



Welcome

I often joke about this becoming a New Year newsletter. This year it will probably come true for most people, as I am still typing and it is 22 December today. My goal is to get them in the mail by Friday, so at least they are on the way by Xmas.

Sun sets on Gladstone

For those of you not in the know (or just too plain silly to notice that this was posted from Victoria), we have moved house. Not being people to do things by half, when we move we do it several thousand kilometres at a time.

We weren't sick of Gladstone by any stretch, and Michelle was none too keen on leaving Queensland, but there comes a time - that time is when you can't get any answers about renewing your employment contract.

Anyway, I had been courting other opportunities and accepted one with Grampians Water in Victoria, based at Horsham in the west of the State. Incidentally, I finally was offered a new contract but decided to resign instead.

Picture below is sunset over Lake Awoonga (taken from our front lawn).

OS 2 NZ

Our big trip for the year was to New Zealand in March. We had this one planned from about September last year, so even a change in address and job had to be fitted in around it.

It was easily the biggest trip that the girls had made and they loved every bit of it. We had a 7-seater van so there was plenty of room.



Highlights included a trip on the Transalpine train, cruising on the SS Earnshaw and the gondola rides in Queenstown and Christchurch. Oh, and the Cadbury factory.

For me the highlight was probably the tasting room at the Speight's brewery in Dunedin, but only because the girls wouldn't alter the itinerary to let me take in a game of rugby.

We had a total of 10 days, travelling from Christchurch to the east coast via train, back by car, down to Wanaka and Queenstown, then over to Dunedin and back up to Christchurch.

Emily turned 9 in the middle of the holiday, so thought it was a fairly special birthday. Most of NZ knew it was her birthday by the time we left.

We arrived back in Brisbane on 20 March. I departed for the new job on the next day.



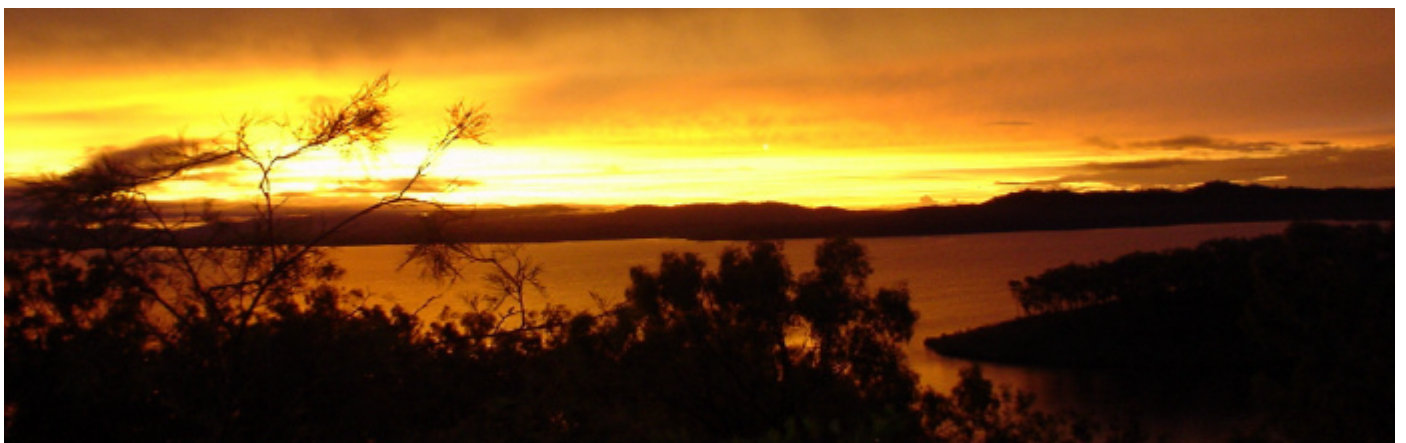
Girls at Brisbane Airport

Flying South for the Winter

I arrived in Horsham on Sunday, 21 March, fresh from New Zealand. I started work on 22 March and worked for two weeks before flying back to Gladstone to help pack up and move the rest of the family south.

We made the move a bit easier by not driving down. Since removal costs were going to be reimbursed by the company we made our lives a little easier and put Michelle's car on a carrier and flew to Melbourne, where I had stashed the new company car for the drive out to Horsham.

Our arrival coincided with Easter, so we had a few days to settle in and unpack before I had to go back to work or the girls had to start at their new schools.





Green Acres

My first real job when I arrived in Horsham was to suss out some accommodation.

I looked at every house for sale around the district during the first week-and-a-half and concluded that I wasn't going to find anything suitable to buy in a hurry, so I had better find something to rent.

No sooner had I done that than I found a place I thought would be perfect (photo above). I emailed a few photos to Michelle, arranged a loan over the phone with the bank, had the place inspected by a valuer, builder, pest control, made an offer and signed a contract all within 24 hours.

Fortunately, Michelle liked the place and the girls liked the cubby house (inset). The house is circa 1920 vintage that has been moved from elsewhere and restumped, reroofed and rewired. All set on 4 hectares (10 acres) only 5 kilometres from town. Most importantly, it boasts a large shed for wood working and tool storage.

Girl Power

The girls have settled in well down here and all three have done well at school. Amelia is excelling, even though at 7 she was a year younger than the rest of her class in grade 2. Emily completed grade 4 in 2004 and Hannah finished Year 8 at high school.

Amelia and Emily are doing trampolining (very big down here) and Hannah is into drama.

Emily and Hannah have been involved in their respective school choirs and Emily (yellow shirt in centre below) sang in the combined primary school choir at the Carols by Candlelight.



Hannah (now 14) continues to improve following her surgery last year (see 2003 Cheers). It was a difficult first 3 months with her being in plaster. She has taken 6 months to get confidently walking again with her frame. She is now at the stage of almost getting off the frame and onto elbow crutches.

And then there was one

In June, the Government announced the merger of Grampians Water (urban water supply) with Wimmera Mallee Water (rural water supply) in June.

I had to reapply for a job with the new organisation, and fortunately got one. As of 27 October, I am General Manager Operational Services with Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water - try saying that quickly!

Fair to Mid-Wife

Michelle had no trouble finding work down here and is presently working at the Horsham hospital 2 days a week, and often more. When she rang to inquire if there were any positions vacant at the hospital they went into a state of excited shock and very nearly came out to pick her up, just to make sure she didn't get away. They don't get a lot of midwives moving to Horsham.

She has been playing netball with some of her workmates as well.

Farm Life

We gave our chooks and guinea pigs away to friends when we left Gladstone. We are starting to make up for it here.

Being on 10 acres the girls were keen to start a pet collection. We bought a shitzu-poodle cross puppy (supposedly), now referred to as a shit-poo. Was cute, is now just stupid and not looking like getting any smarter.

We also own a cat who was cute when he was a kitten. Now he brings home rabbits and other stuff he's not supposed to. Just a matter of time until the neighbours start losing sheep...

These acquisitions were followed closely by 2 rabbits who promptly went missing (feral cat), then 2 more rabbits (which up and died).

We acquired 2 ducks to keep us in eggs, although we are now down to 1 duck. Soon to be none if she doesn't come home. The two of them absconded to the next door neighbour's dam when it was filling and refused to return. A fox cleaned up one and the other is on borrowed time.

We are planning to get some sheep to keep the grass down and Hannah wants a horse. I promised her a pig as a compromise (not sure how that works, I just know she isn't getting the horse).



We have just received a dam fill courtesy of the channel system (no idea how that works yet, but as I'm now in charge of channel filling I should make an effort to find out). So now we have some water to start the fruit trees and vegie patch properly.

And, most importantly, I bought a tractor! Okay, it's really a ride-on mower, but as far as I'm concerned, it's a tractor. I think Michelle likes riding it more than I do.

Farewell!

Here's wishing you and yours a safe, happy Christmas and prosperous New Year. All the best for 2005.

Love from Stephen, Michelle, Hannah, Emily and Amelia.

