



The Ghost of Christmas Past. Well that was a year, wasn't it? It does seem surreal that it was a year ago that we were back in the UK and France for Christmas, being tourists and catching up with friends. It was all so exciting, we hadn't been back there for three years and we hadn't had a UK winter for a decade. I guess I was a little apprehensive about the UK winter and also about using up all my holidays in one go, a great example of worrying about completely the wrong things. We are now down the other end of the year and the world is upside down, and I now have a complete years' worth of holiday to use up.

Now then where were we? Well I believe Steph and I were getting worn down by the searching for houses over here. I know that by comparison to other people's problems this is a quite luxurious position to be in but it was still wearing us down. Things took a different turn at the beginning of December; we were still looking at around 5 houses every Sunday. We had a usual crop of houses we were interested in but actually the house that most appealed to me

was one right on the promenade in Paraparaumu Beach, the only slight issue was it was to go to auction. Now we have bought houses in the UK and it's a se-



rious process, there are structural surveys and searches to be done. Over here like I have said everything works a bit differ-

ently and because the market is so hot it works a bit quicker. We have been doing our own searches if they are straightforward and Johan



has been helping us with building assessments (on a “best endeavour” bases and he is not actionable – is that OK Johan?) simply be-

cause we cannot get a building report produced before the deadline is up. Johan looked at two houses that day and he said that if houses were



boys then one of the houses had short hair and your Dad would want you to go out with him and the one by the beach had a

guitar. On later reflection he said that it wasn't as bad as he first thought and there was nothing fundamentally wrong with it so we were off to the auction to see what happens.



Auctioning is an odd process, and I guess I have a positive attitude to it as it worked out for us. Sometimes auctions are at the property – a depressing affair if nobody turns up – but Harcourts do all their



auctions in their offices. They auction 15 houses in one sitting, so even if there are only 2 or 3 groups bidding on each property that means more than 50 people in the room. Its all a bit daunting, and the agent knew it was our first auction so they offered us someone who could bid for us. Steph said she had done a bit of internet googling on how to buy a house at an auction so we thought we would give it a go. The first bid was for \$1.1 million so right off the bat we knew it was a proper big auction. That bid was not for the house we were interested in, we were the second lot, so it gave us time to get a feel for the room. Even I noticed that in the first lot one of the groups was confident and sure of itself and the other faltering; they had lost before they started.

Our lot. Well Steph was magnificent, she was sure and confident, we knew exactly how much money we were prepared to put down and after a sequence of \$10,000 raises when the other side tried to raise by \$5,000 Steph

sensed weakness and immediately raised by \$20,000.

Steady on, I thought, that's our money here, but I needn't have worried the opposition folded soon after. We had won, well maybe.

We were taken to a room off the auction room and waited. Then the auctioneer arrived and said the reserve for the house was \$750,000 and although we had won the auction with a bid of \$695,000 the vendor was not going to move from their reserve. Oh dear, I thought, we aren't going to buy a house after all. Then we started to negotiate. It took me a while to understand that this was exactly the position we wanted to be in when buying a house rather than having to do blind bids. Anyway slow I might have been but I was apparently playing the sidekick part to Steph's negotiation as required. Steph said we could go up to 710, maybe. The auctioneer left and returned, no 735 was the absolute minimum. No, said Steph crossing her arms, we are leaving we have other properties to bid on. Are we? Do we? I thought. Even the auctioneer was surprised and asked if we were really leaving. He did us a favour at this

point, he said if we could give him anything he would get us a deal so we bought the house for 715. I suspect it was a good negotiation as we spent a lot but they got less than they wanted. A



good compromise makes nobody happy, except perhaps in retrospect.

Somewhat shakily was signed the forms – paid \$71,000 and felt compelled to drive around to the house and stare at the gate, just to check it was all real. We would be in for the second week in January, all done and dusted.

It's weird after some big task has been completed. At times we didn't know what to do with ourselves, we didn't have to organise viewings every weekend, for pretty much every morning of the first week when I woke up the first thing I thought of was – we bought a house.

There were birthdays to be celebrated in December and they often go unmarked in the Christmas rush so it was good to have the time and the attention to be able to give



them space. Antionette's Mum Hannie really likes the Sound of Music so we had a Sound of Music sing-a-long lunch complete with lederhosen and we had a lovely meal for Beverley's birthday one sunny evening.

Then all of sudden we did seem to be back and normal, we were able to have a very pleasant day doing our Christmas shopping - even meeting up for a drink halfway through, and going to see a concert with a real orchestra in the evening.



We did spend some time writing cards and getting them sent off, Steph was sort of joking about trying to graph how long they took to get there. Well we didn't actually do a proper graph but anec-

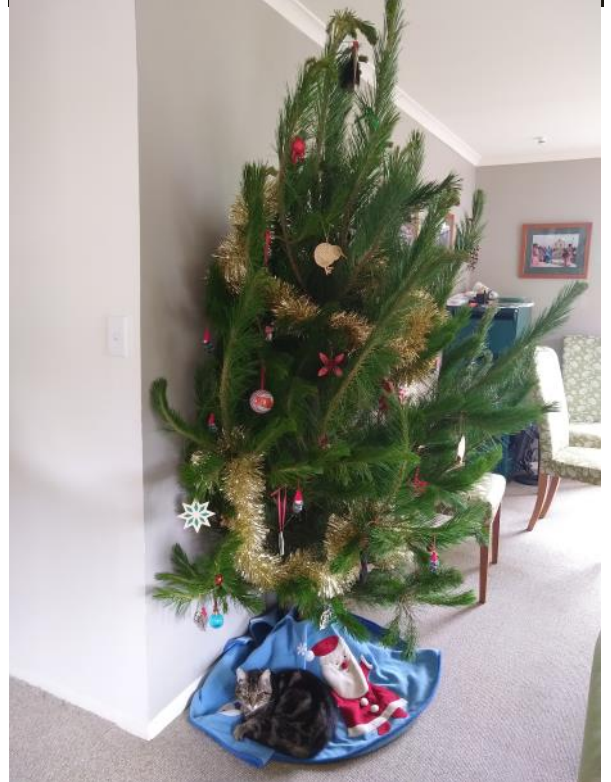


dotally the spread was impressive, they were all sent at the same time but the gap from first to last was over three weeks. I've tried to make Christmas cake for Mum every year for a while now and usually we can carry it back or find someone who is going but not this year so it was good to see the cake arrived by post with just a few days to go. We got our Christmas cards from the UK in one big bundle on 9th January.

By the time we got to Christmas we were very tired and run down. Not just us – the whole country seems to have been struggling to get to the end of the year. Numerous people at work were going down with minor ailments. We also both got a cold that I in par-



ticular took weeks to shake. In this year of course you cannot just have a cold, we needed to self-isolate and then be tested for covid and await our results. We were negative but it still reminds us that the whole thing is fragile. Christmas lunch itself was sunny and warm and had silly “pass the parcel” games and good cheer, by comparison to other years there were no extended family visitors. The period was a delightful opportunity to play cards with family, an unexpected benefit of the year. The cards groups are gradually spreading so now we have tables with 5 or 6 people spread over 4 countries. We did get to cycle through the sunny bays to see “A Christmas Gift from Bob” at the cinema. New Year was lovely, Liz and Andrew came down to see us for the last time in this house. I did feel we should have planned more in the way of ac-



tivities but all the time seemed to be taken up with chatting and catching up so I guess it was all right in the end. We all stayed up until the New Year and even watched Helen's recommendation of Robbie the Reindeer, something we had missed for some reason.

Oh and yes we are moving, so there is lot of packing to be done. Its actually quite a good activity, in the sense that all of a sudden it seems real, we really are moving into our house and we are also going to be able to get into all the stuff we packed up into storage a decade ago. From Friday 15th January our address will be

230A Manly Street
Paraparaumu Beach
Paraparaumu 5032
NZ

The house we are currently in is going to be let by a colleague of Steph's so we shall get any mail that's still in the post.

I guess even as I type this I can see that things are radically different for different people round the world.



While the new variant covid has broken out in Australia, I am listening to the cricket from Australia and the crowd has been reduced from the usual 40,000+ to 9,000 physically distanced. The radio news is full of the aussies moving their vaccination program from March/April up to next month. All of a sudden we are reminded once again how fragile this freedom we have here is and that we might not move if we are locked down again.

Once again I think we are in a luxurious position by comparison to those in Europe. As they pass mid-Winter rarely have people looked forward to the life renewal of Spring with so much longing. I am sure that the belief that 2021 will be better is a true belief but it might just take a bit longer than we originally thought.

