



Rotorua, New Zealand

Mid-year update, July, 2025.

Dear Family and Friends,

For a start I must apologize for not sending my usual annual letter last Christmas. This was due to health-related issues which arose very suddenly in September and involved me in a round of St. John emergency call outs, Doctor's visits, Hospital appointments, two gastroscopies and ongoing medication. I was unable to eat and drink normally for much of the time and did lose some weight, but thankfully the medics managed to fix the problem for the time being at least, and I am once again able to eat and swallow normally. I do, however, have to abide by certain rules but am more than happy to do so and have recovered the lost weight.

Although life for me now is at a much slower pace since retirement at the end of September 2022, it has turned out to be not such a bad thing because my ability to keep up with my former routine schedule has declined dramatically and even such things as having a shower or getting dressed can take me ages. I try to plan my days whilst still in bed of a morning enjoying a cup of tea but seldom achieve all that I'd optimistically planned. I tell myself "palibe kanthu" (no worries) and finish my tea with a smile on my face. At least I'm not going to be late for work, and I revel in the thought! One really good thing is the fact that as a general rule I sleep very well, seven or eight hours a night non-stop, no sleeping pills required. But I do still need a sleep after lunch, usually for at least an hour, except when I'm out fishing in which case I sleep all the way home with Graham driving! Then, if we've been successful, we have fish to measure, weigh and clean and data to record (diary is kept). By the time we're finished I'm pretty tuckered out, but happily so.

One thing I can claim about being retired is that I'm never bored, with trout fishing still being my main activity, added to which I like to attend events like Orchestral Concerts, Ballet performances, Operatic Recitals, Shows and any interesting Open Day events. Cathy usually accompanies and transports me on these occasions, and a frequent additional joy is meeting up with friends and former work colleagues in the venue foyer, many of them being from my days at Rainbow Springs. Sometimes there is quite a group of us which forms and it is just like being at an impromptu family reunion.

From time to time, special occasions arise to which I am invited. One such event was a wedding on 29th. February 2024 (leap year), which was held in the garden of a Rotorua Marriage Celebrant. The happy couple had both worked with me in the Park at Rainbow Springs (it was how they first met). Ben is a New Zealander and Maple is from Beijing, and it was she who invited me to be her witness at the ceremony which I was both delighted and honoured to accede to. It was the smallest wedding I have ever attended with a total of only six people present, including Ben's mother Michelle (his witness), his stepfather (Wayne) (recovering from recent throat surgery) and the lady celebrant, together with the addition of one very special little dog called April. Notwithstanding the generally relaxed atmosphere overall, I found it a poignant and memorable occasion.

Since my last letter 18 months ago, there have been a number of happenings within the family, some good others not so good. For Sarah and husband Bruce, things have worked out nicely; Sarah made a slow but steady recovery from her cancer surgery and follow-up treatment, which enabled them to proceed with plans to tour the South Island in their mobile home. They covered the top half of the island in 2024 and the bottom half this year, each trip lasting two and a half months. They are now very well versed in what the South Island has to offer visitors.

Sarah and Bruce's two children both live and work in Hamilton, some 74 miles north of Rotorua. The oldest, son Logan, is an architectural draughtsman (same as Graham) and is now well settled in his career. He and partner, Chloe, who is a production engineer, upgraded their home a couple of years ago and now reside in a more rural area on the outskirts of town. Sarah and Bruce's daughter, Rainbow-Rose, was able to purchase a town house in 2023 which she moved into and eventually completed her studies. As a result, I had the great pleasure of

accompanying Sarah and Bruce to her graduation ceremony in May 2024, when she received her Bachelor of Counselling degree. She is now in full-time employment.

Graham and Cathy have both been leading very busy lives. Graham continues as a draughtsman at Lockwood Homes (a leading manufacturer of houses in N.Z.) where his 20 years of service with the firm was recognized by Management in 2024. Cathy changed jobs at the end of 2022 so no longer travels to and from Taupo each day (an hour each way which she did for eight years). She is now employed as a Legal Executive in Rotorua and was subsequently voted Branch President of the Bay of Plenty/Gisborne Branch of the Legal Executives Association of New Zealand (which includes Rotorua). This involves her with a lot of extra travel and attendance at meetings and conferences. In addition, she is also a master skipper with Coastguard Rotorua Lakes (14 lakes) and regularly gets called out on search and rescue missions as well as being involved in routine training exercises. At the beginning of 2024, Cathy also went with her youngest daughter, Grace, on a ten-day holiday visit to New York which was a great experience for them both.

Lela, their eldest daughter, took a gap-year from her studies but continued working full time at a Youth Justice facility. She has now given up the job and resumed her studies (Law and Psychology). She and partner, Te Awhitu (known as Te (pronounced Tea)), bought their house in 2024, and we all had the pleasure of enjoying Christmas day lunch there with them.

Son Bailey continued his four-year Apprenticeship in Timber Machining (which is much more complex than it sounds) and gained his Diploma in July 2024. He distinguished himself by being joint Top Student with a fellow student and they were both offered full-time employment by Lockwood Homes which they accepted. Bailey too has recently purchased his first house and is currently in the process of moving in.

Youngest daughter, Grace, celebrated her 21st. birthday in August 2024 and at the end of that year completed her studies (4 years) at Massey University in Palmerston North. She celebrated by going on a cruise to Fiji with friends and later visited Thailand and Vietnam. Her graduation ceremony was in May 2025, and once again I was delighted to be able to attend with the rest of the family. Unfortunately, I let the side down by falling asleep in the packed auditorium and Cathy had to give me a prod when I started to snore!! Grace was quick to use her newly acquired qualification (Bachelor of Animal Science) by successfully applying for a position as an Animal Welfare Inspector in the Ministry of Primary Industries in Invercargill, which is way down at the bottom of the South Island and about as far away from Rotorua (home) as it is possible to get within New Zealand. By all accounts she has settled in well and is enjoying the great variety of work.

Claire, my youngest daughter, was the only one to be born in England because we happened to be on home leave at the time. She grew up in New Zealand and in 1987, moved to Australia with her husband and young daughter, Alexandra. She lived in South Australia (Adelaide) for about 30 years and in more recent times, now an Australian Citizen and living by herself, moved to Tasmania where she is happily settled in her own house with her much-loved dog (Kelpie/Labrador).

In Ontario, Canada, my eldest grandchild, Alexandra (born Rotorua 1985), has had a very traumatic year due to her husband, Andrew, suffering a stroke and subsequently having to undergo heart surgery. Fortunately, their two children, Owen Raymond and Elza-Rose, have maintained good health and progressed well at school, which has helped the situation for Alex. I am enormously thankful to be able to report that Andrew has received excellent hospital treatment and is well on the way to making a full recovery. To add to her woes (in a way), Alex has been promoted within her government job which has meant more work and greater responsibility.

Writing this letter has brought home to me the extent to which the number of interesting events in my daily life have seriously diminished to the point where I have had difficulty in thinking of anything at all to write about. Even so, I do appreciate how lucky I am to have supportive family and friends around me here in New Zealand (52 years), and others around the world who go back to my school days in England and my twenty years in Africa (Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland/Malawi). The memories still abound and in so many instances remain undiminished by the passage of time, a true blessing indeed.

This comes to you with my love and warmest good wishes.

Ray.



Ben and Maple's Wedding

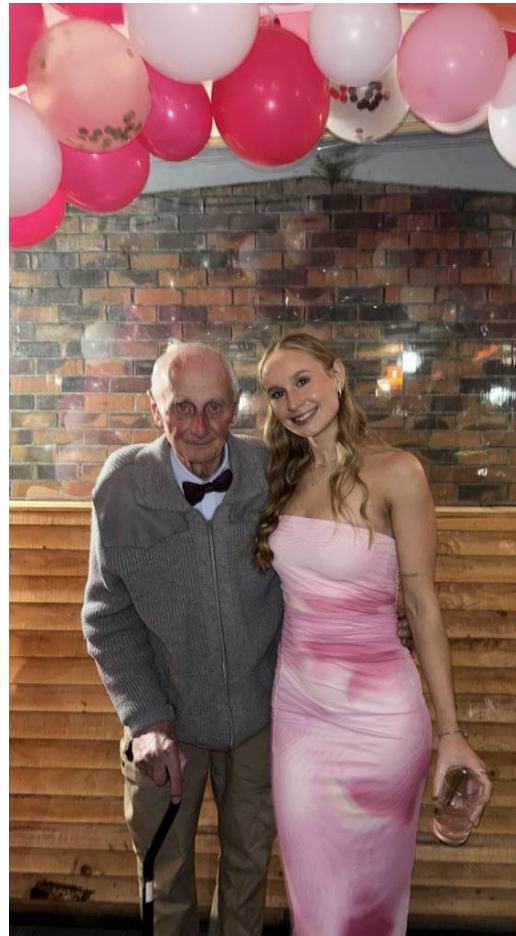


Sign here!





Left to right – Lela, Cathy, Grace, Graham and Bailey at Grace's Graduation



With Grace on Graduation Day.....and on her 21st Birthday



Rainbow's Graduation May 2024



The family in Canada before Andrew's illness



March 2025. A chance meeting after the Ballet.
Jenny (in black) worked with me at
Rainbow Springs for six years



These two characters are now 9 years old and
still enjoying life with Cathy and Graham



February 2025. Maple with her biggest trout
to date 8 lbs 13 ozs – with April's help!



New York, New York!
February 2024. Cathy and Grace.