

Christmas Letter. Howard Family, 2010

It's been a year or two, or more, since we cobbled our Christmas news together. It might have been that we didn't have much to write about, but is more likely that we didn't make the time to get it down. However the past year will always be a highly memorable one for us, and we wanted to share with you how we are going, and what has been happening for all those we haven't been in touch with for a while.

The year started innocently enough. Ted officiated as boat club Chair again, and organised the Lions Fishing competition, at which he is becoming an expert. Jewelia performed a home-grown murder mystery with her friends for her, as usual, vibrant birthday party. We went South to see clients in late Jan and spent precious days with my family, before racing home to give a piano recital where friend Stan on the violin was my musical partner.

March was uneventful, but Ted returned home from a fortnight's business trip in April to discover that the tumours on his face, originally pronounced benign, had grown like topsy. All of a sudden the medical machine went into action and Ted found himself patient in a marathon, 5 and a half hour operation which removed a substantial part of his face, neck and left shoulder. Then things took a very nasty turn as three liver tumours were discovered, he was discharged from oncology and send home for "palliative care only." (Details at <http://tedhowardnz.wordpress.com/about>)

I'd like to say things passed in a blur after that, but the reality is that when someone points the bone it is be a very painful process. We spent the next 4 weeks or so ploughing through the net, reading and learning everything we could about cancer. Survival stories on

established secondary melanoma are rare, very rare, but they occasionally exist. We studied a lot about diet that we would, in normal circumstances not wish to know about, but there did seem to be some evidence that removing most of favourite foods and committing to a strict regime of unprocessed food could, in some cases, halt or reverse the progression of cancer.

So there was Ted, between a rock and a hard place; given no hope of life and waiting for the bleak prognosis to happen, or listening to the alternative quiet whisper of hope, that life expectancy from here could be taken from zero to something better, by embarking on a major lifestyle change and removing any food that currently gave pleasure. Ouch!

Taking action wherever you can, seems to be an important part of moving forward, so with the help of friends, the pantry was radically cleared and cleaned and most of the processed food thrown out or given away, and replaced with a range of very simple organic, living alternatives. And we bought a hand operated mill, so that when Ted eats flour the grain is as fresh and living as possible.

Well the food has been a struggle. I lasted less than a fortnight. But Ted has persisted and although as a meat and dairy manic he has found no pleasure in eating, the results have been profound. Quickly all surplus spare tyres vanished and he developed a new, lean look. And then the magic happened. In October when he scanned the liver tumours had vanished.

It's hard for life to feel normal but suffering can be a pathway for growth, and we are learning to appreciate the moment, and at this moment, life is very special. We've met and been cared for by many people. One of the most significant acts of kindness was the gift of a couple of raised beds filled with veges, put together by the local

Lions clubs. Another was when a photographer unknown to us, came from Blenheim to take family photos for us at no charge.

We are going to have a quiet Christmas together, appreciating each other, without the usual social antics. So looking forward to it!

When illness touches a family, it's very tough on the kids. Will had begun his teaching in China and was finding his feet, only to realise that he wanted to be home with us. He had begun his Chinese experience really well, settling into his apartment, his job with the "Crazy Baby English" language school, and the challenges of being one of the few white people in his world. He returned as soon as he could get away. He lived with us for 6 months and has just left for Christchurch again in the past few weeks, to begin a new life with no certain plans. He is back at flat "Chez Homer" enjoying company of his familiar friends and social networks.

Jewelina has had her metal challenged too. School bullying added to the cocktail of things to manage, but she's done well and grown in so many ways. We were able to enrol her at "Health School" to preserve routine, and even though she was only at her High School for half a year, she managed to run off with the ICT prize for her year.

She's just arrived home from an adventure. An online friend's Mum asked us if she could visit them in the Florida and Georgia, and hang out with her daughter, and go and attend her favourite bands. She had the best time, and had such fun with her friend Kaci once we'd made a difficult decision to let her go. She had lots of travel challenges. Plane malfunctions and immigration ensured she missed most of her connecting flights both ways, so had to think on her feet. She did so well, with this and we were proud. She is only 14.

She's busked and busked to find her travel money. More of challenging herself and getting out and about.

As Ted has become well, the things we withdrew from in the community have blossomed again. I've been involved in the organic coop, what has been a fantastic source of food. Ted has thrown himself back into "Te Korowai" - Kaikoura's Coastal Guardians, and continued with business. He's plotting to sign up to a bike race, to Kaikoura from Hamner. He is the new Lance Armstrong.

The words "golf" and "tramping" are frequently mentioned in our house, but this year passed without a hole in one for Ted, though despite lacking shoulder muscles he played his best rounds ever, and won a batch of prizes. I have developed an addiction to making necklaces from vintage buttons. My friend Sue threatens to check me into the 12 step plan for this! I've also had much joy from singing with the Belle Birds. The dogs are a continual source of work and amusement for us. In the bleakest moments the dogs have still managed to make us laugh.

So life continues much as before, but different. Somehow who does the dishes is not the priority it once was, And having things crossed an dotted doesn't seem to matter like it did. And we are lucky, so lucky!

We are staying around or the holidays to enjoy the place we live. If you come this way, please visit. And have a wonderful Christmas, and holiday time. Thank you for your friendship and support!

With our love

Ailsa and Ted



Ted and friends with Huia as tramp leader follow up the Kowhai.



Jewelina at birthday party "H.M.S. Outlandish"



Ted, in H.M.S. outlandish, practising his soon to be called upon medical skills.



Jewelina and Ted, while he waits for the chop.



Ailsa and Huia take a walk at Ward Beach.



Will tries a new look in China.



Bugler above the sea.



Jewelz in Trash Fashion mode as "Wind up Wonderland"



One of our family photos. It's a very hard thing to get 4 people smiling.



Ailsa savours Mt Fyffe summit



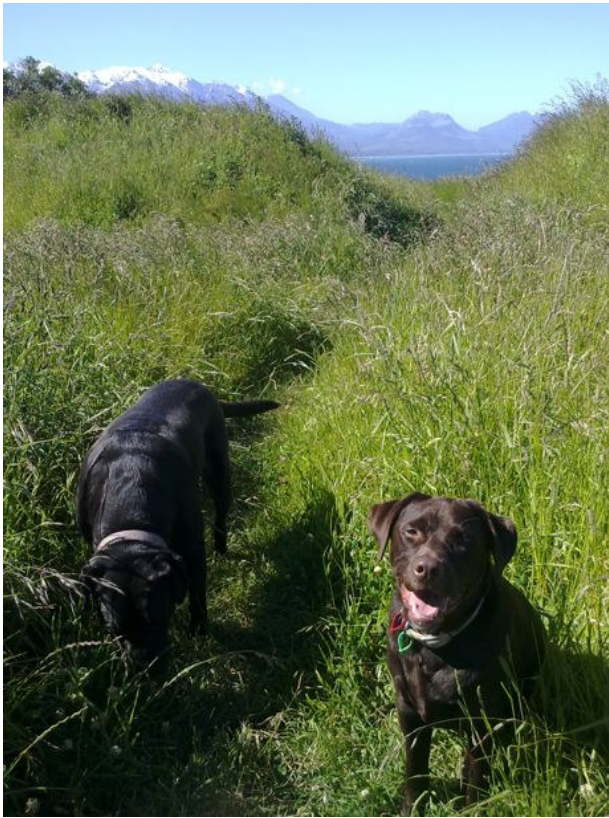
Ted caught raiding one of his new pantries.



A new creative spree for Ailsa



Jewelina and Kaci, best friends for life!



The girls who always make us laugh.



A great moment. Jewelz arrives home after her adventures.



The Belle Birds in the Christmas spirit, 2010



Jewelz wears a hat at one of our early Christmas dinners.



Our new look Ted!