

Sixth chemotherapy marathon completed

Over the weekend, I had a lovely time pottering gently around in my garden, doing a bit of weeding, something that was utterly impossible prior to the reduction in the dose of the chemo drugs. This makes contemplating continuing with the chemo regime I have been having a much easier decision to make. Feeling terrible for most of every second week was not giving me the quality of life I wanted when I only have a little time left.

February has been a month of family birthdays with my eldest granddaughter turning 8, my eldest grandson turning 11 and my nephew having his first birthday. A combined family birthday celebration will take place next weekend, and I am really looking forward to this. I also wonder if I will be here to celebrate these birthdays next year.

Organising my next CT scan

At my last appointment with Dr S, he asked me if I had received an appointment for the next CT scan. He said he had ordered one at the beginning of January for the week beginning 22 February. I hadn't had a letter, but hoped I would get one soon. Ten days later I began to worry. I phoned Waitakere Hospital and asked to be put through to the radiology department. I gave the woman on the end of the phone my NHI number and asked her when my scan was booked for. After checking she came back to me and said she would put me through to the booking clerk. I got an answerphone message and left my

details and why I was calling.

Several hours later I got a phone call and was told that no appointment had been made, that they were really behind with their CT scan appointments and were having to run clinics on the weekend. However, I was not eligible for a weekend scan – I didn't ask why – so I would have to have one during the week. Fortunately they managed to fit me in for a scan on Wednesday 24 February. I asked that I be sent a letter confirming the appointment.

I can't help but wonder what would have happened if I hadn't phoned and organised a suitable time for this really important scan. It makes me very nervous. Cancer patients should not have to chase up getting an appointment for a scan and ensuring it is done prior to the next appointment with their oncologist.

Fifth chemotherapy marathon completed

At the oncology appointment prior to my fifth round of chemotherapy last week Dr S told me the pancreatic cancer biomarker (CA 19-9) had reduced from 9,500 to 7,700. He also said he would continue with the lower dose of the four chemo drugs I am on as I feel better in the days following my all-day chemo marathon when on the lower dose.

A CT scan has been booked in for the week after my sixth session, and the results of that scan will help me make a decision about whether I am prepared to undergo another six rounds of chemotherapy. It is going to be a hard decision to make.

Visiting my favourite kauri trees

There are a few places in New Zealand that have played a hugely important part in my life. Trounson Kauri Park and the Waipoua Forest are at the top of that short list. Aware of this, a close friend organised a trip north for the two of us. If it were not for her I may not have made this trip because, aware of the dreadful impact that kauri dieback disease was having in the Waitakere Ranges and in Northland, I was rather fearful of seeing lots of dead and dying kauri trees.

My friend picked me up last Thursday afternoon and we headed north. As we left the city behind us I felt the familiar feeling of relief at getting out of Auckland, but I had no particular expectations of the trip to my favourite kauri trees.

We travelled north through Helensville and alongside the Kaipara Harbour which, because of the spectacular scenery, is my favourite route to Wellsford. As we turned left onto State Highway 12, then stopped at the Matakoho Kauri Museum before heading towards Dargaville, we began reminiscing about some of the other times we had both made this journey north. Arriving at the Top Ten Holiday Park near Trounson we feasted on the wonderful food my friend had made and then wandered around the grounds and along the side of the river.

The next morning we went to Trounson Kauri Park and to my relief it had not changed much since my last visit almost a decade ago. The very moving account of what happened to the kauri forests when the settlers arrived, including some poetry that had moved me to tears when I first read it, was still

there. It was sad to see the dead and dying kauri trees, but there were not as many as I had feared. As I neared the end of the walk I became aware that I was saying goodbye to this wonderful place that had occupied such a significant part of my life and that this would probably be my last visit.

The next morning we headed north into the Waipoua Forest and visited Te Matua Ngahere, my favourite kauri tree, and had a quick stop at Tane Mahuta which was also being admired by a bus load of tourists. The Hokianga Harbour was as breathtakingly beautiful as ever, but we did not stop as we were off to have lunch at the Boatshed Café in Rawene and visit Clendon House and the art galleries, before catching the ferry to Kohukohu where we stayed in a lovely old house that I fell in love with.

One of the highlights of the trip was a repeat visit to Clendon House. I had first visited Clendon House well over a decade ago and met Lyndsay Charman-Love who at that time was working on a book about Jane Clendon, the Maori wife of the owner of Clendon House, who was left a widow in 1872 with little money, huge debts and eight children to raise. He planned to call it "The Book of Jane." When talking excitedly about the poetry I just read at Trounson Kauri Park he told me that he had written it. He then talked at length about Jane, and since then I have never forgotten her.

Imagine my delight on my return visit to Clendon House all these years later to find Lyndsay there again. In fact, I got very emotional and burst into tears. Unfortunately he had not managed to finish "The Book of Jane" because he had been so busy planting thousands of native trees on his property. So I forgave him and bought his book of short stories instead, "*Top Hat and Taiaha and other stories,*" and he signed it for me.

On so many levels, especially the spiritual and emotional ones, it is impossible to convey how much this trip has meant to me.

