiences, except for the panto. We went to our local car museum to see the end of year show for the New Zealand Dance School. It was a fascinating venue, we have not been before. It was a real mix on ballet and modern dance and a mix of great to



amazing skill levels. Then we were at modern dance ‘Venus Rising’ in Wellington. A COVID delayed performance which was magical. Our Dame for the Wellington panto retired last year so we wanted to see what the new one was like. In the end we got to see the retired one as the new one had COVID – and the show shut for a week the night after due to COVID. Being a sell out I am not sure if they extended the production to enable everybody to see it. In Manchester we used to get tickets to take patients to see the dress rehearsal of the panto and the retired Dame standing in was all those additional laughs that arise. He did really well and then half way through came out with his ‘Book of Spells’ – with his lines in it. We are obvious well settled as we now get all the jokes.



We were privileged to join Antoinette and Johan as they became New Zealand Citizens. Our third ceremony, each one in a different region – Wellington, our own in Lower Hutt and this time in Kapiti.

The food was far superior at Kapiti, all had the very positive message that we New Zealand are honored that we have chosen to become Citizens.

On Christmas Eve we went to pick up Pip and James from the airport – you get to sit by the beach watching the planes landing, or in their case nearly landing and taking off again. They made it second time down, it was not even that windy to make it a difficult landing – says the none-



pilot!!! I trained with Pip and knew James from then too. Pip is in a long waited for lecture tour of Australia and New Zealand, all very new and different them. So we had the fairy lights all

around the bed and asked if they had any traditions they would like to follow. So Derek and I have a new role of Santa and Elf and had to go and make a little boy “so excited he



looked like he was going to wet himself” (Derek’s description). I think we enjoy the “ho ho hoing” as much as he does. On our return James (Swedish

stock) had prepared pickled herring and taught use all about Skalling with Aquavit. If somebody looks you in the eye and raises their glass and “skals” you then you have to look them in the eye and join them for a drink. James is obviously a pro at this and Derek had just taken a bite of Camembert and found himself chasing it with the aniseed shot.

We had a fabulous 6 days with Pip and James. After much rain they brought the sun so we could spend most of the time outside. We introduced them to some of our favourite things – cycling to the cinema, swimming in the sea and pass the parcel on Christmas Day. We even did a mini guided tour of Wellington. So brill to



spend longer with people, you are all very welcome and can ask Pip and James for a review??? We will soon have better facilities as we have the plans in for a



company to put us a second bathroom in – they start in March – all we have to do is paint.

The bathroom will be such a different experience as

straight after Pip and James left we started taking out the kitchen and putting the new one in. BEFORE PICTURE



Looking at receipts we bought the solid units in May 2022 and they have been in the garage since then. We have been pretty full on with

the kitchen for 2 weeks – we have enjoyed it and broken the back of it before we go back to work tomorrow

(16/1/2023). Loads of little jobs still to get it near

finished. NOW PICTURE

We have a public holiday next weekend so I think we will be ready for the electrician and



granite work surface people to come in. The last bit gets messy as we need to take the ceiling down and the Gib off the wall behind the units. The Gib got wet some time ago – before we brought the house. We knew it was moldy and will be very glad to get rid of it. So far we have not found any nasty things – when we took out the unit the walls were all good and the just had to go to the recycling centre and buy some tiles for where they had not put them under units. It looks fabulous and is even more frustrating – now we have a brand new oven in the kitchen and not the garage but it still does not have power. Thankfully the layout of the kitchen has meant we have had a functioning kitchen through the whole process. I will put an agendum in here as 27/1/2023 we got the electrician in and lost the kitchen for a weekend—well the oven. We had some great luck with taking the ceiling down as there was no muck or mouse poo.



We did have some breaks during the kitchen. Monica came up and we had a cycle. We had to go into Wellington to buy a sink – the shop would have taken 10 days to move it from

one shop to another!!! Having had a successful shopping

trip I suggested that since we were now near the new IMAX cinema we should just stay out and eat dinner and watch Avatar in high frame rate and 3D. What an amazing experience, not a great film but I have never seen anything quite like that. The only other IMAX in New Zealand is Auckland so it suddenly feels like Wellington has grown up and has something very new. We love the cinema so we will be supporting the IMAX. They have quite a large arcade section with two Karaoke booths, something else new to us. We did not try them but this Friday we tried out local RSA club (think British Legion) and they also had Karaoke – again not tired. The food was good and the view was fantastic, the locals friendly.



The club, Vista, was our planning meeting – making decisions for 2023. This now means we cannot send the letter for another week. Derek needs to talk to work about retiring at the end of April as he will then

invite people to his 60th Birthday Party/Retirement Do on 15th April 2023 at our house (keep the date free). We were quite amazed that it did not get discussed at our December party as half the people knew we had been looking into it, people he work with had no idea. I will keep on working – just when I want to. We will come back to Europe/UK for 3 months – June to August 2023. We are planning to

change how we travel – staying in each place for a week or more - not one or two nights. We do not have many things fixed yet but there are things in the pipeline. So as I said at the start 2023 “finding a new norm”.

We are looking forward to 2023, there are lots to do. At this point we seem to have been anticipating the new kitchen and bathroom for over 6 months and by Easter they should be a reality. Then we have the last external wall to paint – one of our neighbours told us of a way to do it to the same quality but potentially 5 times faster!!! So we may have it done before we travel, but it does not matter if not.

Hope you all have things to look forward to in 2023. Death definitely reminds you to carpe diem – Seize the day, enjoy every single day – find the joy in it, revel in the small details.

Lots of love Steph and Derek xxx