



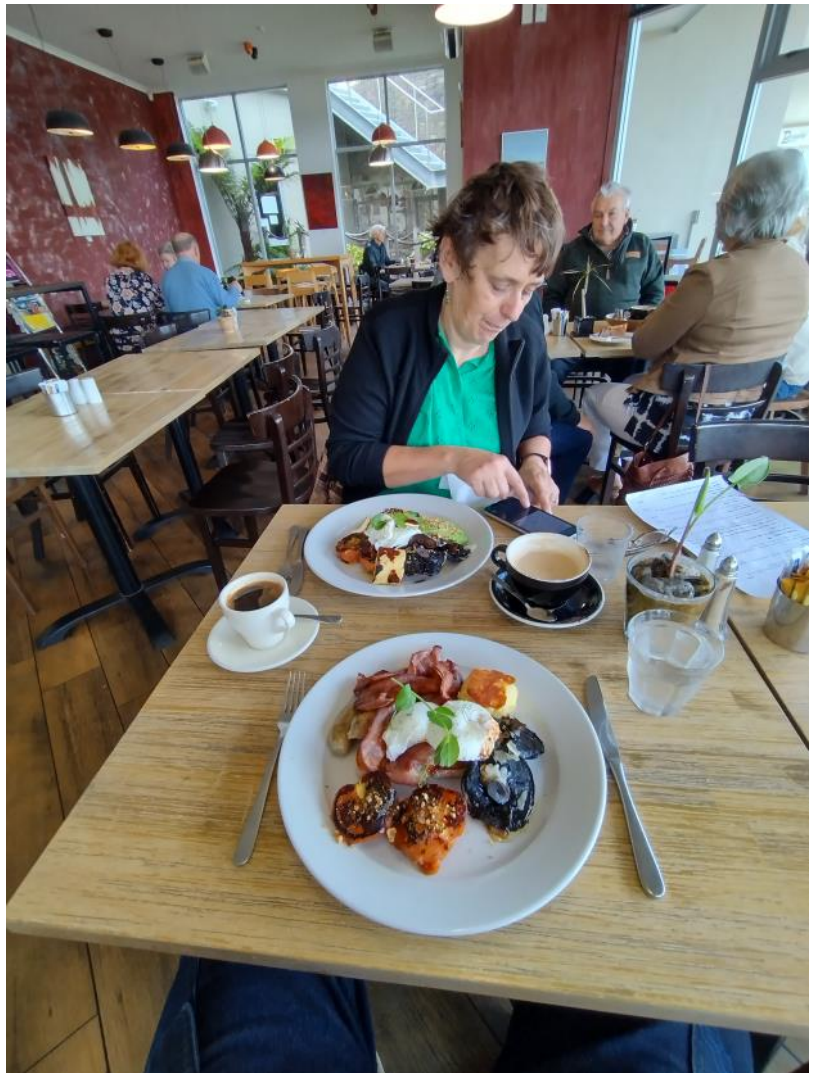
Steph tells me that gloating is not an attractive trait. I do try and remember this but I have to admit that sometimes I get carried away and forget, sorry. I think last time I wrote we had just returned from a long visit to Europe as the first thing after retiring so I didn't really know how retirement was going to sit with me. Well I have to say it is fantastic, I love it so far. In fact I have to remember not to go on about it to everyone, and especially Steph who is still working. It is tricky to describe the changes without it sounding like gloating, but lets see how we go.

While we were travelling back, I had time to think and I wanted to have some structure to retirement, I tentatively suggested that we could think about an "agile" approach. Agile is a mechanism that I used working in software development teams, though it is used in lots of industries, and it means we work out what our long term goal and mission is and then plan two week chunks or sprints to get there. We don't decide what the next two weeks will look

like until we have completed the current two weeks, we react to how a sprint has gone in a retrospective and then plan the next sprint based on what we learnt, hence agile.

Typically we do our sprint retrospective and planning in bed with a cup of tea on a Monday morning, just to be clear this is not how sprint planning went when I

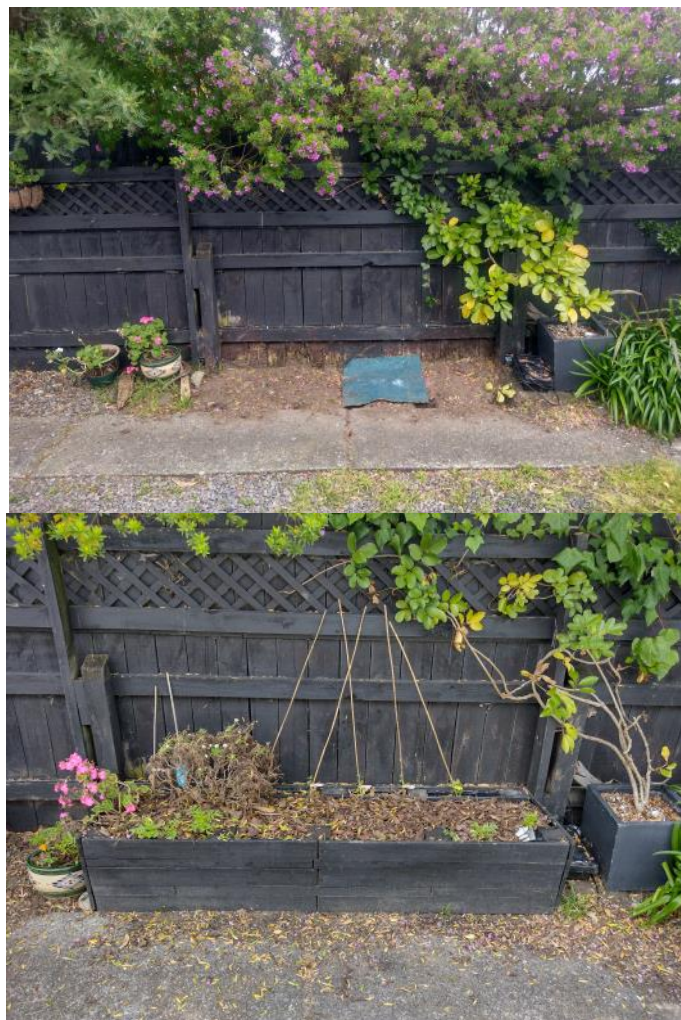
was working. Though sometimes we actually get dressed and walk down the beach and have a big breakfast in a local café and plan there. I wanted to do this so I had some structure, but it also gives me a sense of working in a team as Steph and I decide together what we want to do and then work together to try and achieve it. Like I said Steph has not retired she works Wednesday's and most of Thursday which means we are planning for the other days. I carry on working on my own software projects on Wednesday and Thursday, sort of an inverted weekend we work two days and the rest of the week feels like a giant weekend. I have become the stereotype in that I struggle





to remember what day it is and also cannot believe I managed to fit work into my week.

The first big project we wanted to make progress on was building raised beds. When we bought the house there was a raised bed against the house, something the building inspector was less than enthusiastic about, so a couple of years ago we dug out the bed, about 4 metres by 2 metres and 15 cm deep. It didn't sound like much to me but it was, it really was. We knew we wanted raised beds, we are so close to the beach that the soil is basically sand, great for drainage but not so good for most plants. We moved the big mound of soil down the garden and we would work out the details later, well now is later. We





looked at it and of course we needed the soil in a different place from where we guessed two years ago, in fact we needed to move the soil out of the way and build the raised bed and then move the soil back into the new bed and then top it off with some delivered topsoil and fertilizer.

We drove around the surrounding businesses looking for unused pallets, we did check we could have them, we didn't just steal. Then we could pry-bar them apart and cut them up to reassemble them as raised beds. We even spotted old tires that were going to be dumped that we could zip-lock together even quicker. I have to say I hadn't envisaged gar-

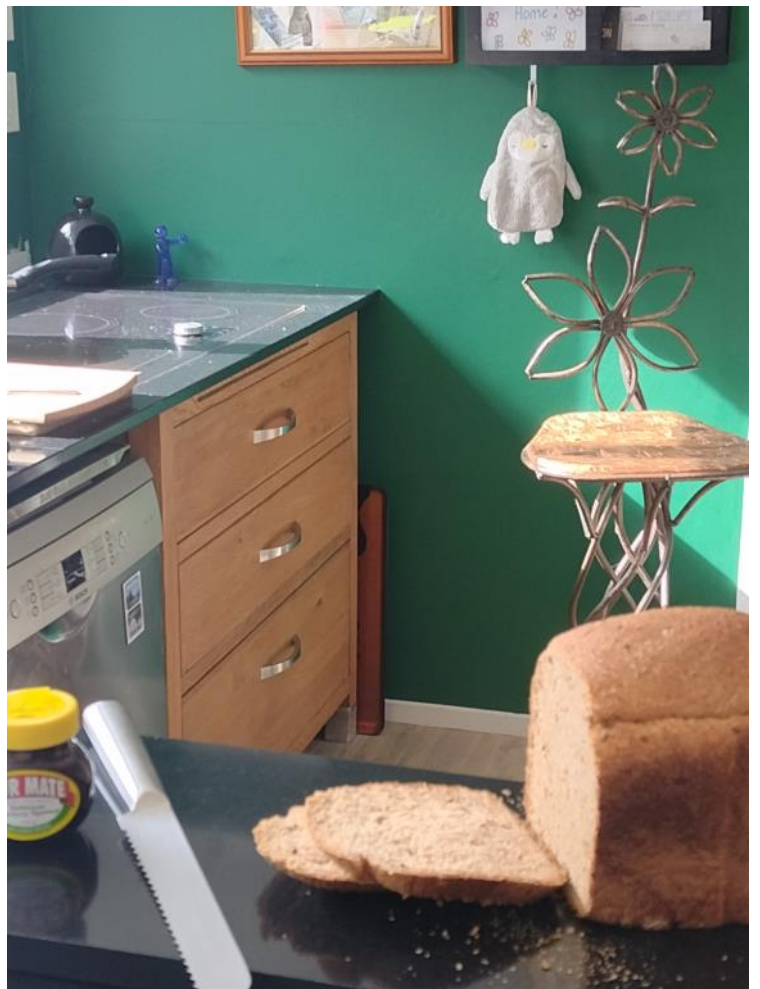
dening involving quite so many power tools. After building the first two beds we were walking locally and spotted a large pile of used car tires, it turns out that these were also available for free and were much quicker to zip-lock into a raised bed than using pallets. It has taken a good few sprints but the bed is ready and planted and the old mound of soil is almost gone, almost.

There were some background things I wanted to make a part of how we live. We wanted to cycle down the river to





the local cinema. It's a great thing to do, we get exercise and can take advantage of cheap tickets for seniors on a Tuesday. It is a wonderful way to see the seasons change. The cinema is small, only two screens and we have to carefully plan what we see as we pretty much see everything they put on. We have seen everything from lots of funny little French films to Barbie (brilliant) and Oppenheim (also pretty good). We don't want to cycle in the dark so we need the 10am, noon or 2pm showing so sometimes we do end up waiting for the cinema to open so we can get in, I suppose it is better than waiting for







the pub to open.

When we were in the UK I noticed that James made loaves of bread every couple of days, I wanted to try and get into this rhythm so I started practicing, and I think over the last couple of months I am now at a place where I can bake batches of 10 rolls twice a week and also use the bread machine to produce a loaf overnight, it does mean that we are woken up by the smell of bread every couple of days. The big breakthrough with the bread rolls was finding a good way of proving the



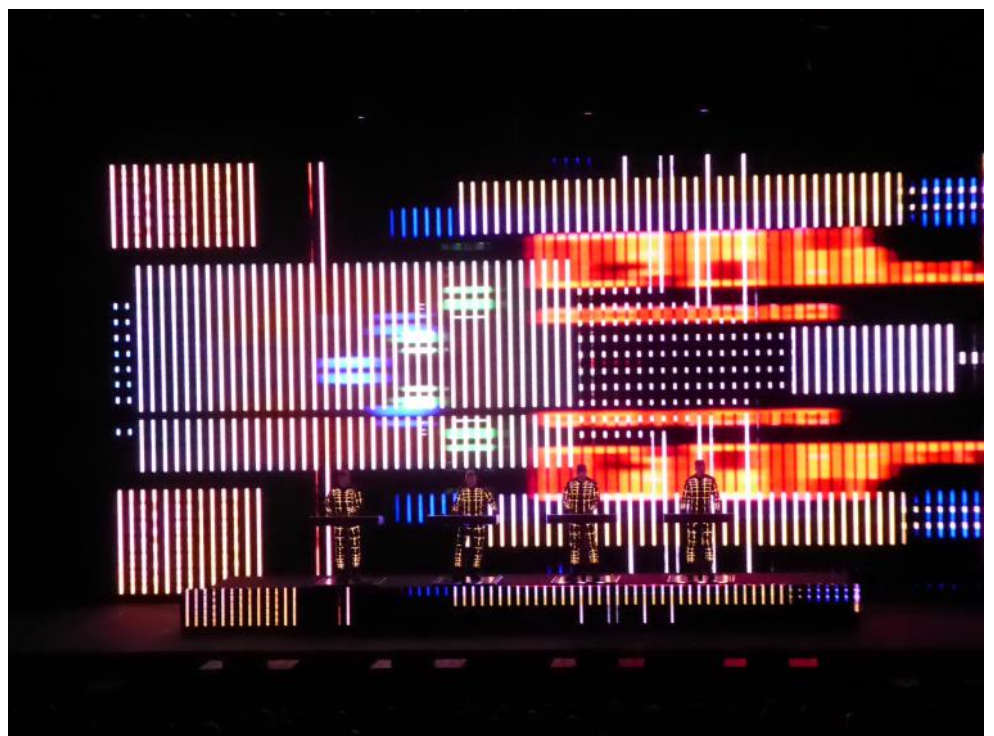
dough, it turns out that the hifi amp I bought last year runs quite hot and that the cupboard that it sits in is kept at between 30C and 35C, perfect for proving



bread. As a side-line I also had a go at making crumpets and after some trial and error (it turns out that chocolate crumpets need more work) I think I have got the hang of them.

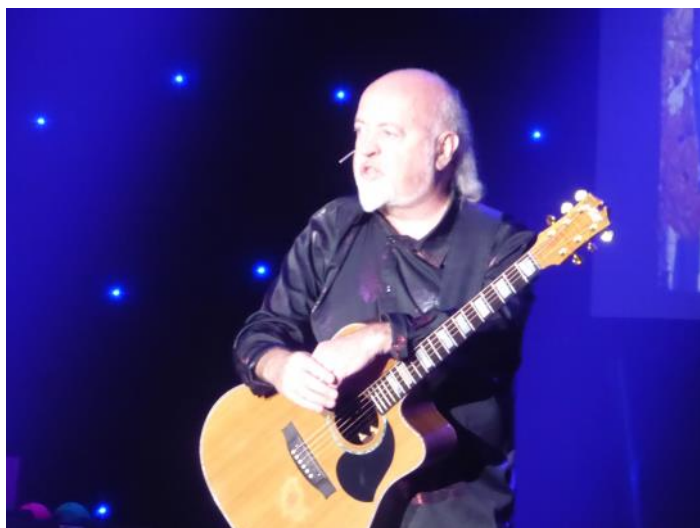
The time since retiring has been quite strange. We were in Europe for three months and it was great to be able to take time to be with people, only when we

got back did I realize that we spent the whole three months with only a handful of days on our own. Then when we got back we spent two months just together not really seeing anyone else. Then in November we suddenly had lots of social contact and culture. We had visitors and were away for weekends and we had tickets to events. Very strange, in other years all these three phas-





es would have been happening all year long but for some reason this year is very compartmentalized. We had tickets for Dara O'Briain, Bill Bailey and Kraftwerk all in one week. In fact Kraftwerk and Bill Bailey



were on consecutive nights at opposite ends of the country. Its natural to compare them and try to rank them but actually they were three very different shows, I enjoyed them all. Dara was certainly a very polished and practiced performance whereas Bill did seem to loose his thread at times though his musical instruments like the light harp and drum balls where something to behold. Bizzarely both made jokes involving Svalbard, what are the chances.

Kraftwerk had a lot less jokes but oh my they were loud.

We did take time to go on a road trip to see people and also as we slid towards the advent tree Steph took me to a play about gingerbread men twins, it was fantastically bizarre, I think we were the only ones in the audience who were not either under 5 or related to the cast.







So now we find ourselves in the last sprint before Christmas. We have been so focused on what we were trying to achieve that we completely missed the deadline for posting back to the UK, apologies if your card arrives in February, or not at all. We are thinking of you.

I am typing this last bit in a holiday Yurt, a pre-Christmas weekend break, in the blinding sunshine looking out onto the volcano Mount Ruapehu snow and ski fields trying to think about how my life has changed this year. I guess that is what I have found so far is that I have discovered so much freedom and







time and I really love it, if I get side-tracked into doing something that I enjoy, that's fine, there is always tomorrow. Not gloating honest, just trying to appreciate how blessed and lucky I am.

