

Thursday 25th May 2017, the alarm wakes us up at 5.30am for final preening and packing to catch our flight at 8.00am from Hamilton to Wellington. The drive took us through fairly thick fog which we thought was less than ideal but the plane should be able to take off - right ! Checked in at 7.30am and we were told that our plane was due to fly in from Wellington and at present conditions, this wasn't looking very promising. A final call on this would be made shortly as the fog could lift !! Nervous coffees and window gazing confirmed that the Hamilton landscape was indeed mirky. If you stare at something long enough, you swear its changing, but alas, it appeared to be getting worse and a final announcement around 8.15am told us that our flight had been diverted to Tauranga and we were to go to the Air NZ counter to make alternative travel arrangements. Standing in a cue for 15 minutes we were advised that we could waitlist on the full flight at 10.20am and hope there were some cancellations or wait to fly this afternoon !! (The ceremony was due to start at 2.30pm !!) Apparently Auckland was also experiencing fog and all flights from Tauranga, Rotorua and Taupo were either full or not scheduled till the afternoon. ARRRRGGGGHHHHHH !! Paul took one look at me and said, "Grab the bags, we'll drive"!! A six hour drive! I doubted his sanity but at this point we had No options !! We might be there a tad late, but we'll be there.

In the mean time, Melanie and James (Paul's daughter and son in law) were due to depart Auckland at 9.30am. We had been told that Auckland also had fog but hopefully, fingers crossed all they had to do was take off. Tony, Paul's dad and wife Beth, were due to depart Hamilton at 10.20am on the flight after ours. A quick prayer that the fog would have lifted by then. At 92, any journey is a big undertaking for Tony and Beth was feeling a little delicate with the news that her sister, Paul's Aunty, had just passed away days earlier.

As Paul sped along the road, I was frantically phoning all regional airports to see if anyone had flights departing for Wellington. As luck would have it, Sun Air had a flight with seats available departing Taupo. Short lived luck, it was due to depart in 30 mins and we were approximately 50 mins away. (Yes, if only we had hit the road when we arrived at the airport in Hamilton - Hindsight !!) I even went down the charter airline road and then - Helicopters from Taupo to Wellington. Why not !! I'll tell you why not....."yes Mrs kay we can do that for you at the cost of \$8,500" Driving it is !!

Who knew that SH1 didn't actually have any petrol stations on it after you leave Tokorua unless you vere off the road, eating up precious time. So when you start driving down the eastern bays of Lake Taupo with only 40kms of petrol left and hoping you can make Taurangi, the stress levels start to increase slightly. More prayers with a positive outcome this time, one of the sleepy little fishing villages had a two pump station, a toilet and a small cafe to boot. Grabbing sandwiches and muffins with little time for pleasantries, we set off again.

We had arranged to have a nice family lunch in Wellington before we traveled to Government House !! Melanie and James, having had no flight problems, were winging their way to Wellington for a refreshing day without their children. On the other hand, a call from Tony and Beth informed us that their flight had also been cancelled !! I'm now back on the phone trying to find a way to get them from Hamilton to Auckland to fly from there. (They had to come to Wellington what ever the outcome as they were due to fly from Wellington to Gisborne the next day for the funeral. Paul's niece, Chloe, had driven them to Hamilton airport and was still with them. Messages got back to us that Tony and Beth were stood in the middle of Hamilton airport have a right domestic as Tony was ready to throw in the towel and go home whilst Beth was going to Wellington come hell or high water. Chloe reported that the situation was more than a little bit awkward !!! Their flight options were later that day getting them to Wellington after the ceremony.

So doing the maths, you would have worked out that if we had driven out of Hamilton airport at 8.30am ish for a six hour drive with the ceremony starting at 2.30pm, Paul was going to have to put his foot down. Plus, neither of us knew Wellington so i would have to use the map app on my phone for directions. With the amount of phone calls and google searching I had done earlier, my phone battery was starting to run down and my phone was also doubling as my camera to ecord the days events. By crikey, what else could be thrown our way. When we received our invitations for the investiture, they were accompanied with a cover letter outlining the day and attire suggestions. It distinctly stated NO JEANS. We were at this point both travelling in jeans !! As luck would have it (we were due some), I had packed my outfit in my cabin bad which was on the back seat. I decided it would be a good idea for one of us to be changed. Sitting in the front seat in my bra and undies,

hurtling down SH1, the thought crossed my mind that it really would be less than ideal to be pulled up for speeding at this point !!! Another stroke of luck was to find my phone charger in my handbag.

Yes, maybe our luck was changing.....

The day was full of highs and lows. Back on the “low” road, our lack of respect for the speed limit came to an abrupt end about an hour from Wellington when we caught the eye of a traffic cop. (You could say we were a bit lucky as the clocked speed was not the fastest we had reached that day. However, who travels with their driving licence when the trip you set out to undertake had flying as its main focus !!) I explained the situation and inquired if the officer would like to give us an escort to Government House in Wellington !!! Worth a try and hey, at least I had my clothes on at this point !

On one of the few highs, I finally managed to get through to the staff at Government House who arranged to call ahead to the police guarding the main gate to inform them we were coming, they would hold a park for us and usher Paul inside to change. Paul was due to be invested half way through the proceedings so they would move him to the end. Maybe his father who was travelling especially for the occasion would make it by then !!!

Melanie and James were having a well deserved stress free day in Wellington and hoping we make it in time otherwise Mel might have to accept the medal on behalf of her dad !

Tony and Beth, now back on speaking terms, were on a bus travelling to Auckland Airport in order to fly to Wellington. In their haste to get to the departure gate on arrival, Tony took a fall on the escalator trying to juggle a moving stairway and both their bags. He fell backwards, cut open his head and had a nasty cut to his wrist, blood soiling his clean pressed shirt. The airport staff hold the plane up for half an hour whilst they tend to his injuries. This in turn didn't exactly bode well with them trying to get to Wellington.

So, finally we hit Wellington - luckily not in rush hour. The “waze” app on my phone got us to the main gates at Government House where the police waved us through saying, “Welcome Mr Kay, we've been expecting you” ( I wondered if I should quickly ask them if they could have a word with their colleague up the road !) We drive on and get pulled over at the front entrance way by an Army Officer where he tells us to park and places cones up around the car. I'm whisked inside, doing up the tie on my dress and popping my jacket on to be seated with the other guests in the ballroom. I'm told they will hold the ceremony proceedings until Paul is seated. Paul in turn is rushed off to get changed. A pianist continues to entertain us at the grand piano whilst there is a slight unease in the room whilst guests wonder what the hold up is. The rest of the recipients are ushered to their seats and finally Paul is escorted to his seat with all eyes on him - talk about making an entrance !

The announcement is made that their excellencies Dame Patsy Reedy and Sir David Cascoigne are to make their entrance and we all stand - 15 mins after the programmed start time.

We made it !!!

Ceremony over with a sense of pride, achievement and admiration for a man who shows strong resolve and determination, we all enjoy afternoon tea with a cheeky wine or two and a private reception with Dame Patsy, Governor General and Queen's representative.

Everyone is packing up and a taxi rolls up with Tony and Beth !! Tony's head is still covered with dried blood and his wrist is bandaged. Unaware of their story at this stage I'm wondering just how bad their little domestic was at Hamilton Airport !! We manage to persuade the photographer to stay and take family group photos in front of the portrait of HM the Queen.

Everyone is a little weary and in need of Champagne. We had a very nice family meal at an exceptional French restaurant and collapsed in to bed after an extremely memorable day.

Friday was stress free and spent visiting Wellington's highlights.

The next day saw us back on the road trekking north again. En route we receive a text from Air NZ informing us that our return flight (which we had already organised a cancellation) had been cancelled due to adverse weather conditions !!!!!

