December 13th 2016 All Ready for Christmas!

The 50’s and 60’s Music Show was fun and a very polished performance from the local AM DRAM Group but the lunch at the venue beforehand was even more entertaining.

We ordered our lunch and asked for a carafe of wine. “We only sell by the glass!” the officious waiter said at $5 a glass.

“It says in the menu a litre carafe of wine for $20, so we’ll have a carafe thank you.” Rob replied.

“You won’t drink that in time for the start of the show,” (You wanna bet, I thought). Buying the wine by the glass worked out much more expensive than the same amount in a carafe of course, it wasn’t our drinking speed that concerned him. I have an idea he was the treasurer as well.

He thumped the carafe down on the table and then stood back and stared at Rob without speaking. Such a suave guy. Rob immediately twigged he wanted paying. His rudeness was quite funny.

He was also front of house, standing erect and demanding, waiting for his audience (troops) to be stunned into silence before he started his speel. My thoughts went from imagining he was mildly aspergic to being a sergeant major in the army ret’d.

At the interval we were all herded back into the dining room for pudding, “Darling,” I said, “Why don’t you order another carafe of wine to go with dessert?”

“Not b…… likely.” Came Rob’s reply.

One of our many walks, around the Hatea Loop, takes us down one side of the river, across a pedestrian bridge, a little further behind busy workshops and warehouses, then over the new bastion bridge, Te Matau A Pohe, and back up the other bank to the Town Basin. Birdlife abounds, mostly common introduced species but also the local pukeco, a blue chicken with long legs and a fleshy red bill that reaches to the crown. At low tide we watch eels wiggling and feeding over the mud flats and each day larks sing from up high above us while a tractor gathers in big bales of hay.

A variation on our multi-coloured kingfisher at home is the New Zealand Sacred Kingfisher which is more common and less shy and has a green back and head, blue wings and tail and a pale cream belly and collar as we study them on the piles and logs in and around the marina and river side.

The local re-cycling boxes are purple in colour and and during one Hatea Loop walk we gleaned a few empty carbonated drinks bottles from one and did some dumpster diving to collect a few more that we would need to bottle our first batch of red lion beer. Which fermented well. Our second batch, this time dark ale, is brewing as I type ready for the Christmas celebrations.

It seemed for the first few weeks we were here that we were getting nowhere with all the jobs that need to be done. The turning point was visiting the foundry where we had taken the bent anchor and finding that not only was it back to its normal shape but the bent anchor pin was now straight too and a stainless steel lever key had been fabricated so Rob could unscrew the water tank hatches to allow access for cleaning the inside of the tanks. No doubt the heat in the tropics had wedged them tight shut.

Right now Rob has gone to collect the refurbished windlass which he will repaint before refitting it. Scott, our electrician, will fit a bigger cable to the windlass and has ordered a complete new Auto Pilot for us to include not only the motherboard (brains) but also the hydraulic ram (brawn) that is located under the steering quadrant and does the physical work of turning the rudder. The old one is the original and has done well to last 27 years, if the new one lasts that long and I do too I will be 91 and about to outlive my Mum!(This will be the singular most expensive item on the repair list, hopefully, at £4,000).

The new battery charger is fitted and while we were briefly alongside a pontoon in the Riverside Marina we connected to the mains to find it does work. We moved to this marina after finally convincing Terry of Alloy and Stainless that he should come and have a look at the big opening windows on the front of the deck house to see if he could replace the pot rivets in the hinges. He hummed and ha’d, so Rob just said “Well if you think you can’t manage it…….”

Half an hour later Terry walked along Zoonie’s side deck and as soon as he saw the hinges said, “They’re not aluminium, they’re either brass or likely anodised bronze. No problem and we’ll use Molen rivets that are tolerant of any metal and won’t corrode as quickly as aluminium.” Job done! Secure and properly opening windows.

We have just finished the last of three varnishing jobs. The remaining saloon floorboards that had not yet been refurbished went to a local joinery workshop where they were flat sanded back to bare teak with pale yellow holly strips. We coated them with clear satin varnish which is great to use as it dries in no time and can be re-coated every 6 hours.

The mitred joints in the teak trim in our heads were shedding varnish in the constant wet of the shower and over spill of the basin, so they are now sound again and, finally, the companionway sides and splashback behind the galley sink are all lovely new surface wood, revealing pretty knots and the rich golden brown of teak.

A local sailmaker, oddly called UK Sails, is stitching pvc to the foot of the genoa where it has rubbed on the pulpit rail. They are also fitting a new window to the sprayhood over the cockpit as the UV is turning the existing window to a pale brown that cannot be seen through. The new material is thicker and more UV resistant and will have a centrally unzipping window to allow a breeze into the cockpit while we are moored, so we no longer need to lower the hood and fit a shroud cover in its place to create a tunnel of ventilation.

Phil, at UK Sails, quoted us $750 to make some chaps for the dinghy to protect it from the sun. Another company quoted $1250. So we went to the second hand chandlery next door and bought a Pffaf 6 hand sewing machine for £130 and Rob is presently buying the fabric from UK Sails who I think frankly didn’t want the job anyway. Pre-Christmas itis.

My new toy had already been put to use making a set of signals code flags to read MERRY CHRISTMAS that now flutter gently in the breeze just above the boom. Competition over the decking out of the boats with garlands of glitter and lights is hot right now as there is a prize of $150 and two of $50 for the best festive dressed boat.

Early Saturday morning saw me being hoisted up the back of the mast to the radar receiver to fit the 5 foot Christmas tree, (complete with white LED light on its uppermost branches), to the front of the mast. While there I secured the red and white tinsel to the lower shrouds and let it fall so Rob could put a twist in it around the shrouds and secure it below. He has also put coloured solar powered LED lights all around her rail and inside the cockpit. We have yet to tie red ribbon and a bow around the enormous pale blue bundle of stuff we have taken from the forecastle so it looks like a giant present. An inflated Santa is meant to sit on top of him but as he requires a mains supply to operate his fan that will have to wait until we are in the marina. People walking over the canopy bridge just in front of us are taking photos of Zoonie and saying to us how pretty she looks!

We have had some lovely outings with Tony and Gail, hiking and picnicking on red wine around a spectacular headland and exploring gardens planted in a dis-used limestone quarry. Not yet up to Haniteli’s standard on Vavau, they rely on volunteers to do the work and achieving ‘Botanic Garden’ status is something they aspire to.

We went to a performance by ‘A Choired Taste’ in these gardens last Saturday with Tony and Gail. We took four new folding chairs we had bought at a cost of $8 each and they all held our weight well!

The leader was a glamorous lady in floral leggings with a pale fuchsia flowing top and flowers in her pastel coloured hair, a hippy granny by the looks and her singers were mostly ladies and like all amateurs who plant gardens, act and sing for the love of what they were doing, it was done really well.

In the high walls of the quarry, where we sat by the lake; the songs, rising evocatively towards the puffy white clouds scudding above our natural roof, ranged in genre from classical, pop and country to labour/work songs from Africa and the Caribbean and a short carol. We joined in on one song with a repetitive chorus and performed in canon which was fun. It had rained all day but stopped just before the concert.

Afterwards we had a delicious Thai meal to round the evening off.

We shall miss Tony and Gail when they fly home to Houston tomorrow, returning on the 14th March. Each time we spend with them our relationships grow deeper and more expansive. We have so much in common and just get on really well with them. Its wonderful for me to make friends in this way as work and other commitments have often taken up daily friendship times and opportunities. To envision them beings friends indefinitely is one of life’s real luxuries.

A Day on the Coast.

Last Sunday was the first we had to ourselves for a while as Tony and Gail were busy doing the countless jobs required to put Cetacea, their boaty home, to bed for three months.

“Let’s go to the coast,” Rob said. So off we went to the Tutukaka Coast just north of here. Cattle lazed in the gentle pastures that in turn languished below pretty tree covered hills. From the car park in Tutukaka we walked towards the lighthouse set on a tiny island which joined the mainland along a short causeway. As the walk across this causeway could only be attempted in the hour before to the hour after low water we sat on the mainland side and looked around a 360 degree vista of land and sea. It was very breezy and cool but at least the rain held off.

As we wandered back to the car we pondered on the exclusive, fenced homes secured with padlocked gates and warnings signs, ‘Private Keep Out’ and reflected that not so long ago, 170 years or so, this is where Maori’s ranged and camped with no concept of land ownership.

In the village we found the location of Perfect Day excursions with whom we will take a trip to the Poor Knights Islands on 27th December when Charly and Tom will be with us.

In our brochure the photo of Matapouri Bay shows sun-hatted toddlers tottering down the wooden boardwalk to the sandy beach. The photo did not lie, the bay was beautiful and families were enjoying the sun, building sand dams and castles and some even swimming. A young father carried his sodden baby daughter at arms’ length back up the beach to mummy who walked towards them with an opened towel.

At the wide Woolleys Bay with its long rollers we munched our packed lunch watching the surfers playing the waves and seagulls hovering over picnickers hoping for some crumbs.

The Whananaki wooden footbridge is 395m long and said to be the longest in the southern hemisphere, ‘though I haven’t checked that out. It spans the estuary of the same name and we crossed it to find a holiday park, local school and a shop that sold “the best coffee in town” and ice-creams. We were told this by a gentleman who used to ride his horse across the wide shallow estuary. This is trekking country and I hope that Rob and I might one day go for a trek along the sands.

Naturally some fields were home to these lovely horses and in others, were herds of goats and big herds of dairy cattle, one such herd making its own way towards the milking parlour. You only need a good lead cow who knows the way and it saves the farmer so much time.

Somewhere we had learned that many farmers and fishermen have done career reversals, leaving the sea to become farmers and vice versa. I don’t really know the reasoning but we did see numerous vessels, fishing boats and yachts that had been trailed from the shore to the homestead and left to rot and rust away. One such vessel caught our eye. A fine lined yacht of around 50 feet and made of ferro cement, the chicken wire skeleton peeping through holes in her sides. The farmer was cutting grass with an aged tractor of around the same vintage as the yacht. I longed to know his story.

And that marks the end of this present story. Please, all of you, enjoy ourselves at Christmas in your own way. Go placidly amidst the noise and haste, walk lightly and rest well.