



Wow – Easter already, I only just turned around and it was Christmas. I guess that's how time goes. I sometimes sit down to write and think, well nothing has happened; I'll not have anything to say. My pattern is that I find out where I got up to last time and then flick through my photos to try and remind myself of what has happened. Well I was completely wrong – lots has happened since Christmas both for us here in our tiny corner of the Kapiti coast enjoying summer by the Tasman sea and the rest of the world as it wakes from its slumber of COVID and restarts life both peaceful and warlike.

Pretty much as soon as we went back into the office after Christmas Omicron arrived. We always knew that at some point having New Zealand COVID free and it endemic in the rest of the world was not really sustainable, at some point we were going to have to let it in, having most of the population vaccinated and it being the height of summer when omicron started to surface I think our government thought that there would never be a better time to do it so we relaxed the border control and allowed it in. Its still a shock, we had around 50 deaths to COVID in the previous

two years and all of sudden we had between 10 and 20 people a day dying. I know these numbers are miniscule compared to the hundreds of thousands dead in



the UK and I know it must happen but its still a shock. I guess its fine as long as you aren't one of the 10 or 20 people concerned.

We moved to a traffic light system designed to slow the spread, the idea being that our hospitals would be able to cope. It does seem to have worked, our numbers are falling now as we move into Autumn. The bank was super cautious, I guess that's what banks are like, and we were not allowed into the office while we were at red, which has meant the last time I was in the office was one day this year.

In fact until this month the last time I was in Wellington was to listen to some amplifiers in January. I had noticed a crackle in one of the speakers over Christmas and thought that new speakers were needed. Some experimentation later I discovered it was actually the amplifier. When I took it out to look at it some of the connections fell inside

the case, the amp was literally falling apart. I only bought it a while ago – though now I think about it was probably 30 years ago. I was worried, what with music streaming and smart speakers and sound bars did people actually buy two channel analog sound systems any more. Well I need not have worried, not only do they exist but they are still using the same techniques and they still work. I phoned up “The Real Music Company” in Wellington and they said they could get all the amps I was interested in, they were right at the bottom of the price bands that they carried but he was sure I would find something I liked. I did pretty much know what was coming and that it was going to be expensive but if its only every couple of decades why not treat myself. We arrived with my speakers and some CDs and he said that just before we listened to the amps I wanted to hear he just happened to have an amp setup – that cost roughly double the amps on my list. Well we listened to Cheryl Crow and Beethoven,





the same track over and over on each amp. Obviously the first, most expensive amp was the one that sounded the best, I did wonder if I was just trying to convince myself but Steph said I just had to buy that one as it sounded so much better, so what could I do? Again I was a little worried that these things sound great in the shop but are always a bit disappointing when you get them home, however it sounds just as fantastic now. Moloko is currently playing and the percussion still makes me stop and listen. I ended up listening to music I hadn't heard in years so as I am sure countless people have said if it brings you so much pleasure then its worth it.



We had been planning to go away for a break with Johan and Antoinette and although I was a bit concerned that COVID would disrupt the plans but in actual fact it was the weather that scuppered the plans. We had set of driving north and had got about four hours from home when



Antoinette phoned, the weather pattern was rubbish for fishing for the whole of next week. Fishing was the whole point of their trip so it was completely understandable that they would postpone, but what should we do? In the end we decided that as we had already set off and taken time off work that we should press on, we cancelled the accommodation and were guided by where we could find half decent weather. We went to see Andrew and Liz and did some walking and cycling with them and then we went to Ohope, the only rental we could get at short notice was a five bedroom and two kitchen mansion but as it wasn't let it was cheap. We even managed to







play cards, internet cards. I managed to rig up a wireless router connected to my phone and we played until I ran out of data. Then I discovered that the house came with its own internet access – all I had to do was read the instructions and plug it in. We pottered along the beach, by foot and by bike and then when the weather really did disintegrate we went to see JP and David for a board games weekend. All in all not the trip we were planning but fun non-the-less.

Now I sit here, its less than a year until I am 60. Steph has made it very clear that she will not be getting up and going to work if I am retired and loafing in bed. So as a prelude to this she has decided to give up her full time job and see if she can make a living by doing contract work as an OT and running manual handling courses for local retirement homes and after our little break she set off trying to see how it went. Wow such a change, I guess I have got used to having the house to myself for my work

week and all of a sudden we share an office. Its quite a change but we do seem to have managed to adjust. Its early days at the moment and what with COVID and everything its not what you would describe as normal but Steph does seem to be getting enough work.

Steph has decided that if she cannot get enough work in the short term she will use the time to sanding and prepping the house for painting. When we had a report done on the house he spotted a few things but the main point was that the house was very poorly painted. So we decided its something we can do ourselves, its really all about the preparation, as large areas of the paint required very little more that harsh





language to remove them we really had no option other than to strip it back and make sure its properly filled and sealed and then paint. In the process we are planning to change for its current brown and cream combination to a pale grey and blue combination. Of course it is a little distracting



being sanded of pre- for when windows fitted. just in winter our



but it sort pared me the were to be Yes, at last, time for new double glazing



was ready to be fitted. It was super exciting to watch them rip all the windows out and then steadily go around and fit the new ones. As part of



the plan we turned the main entrance-way around so that we have a large sliding door opening onto a patio seating area. Now they were noisy, a lot more noisy than the sanding. After the first day we were forced out of the office, as the window was being removed, and had to work from the garage. It took them all week to fit the windows, the house was a bit chaotic while it was happening but I have to say they look wonderful, the old windows were so old and rusty that I feared to





close them after the summer would mean having to go outside with a hammer to hammer them closed. Now we need to fill all the nail holes and paint the new windows inside and out, but whatever, its just more painting.



Next was insulation, we had been putting them off until the windows were done but by comparison they were done in half a day, it cost a lot less and apparently it will have a bigger impact on keeping the house warm. When the house was built there was no requirement to insulate and of course there was none in the walls. We are on a concrete plinth and the roof is new and it insulated (I looked while the wood-burner went in) so its just the



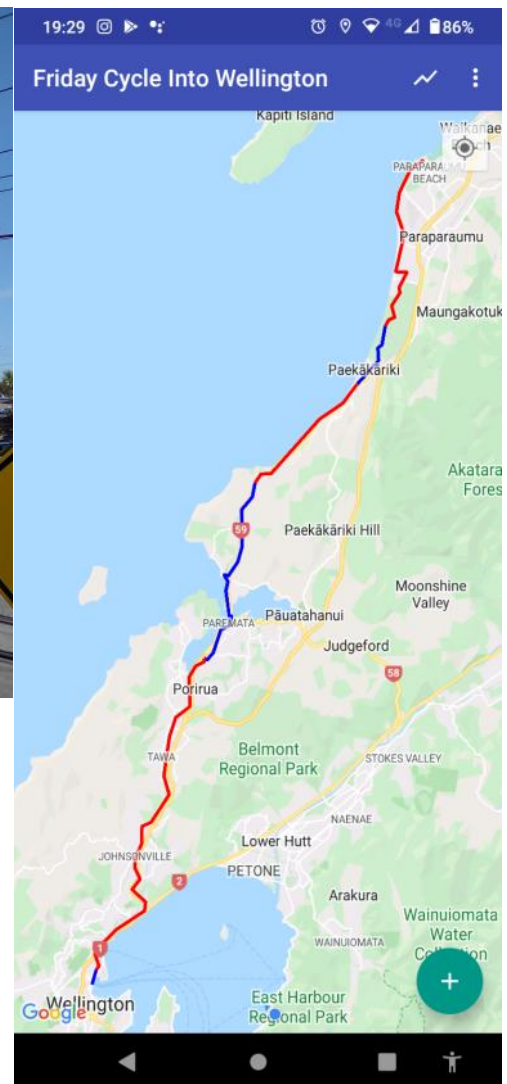
outside walls. They have now been injected with what feels like cotton wool but apparently is spun glass. We are very snug, I got up one morning last week and the



temperature outside was 9 degrees, inside it was 20, lovely. Of course all the little dots need sanding and painting, but its just more of the same. We are planning to break up the sanding by painting each of our three walls as we go, the house is semi-detached so we only have three walls.

We are still trying to go away for breaks, even though at the moment domestic travel is all that's really possible. We met up with Andrew and Liz, between where we live, in New Plymouth. We haven't been to New Plymouth since Womad six years ago. We had a long weekend in a super swish air bnb and walked along the front, visited a brewery and even explored the new cycle path and visited the





new(ish) Len Lye art gallery.

Our other pet project was to cycle into Wellington. We have done this from our other houses in the suburbs and even Eastbourne. Now we live up the coast it's a 63KM ride and there are two rather big hills in the way. The cycleway is down the state highway and as it's the main route into Wellington it can be quite busy and noisy and so not the nicest cycle in the world. However we now have a new motorway open, Transmission Gully, 10 years in the building and the effect is that all the traffic has come off the state highway and its now a very pleasant cycle along the shoreline, mind you there still are two big hills. Once over the last hill we freewheeled







down the other side into Wellington onto the ferry and over to Eastbourne for a well-earned beer and a take away. The following day we caught the ferry and the train home.

We did stop off at cafes along the route and it looks as though at one of them we managed to catch COVID. I know it affects different people differently and for some its

serious and even life threatening. We were one of the lucky ones but even so we were wiped out for a week and were warned that it's important to take the recovery slowly so I did work from home the second week and napped a lot. I'd say by week three we are both over it but I'm not that eager to get it again.

Of course it does mean that we had to isolate and get food delivered, including for my birthday, but to be honest I didn't really mind, like I said we were pretty lucky and we managed to keep ourselves amused, did I mention the painting?

Love Derek and Steph

