

STEPH March 2025 The times they are a-changing

Hi all,

Steph here, nearly retired so time to be pulling my weight and taking a turn to write the letter. Have just been to A Complete Unknown, which I enjoyed more than I thought I would (Derek being the Bob Dylan fan not me) it did make me think very much that our Time they are a-changing. As I transition to retirement I also have new perspectives on life. So all that makes a great time to write.

When we went to Australia and Caz came over it really was me making the last step towards retirement. It was the first holiday when I did not get texts and phone calls about clients. I did continue supervising my 7 occupational therapists but that is one conversation with each a month, so fits around travel.

When we got back from Australia it really did change Derek's life as well as mine. He is used to me working 2 days a week, when he gets to write code. Now we have to think when those days might be, perhaps when I am lost in gardening or sewing. Derek and I started talking retirement in our 40's; when did we want to retire? how much money would we need and? what did we want to do? Now we get asked what will we do with our time and like so many retirees we say we do not know when we found time to work. The wish list of projects and new hobbies

has not even been touched.

We started 2025 with strong reminders to get on with life. A friend's father dies unexpectedly, not much older than Derek. Another friend did not die as they got the stent in time. So I suspect I have 3 priorities. Travel, give time and skill to friends who are working and home make. OK I will add a 4<sup>th</sup> – stay fit and healthy. So those are the things that have shaped the start to the year.

We had decided that in January we would go to the South Island to have our first official house sitting engagement. So over Christmas I looked at the site and offered to sit. We have learnt sooooo much. I have started the letter in the Timaru house sit, easy to book so we could then look at options before this 10 day sit. I replied to 9 adverts and all of them got back to me to tell me they had already got a house sitter. Not sure if this is because we only have one reference on the website OR what!!! In the end we could flex our plans to support the friend who's father died and cycle around and stay with Mushroom – an adorable cat. Destiny told us what was needed. It does mean that the stand alone Timaru house sit was more expensive as we paid for the ferry but we love visits to the South Island and we also





get to catch up with Liz and Andrew. So our first house sit was for a couple called Bronwyn and Brian (these are also the names of my parents) and their two small dogs Lily and Rosie. The 3 bed house was lovely and had a sort of sea view, yes we could see the sea but also the container port – not terribly charming. Lily was old and self container, Rosie was 18 months old and would be happy for ever if you kept throwing the ball down the

garden. We had packed everything for this 10 day stay, bikes, the gym, bread maker and sewing machine. We had a delightful stay and planned around the restriction of only being able to leave the house for 4 hours at a time as Rosie



stayed in a crate if we were out. If she came with us she had very strong views about how far we should walk. Rosie found some shade and lay down when she had enough – about 7km. She was small enough to carry to a coffee stop and was happy to walk home after an appropriate rest.

Timaru was also a bit colder



than home, I even need long trousers and definitely a coat. There were lots of short flat walks and one days great cycling. The art gallery was amazing, well not as good as MONA (see last letter). Andrew and Liz came down and stayed locally in their camper van. We asked for permission for them to come around for dinner and had a wonderful evening talking about what you gain from house sitting versus camper van. We loved having all the space and a full kitchen, we even had fresh veggie from the garden. But it is less spontaneous and there are more restrictions. We will do it again, perhaps when we go to Australia and in Japan where it is mainly cats.



The rhythm then started; home for a couple of days and then off again. Time to tidy and water the garden and do the washing. I do love my garden. Interesting when we were looking to buy a house a large garden was not on the essentials list. Our garden is not huge but I do enjoy it. I see it as part of the house, I am a home maker and gardening is a bit like cleaning. This year I planted one tomato plant and it has become a triffid. We also went to the local open gardens. The weather was



stunning and we cycled between venues. It was amazing to learn what grows locally and I took photos of lots of plants I want. We also got ideas about getting rid of some of the grass as it just dies in our dry summers and making a flower bed. From our house in Timaru we learnt that we want to make a lounge area outside. Some people must spend all their time in their garden and some were a bit of a cheat as it was house builder wanting to show you what you got in your new build house and garden.



First stop Napier to see Fleur and Stephen and go to the Art Deco festival. We had been once before in 2013 and loved it. Last time

we did not book soon enough so only went to few events. This time we were organised and booked a range of 6



events and some free things too. The festival has had a tough time, not running during COVID and then it was all organised and three days before the 4 day festival Napier had horrendous floods. It ran last year and is back to full force this year. It is one joyful round of dress up, promenade, dance and eat. Somebody Stephen works with has a whole wardrobe of clothes and was happy to lend out items. One day I had a brunch, afternoon steam train and evening dinner dance outfit change. We had an energetic hour, that went on an extra half hour, to learn how to Charleston – without the swivel. Then the events we went to did not play a Charleston!!!



Then home and another hand of destiny. Since we can decorate we offered to help friends paint their house in Wellington ready for sale. This meant our house would be empty so Johan and Antoinette could stay there when their son, wife and 2 year old came over from Holland for 3



weeks. They would not all have to fit into one house and try and work with an active 2 year old. Johan's son and wife want to see if they would like to move to New Zealand.



As I type we are in the middle of this stage. Derek and I are enjoying decorating, the house is empty so it makes it easy and you feel like you are making progress every day we paint. I cannot wait to see how the estate agent stages

the house. The kitchen is being replaced so we are glamping. Thankfully a Murphy bed (one that drops down out of a wardrobe) means a proper bed. I had cooked lots of meals for the freezer and Johan and Antoinette have lent us their very South African portable fridge freezer.

Derek and I are enjoying being city kids. We walked into the Botanical Gardens where there was a Chinese Lantern Festival







and have plans to visit a historic building, the theatre and shops that are only in the big city. Many people volunteer and I really enjoy helping out friends who are working as a volunteer. Time can be so precious and we have that time. This was brought home to



me when I had to take the car into the garage – if I was working it would be such a pain and frustrating to find the time – and now it is not.

So we are learning lots in 2 month. When we are away from home it changes our

routine, in a good way. I think we read more and enjoy different walks and cycles. Some things we manage to keep as routine, doing the gym and making our own bread. What does not change is that computer admin still has to be done – Derek has stayed focused on sorting out the tax.



Steph demands a celebration when that is actually done. We get one step forward but not to the end – soon, very soon! Derek has taken on all those emails and sorting while I have closed down being an occupational therapist. Out of 7 occupational therapists I supervise 5 have now got a new supervisor. In truth it is not my role to find them new supervisors but I can send one email in place of 7 people all having to send their own. By the end of March I will be fully retired.



And the travel plans continue. We are coming to UK/Europe for your summer. This has waited until Derek had his cataract operation – 10<sup>th</sup> March. All

went well. We need to confirm he has no issues afterwards as he is a little complex. So the plan is 4ish months. We hope to see lots of people and do a little travelling.

The we are going off to Australia for 5 or 6 weeks over Christmas – around the cricket and friends living in Brisbane.

At Christmas 2025 I mentioned to Derek that this year we would be out of the house for about 7 months!!! No wonder household jobs will have to wait. We have the rest of very exciting lives so no rush.