

## NEWSLETTER 2021

I did not think 2021 could be worse than 2020. How wrong I was. It started well enough. In New Zealand we were smugly patting our backs congratulating ourselves that we had dodged COVID. So smug that the Labour government delayed the vaccine roll out as we had “no urgent need for it”. Our borders were opened to Australia. No quarantine time necessary between the two countries. Then Delta hit our shores brought in by an Australian tourist. Borders closed and the entire country went into strict level 4 lockdown again. Hard and fast like the first lockdown. Delta has another agenda and spread quickly and was deadly. Auckland roads north and south were closed and had a police force manned border. Only essential workers allowed to cross with the correct documentation. Like the Berlin wall without a physical wall. Thousands got Delta, thousands lost their jobs. Businesses, schools and university closed. The major economic city of New Zealand came to a grinding halt again. We were promised that when 90% of New Zealand got vaccinated that the Auckland border would lift. A massive vaccination effort was done and on the 15<sup>th</sup> December this was achieved. We were allowed free to travel around the country again but only if we had vaccine passes and mandatory wearing of masks. But lurking in the shadows COVID was planning another attack and sent the Omicron variant out into the world. Omicron was 50% more infectious than Delta. Our international border opening on the 17<sup>th</sup> January was cancelled. We were land-locked in New Zealand and if you did manage leave to return you had to go into compulsory government quarantine facilities for 2 weeks. These hotels were incredibly difficult to book into. Every aspect of our lives felt controlled. What a mess. But 2021 did have a few highlights. In between lockdowns we travelled to Christchurch to celebrate Marie Utley’s 65<sup>th</sup> birthday held in her new home.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June little Mia arrived. Our first grandchild, and she was so wee -- just weighing 2.8kg. She brought such joy and happiness into our lives. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> three-month lockdown in Auckland, Kelly managed to obtain a travel permit for 10 days to cross the southern border to bring Mia to Hamilton. She said she had postpartum depression and needed to see her mother. I am sure when Mia is older the idea of her mother crossing a physical border south of Auckland will sound like a fairy-tale.

Also, in June my dearest childhood friend Rod Difford succumbed to brain cancer. Rod was my friend for 55 years and he and his family saved my life as a teenager. My teenage life was made impossible by an abusive alcoholic father, but Rod and his parents opened their hearts and home and gave me the courage to rise above it all. My deepest sorrow is that due to COVID and travel border restrictions I could not go to South Africa and spend time with him early on when he first was diagnosed. Because Rod left and Mia arrived the following week, my profound sorrow at losing him was replaced with the joy of meeting Mia.

So, our 2020 was like most people in the world completely controlled by COVID. We remain locked away at the bottom of the world. The news is that by Easter in 4 months’ time we might be able to travel again. One must have some hope and I found it in the following poem. This was written by Amanda Gorman the incredible young poet her read a poem at the USA at President Biden’s inauguration.

What was cursed, we will cure  
What was plagued, we will prove pure.  
Where we tend to argue, we will try to agree.  
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future we foresee.  
Where we weren’t aware, we are now awake.  
Those moments we missed; are now these moments we make.  
And our hearts, once all together beaten  
Now all together beat.  
Come look up with kindness yet,  
Even solace can be sourced from sorrow.

We looked forward to a better 2022 and the safe arrival of two more grandchildren.