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"A Different Light"

A Different Light –20th January 2024 – “Forget the back-to-work blues and be grateful for the gift of a New Year”

After over a week of being back in the routine of 5.30am alarm clock starts, commutes into work and work itself, the holiday break is all but a happy memory. We had a fabulous staycation. Family and friends came and went as we enjoyed lashings of food and drink. Mexicana was a common theme with quesadillas, tacos, huevos rancheros and of course icy salty margaritas.

Our festive break did have its moments of mild drama, apprehension and consequences that should have been foreseen.

After the passing of Shane Mc Gowan (The Pogues Singer) my wife Sally insisted we learn the song “Fairytale Of New York” for a Christmas rendition. I foolishly took this as false threat. But on Christmas Day, when we had over twenty guests at our house for lunch Sally suddenly announced that she and I would be singing a song. I was somewhat startled. I had been leading the charge enacting my Father’s tradition of drinking whisky on Christmas morning, and the last thing I felt like doing was a public musical, performance to my extended in law clan. Nevertheless, we sang the song. It was a duet. I can still see the faces of Sally’s family as they looked on with serious and bemused expressions. (Some worryingly recording on their phones...)

Next up was New Year’s Eve. It’s always a subject of vacillation for us; where to go, what to do. We carried on our theme of staycation. My friend Patrick has his birthday on New Year’s Eve. I sheepishly turned down his invitation to his 60th birthday party on the grounds that the accessibility of his house was questionable. I also however quietly felt trepidation about the degree of revelry that could take place. We instead opted to host a dinner party with a (you guessed it) Mexican theme. Needless to say, New Year’s Day was lethargic-

reading and dozing by the pool. I woke shocked by the extent of sunburn I copped. Sally was more concerned that the pool's inflatable shark was missing. Oh, the micro dramas!

We finally broke out of our staycation mode and ventured out to Pataua North to stay at our friends Bridget and Robbie's family bach. When we got there it transpired that Robbie had been recently rescued from ocean side of the spit. He and Bridget had set off for a kayak in the estuary. Bridget had wisely turned right to go against the tide up the estuary, whereas Robbie had taken a "devil may care" attitude and turned right to go with the tide towards the river mouth (it had already been a long morning for Robbie). Consequently, he was tipped out in the turbulence going over the bar at the river mouth and swept along the bay. His first would-be rescuer was a surfer whom Robbie "fobbed off" telling him in no uncertain terms that he was fine. After a while of hanging off his kayak, he welcomed a second rescuer on a jet-ski.

The next micro drama involved a fondue set my wife had bought at an op shop. Our Grand daughter was keen to try it out. A cheese sauce was made. The burner was lit. The flame grew and grew and then grew some more. Soon the entire fondue pot was engulfed. The fondue set was taken outside and doused with a bowl of our dog's water.

The next day, our inflatable pool shark appeared on Facebook on a Waipu Community Page with a message saying "I'd like to return this to its owner". It solicited numerous shark sighting jokes in the comments. When we tried to get the shark back it had been claimed by someone else. Was there more than one missing inflatable shark in Waipu? Maybe – just another holiday mishap...

I've recovered from the Christmas Pogues' rendition. The sunburn has browned, peeled and healed. Robbie has since reflected on his kayak escapades. A new fondue set is being trialled. The pool shark is nevermore. While these minor holiday mishaps seem somewhat trivial I count us lucky as we have managed the odd mundane sling or arrow as opposed to any more outrageous misfortune. There could have been far worse consequences for some of these little anecdotes.

I feel for those who have had any more serious matters to deal with over the holiday season-it is a time when we may venture into new activities, may lose our focus, or simply suffer the randomness of a busy and somewhat structureless time. I have had a holiday season thus blighted before. So, instead

of getting the work blues, let's be grateful for small mercies and mishaps and go graciously into this gift of a New Year.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.