

It does seem very odd to be writing this, well let me explain. We came out to New Zealand ten years ago and when we were planning the move I thought about how we were going to try and keep contact with friends across the world. I didn't really know how it was going to work, the 21st century offers a multitude of options, social media, email, blogs, even snail mail I thought I would pretty much try them all and just see what sticks. I also wanted to keep in contact with Mum, we were used to seeing her and talking to her every week so this move was going to change that.

In amongst trying my options for communication I also tried to write to Mum every couple of months, by including pictures and my thoughts it gave her a flavour of what was happening in our lives, I also found it quite beneficial to reflect on what was happening. As these letters to Mum evolved I then started to send them out in email to anyone who was interested and as far as I can tell from the feedback I got they seemed to be the most reliable mechanism for keeping contact with everyone, not just Mum. People seemed to like the photos and



clear large text, which I did for the benefit of Mum's ageing eyesight.

And now for the odd bit. Mum died a few weeks ago, so she will not get to see this. I guess I will still continue to write it and hopefully people will still want to read it.

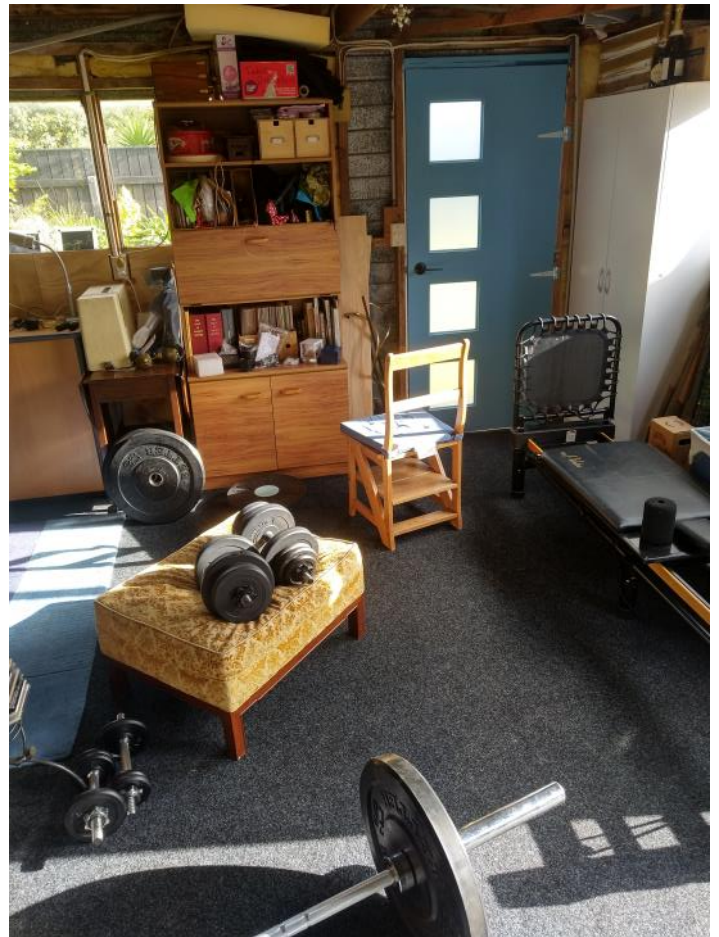
It is quite strange to try to work out my feeling about Mum dying. I do miss being able to talk to her and show her what we have been doing, but on the other hand she was 94 and her body and mind were both failing her and as she herself said she was ready to go. She got to stay and indeed die in her own home, something she wanted. She enjoyed living there even as she declined and it was only really the last year or so that dementia really started to cloud into her head as she slipped away from us.

Its been interesting to watch her grow old, I guess that's all part of being a parent is teaching your offspring. I have learnt lots about growing old by watching Mum go before me. It's not an easy process but its one we are all going to have to get the hang of, if we are lucky, so it's probably worth some thought.

For example I have now started doing strengthening exercises with weights three times a week to strengthen my knees and shoulders. I know that if I don't do this they will get weaker and I am going to need them in the years to come. The new house has helped in this regard; we have a large insulated and carpeted garage where I can lay

out my weights. It does seem to be thing over here to have well-appointed garages almost using them as an additional room, which is what we intend to do.

We have started to tackle the list of things we want to get done in the new house, one of the first being to take advantage of the garage. We have changed the main roller door so its now powered and remote controlled. Now all we need to do is do the same to the gate and Steph will be able to get from the street to the garage without getting wet. The other door in the garage didn't work, we knew this when we bought the house so it wasn't a surprise. When we looked at the door it needed a complete replacement, the door itself was rot-



ten, the hinges and lock broken and it had been nailed shut. We got a brand new shinny door, painted it and hung it, redis-covering all Steph's power tools as we went.



We felt a deep sense of achievement for being able to work out how to do this, working together as a team. I guess a proper joiner would have done it in far less time than we took but this was something we have produced, and I cannot help but smile every time I go through the door to do my exercises.

Today is an exciting day as another item is being checked off the list. The house was built in the 1970's when it was acceptable to have exactly one power point in each room. Today Andre the electrician is here and he is installing an additional 50 plug points in the house – we should be able to remove soooo many plug blocks and actually be able to reach power points when we need to.

We have started to get out and have our lives back again, now we are not either looking for a house or moving house. Steph has even got me to volunteer where she works. Its not the most complicated job in the world,

pushing wheelchairs, but once again there are many benefits. I guess the most immediate being that Steph's residents get to go to the Food Show or out to the theatre to see the Jersey Boys and that could not



happen if Steph doesn't have enough people to help out. Like I said its not the complicated job (but why are the breaks on wheelchairs in different places on every wheelchair) but its such a complete departure from my regular working environment. All the people I work with are high functioning and my interactions with them are all well-defined. In fact we define our interactions specifically when we have a team kick-off. In contrast when I volunteer there are a wide variety of people and disabilities and anything can happen, it's a bit scary but it also stretches me in a good way.

We do have longer term ambitions with the house, we want to get it double glazed and install a wood burner, hopefully I'll be able to share the progress as we go even if Mum is not there to see it.

Steph here.

The Food Show was fab, quieter than usual as we had two this year due to COVID 19!!!! Some stalls did not come this time. The new product on the block was a bag of candy floss – same size as a bag of crisps. Healthy – as it is made of brown sugar!!! Peanut butter was terrible and my favourite was watermelon.

Jersey Boys was very skilled show, perhaps not our first choice but enjoyable. For me it was a quick learning curve. The Opera House has 8 wheelchair seats – none next to each other!!! So I planned to transfer one of the residents into a chair next to the wheelchair space BUT Ticketmaster does not know the theatre so these seats were not next to each other. In the end no transfers were done as the wheelchairs could sit next to each other – the issue one was a bit near the end of a row, so ‘would block it’. I explained me transferring somebody into that last seat on row would block it more than me sitting in that seat next to the extra wheelchair!!! Gosh if we want to go to a show as a group we are stuffed!!!!

Back to the show, we know the Four Seasons songs when we heard them but were not totally invested in them. The actors have amazing voices and sang pretty much all the time for 2.5 hours. Being a matinee they were just about to do it all again, what does that do to your voice. They had so many different jackets to change into and then did a bit where they projected themselves as if doing a TV per-

formance – of course in the time in black and white. The different jackets were lost!!!

Really made me think about ‘boy bands’ – they do this synchronised



dancing – but so did the groups back in the 60’s. They were so polished. I must look at you-tube and see if the original group walks in such a camp manor during ‘Walk like a man’. We did do lots of woo ooh ooh woos – only aloud at the end when we were all allowed to join in.

Due to our great Queen’s birthday we have a long weekend this weekend. Two more days and lots of pottering. Summer clothes to go away and winter ones out. A bit of gardening and making a big bowl of yummy soup.

I hope you are enjoying the improving weather and summer comes to you. Stay well and lets hope you ease out of COVID without too many set backs. As a front line medical worker I have just had both my jabs. No dates for Derek yet.

Lots of love

Steph xx