

## 2019 – NEW YEAR LETTER

At last it's the end of 2019. What a long year it has been and I for one am pleased to see the back of it. Mosque attacks; 51 dead, volcanic eruption; 19 dead, severe floods and mass climate change protests and that's just in New Zealand.

But despite the world and New Zealand's doom and gloom there have been some highlights. South Africa winning the Rugby World cup is one of them.

Beginning of the year we had a huge trip. Starting in Holland and then to Malaga with our good friends Frans and Agnes Hilgers. Malaga is charming. Then onto our usual ski trip in the dolomites, Italy. After one ski I realised my skiing days were over and joined the walking group. After a week off to South Africa, where we went from -18°C to +40°C in 24 hours. Our bodies did not cope with the extreme temperature change and for the first time ever on a trip we both got sick. But Avril and Gavin Walsh's hospitality in Ingwelala, Rod and Kate Difford in Johannesburg and Keith and Marilyn Davidge-Pits at their farm in Magliesburg was such a special time, it made up for not feeling so well. We also stayed with Dot and Peter in Germiston. Very busy time with lots of laughs and catching up.

Then off to the Cape. Again, wonderful hospitality and fun with Martin and Robinne Bigalke in Stellenbosch and Colleen (Van Wijk) and Glen in Somerset West. Our trip to South Africa was all about being with old friends and we realised no matter how far you live apart or how little you are able to see each other; true friendships remain strong and are to be treasured. Last two nights were spent on the Blue Train (bucket list ✓) which was so luxurious with amazing food and service. Another bucket list ✓ was a trip to the Maldives in November, only problem we don't dive anymore but it was wonderful snorkelling.

Theo is still doing limited private practice, keeping gentlemen hours and preventing becoming a feather duster for another year. When he retired from Waikato hospital, he stated he felt he had gone from Peacock to a feather duster. He has taken up wood sculpting and with no tuition has done some amazing work. He says as a surgeon he sees things in 3D. He shows me a block of wood and 2 days later an art piece appears. Remarkable.

In May we got Brillo, a miniature schnauzer. Brillo has overtaken our hearts, our home and basically our life revolves round him. He has brought such joy and comfort.

In June I had a total hip replacement and now can walk long distances and no pain. Truly life changing operation. For the past 6 months I have been a volunteer at *Sharma* and I teach sewing and conversational English to refugees. My pupils are mainly from the middle east and their stories about refugee camps are an eye opener. My joy is they now say English words with a South African accent, this really cracks me up.

Reinie got accepted onto the Advanced orthopaedic training - only another 7 years before he is a consultant. He and Kath moved to Christchurch, so far away. Kelly bought her own apartment in Auckland. This is a massive achievement as the prices are eye watering. Fiona

makes beautiful handmade cards which she sells but also donates to Hospice and sends them to people she does not know. It turns out that a card in the post is very healing.

2019 has presented many challenges and sad events to our family and some of our friends. Maybe you have experienced something that has been too hard to share. One event was the sudden death of our beloved neighbour and my first friend in New Zealand, Betty Blair. With everything that has gone down in New Zealand, with family friends and in our family, it has made me realise how precious life is and how quickly it can change. So be kind to yourself and one another and tell the people dear to you that you love them.

Roll on 2020 and may it bring to all of us and our loved ones only good things.

My quote for 2019 is:

“In a blink of an eye everything can change,  
So, forgive often and love with all your heart,  
For you may not have that chance again”

Stay safe. With all our love from New Zealand.