

At the end of the previous letter we were left on as much of a cliff-hanger as ever seems to happen in these letters. We had spent some time over the last year and more especially at Christmas weighing up the option of retirement. In the end we decided that we would do it - or at least see if we could afford it.

I am typing this on my phone in the cafe at work during a break from Quarterly Planning. Its quite strange to be planning for three months when I will not be here after the beginning of May. I find myself looking around and trying to soak up the environment and to remember the cadence of this working life. But once again I am getting ahead of myself. When we got back to work after Christmas, in late January, its the big summer holiday here so it can take a while before the majority of the team make it back. We went for a coffee together and we were discussing our resolutions for the year, Meg said she didn't do resolutions but rather had a

word for the year - and this year's was "evolution", Tats' was "study" so I said mine as "retirement".

That got everyone's attention. I guess Steph and



I had been discussing it for so long I could not believe they didn't know and it was a surprise to them. In New Zealand people retire at 65 and it seems rare for people to retire early. In fact



it is often much later, apparently 25% of people work on after 65. Even then they seemed to assume that retiring this year meant December, they have slowly got the idea that it will be May. It was due to be April, near my birthday but we decided we would have a week's holiday on the south island so I pushed the date back by a week to May 4th. Star Wars day.

Now I do find myself thinking how much of a change this will be for my lifestyle. As I said I find myself looking



around and even taking the occasional photo. I have to say its a mixed bag, I will not miss the 6am alarm in the dark, long and involved meetings trying to

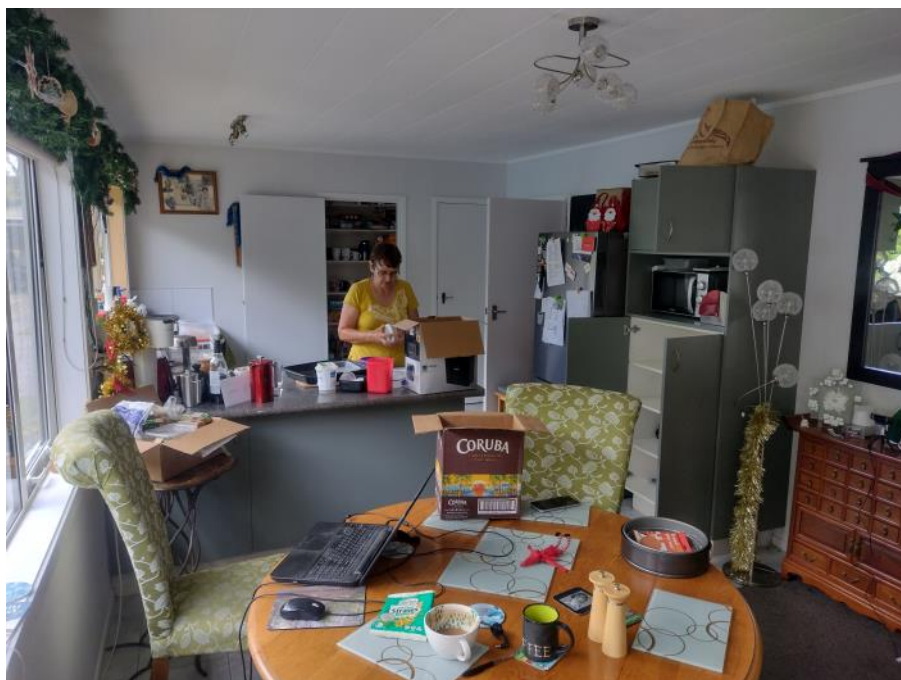
pin down silly and conflicting requirements are also things I can do without. I guess it's the bigger stuff that will have the biggest impact like actually living on a budget, I have been so lucky that my budget while I worked could be flexible but that will need to change. There is also identity, I guess along with most of my contemporaries have defined myself by what I do, so who am I when I no longer work? Sorry, that sounds very melodramatic, I guess I don't think that suddenly my life will have no meaning, it's just that I will need to have different goals and objectives. Maybe I will define myself with those.

One thing I do know, there will be plenty to do, I will not be getting bored. We have started a list and it's getting longer all the time, also given that we are planning to go to Europe for three months we will not really start on it until the south hemisphere spring.

Looking at the end of the previous installment, Steph got the fun job of showing how we started fitting the new kitchen. In the first couple of weeks we made superficially fast progress. We had two weeks off so we could work full time and also taking out the old units and installing new prebuild units meant things looked to be progressing along. The floor looked, and felt fantastic, and it really was quick to lay. Then things started to slow down, for start we had to go back to work and also we started to do more behind the scenes work that didn't make for great photos. For instance we had to pull the units out and rip

the plasterboard off and install new insulation and a 3 meter run of brand new board and as we wanted the work surfaces higher we needed to make new feet for every unit and install them with leveling feet. That was a good idea, when it was all installed the units looked impossibly high to me, I thought "Oh my god, when have we done" but after cooking one meal I was converted, at last working on a surface that is a much better height for me was wonderful.

The next stage was



sorting out the electrics for the new appliances. Well it needed a new circuit from the switchboard so we got an electrician to do that. He arrived and promptly said the ceiling needs to come down. So we hastily got the platform out and pulled down the old tiles. We did it carefully because they are hard to get and apparently people doing renovations will pay \$10 a tile for them. This of course left us with no ceiling so we asked a builder if he could do it, sure he said, but it would be \$4,000 and he could not do it before April. So after talking to people and lots of time on YouTube we decided to have a go ourselves, I mean what could go wrong. We hired a plasterboard lifter, who knew they existed, for a weekend when the tradies didn't need it and we were off. Actually it as hard work and took the whole weekend but we managed to get the whole ceiling up, I think it looks wonderful but apparently my eyesight is poor.

That has been the pattern; we work through the week and then at the week-ends continue with fitting out the kitchen. Slowly it has taken shape and I'd say we now have a feature complete kitchen, but we still need to make some



more shelves, paint and wallpaper it.

We finally worked out that we would not get a break from the kitchen unless we went away. Our first break was to go "over the hill" to the Wairarapa and visit the black sands and lighthouse of Cape Palasier. There were four of us in an AirBnB is was such a lovely break even if the weather wasn't great. We walked along the beach, read our books and played board games and did not lift a power tool.

Our other weekend was a break in the sense of doing a different task. We headed up to see friends in Napier, Steph had promised to make curtains for them. They wanted large custom curtains - which apparently cost a fortune. It was good and fun to see the new house and to just have a chatty but productive weekend. Steph was in charge and we were her helpers pinning and ironing while Steph did the skilled sewing.

In the end I think I understand why curtains cost so much, its not just the fabric but also the sheer amount of labour. They



did look rather good, we will need another trip to do the smaller curtains. We even managed to make time to go and see England get beaten by the kiwis at the Basin Reserve.



While we were not away, we carried on with the kitchen, starting in March we did have some variety, the new bathroom renovation started. Now we had decided that we were not up to digging up the concrete plinth under the house and installing new drains for the bath and toilet, so we decided that we would employ builders and plumbers for that, and I was planning to enjoy watching them work. However there was still lots of moving stuff around for them and also to keep costs down, we were the paining crew. So the walls were ripped down and rebuilt and the plasterboard installed, it was interesting to compare our work in the kitchen with theirs. We did what the manufacturers said and used loads of screws, they used a lot less screws. There were so many tradies and they were so fast. After that we had 3 days to seal the plasterboard and then

undercoat and top-coat it. Our work seemed to pass muster as the tiler has now taken over and who knows by the end of the week we might actually have a bath.



And now the bath is complete and christened. It was so worth it to wallow in a nice deep bath and listen to podcasts while



looking down the garden. Also the kitchen has reached a state when we feel there is nothing urgent. The lighting and worktops have all been installed.

I am having a birthday party, Steph is calling it the nearly party, I will nearly be 60 (its a couple of days before my actual birthday), the house is nearly finished and I will nearly be retired. It does seem slightly surreal - all of it.

Also, just because of how it worked out we are off to the South Island for a week with Liz and Andrew, after all that DIY I think we need to chill, read books, walk on the beach and cycle before I do my last couple of weeks at work and try and get the house tidied up before we set off for a long summer break in Europe. Hopefully we can catch up with friends and family, we arrive in the UK at the beginning of June and leave at the beginning of September.

People often says it's a small world, now we have booked our flights we learn that one of my team members will be at Wellington airport for her flight at exactly the same time and also that Caroline, Steph's sister, will be back from her holiday and she lands in Manchester 15 minutes after we do.

