



2021. So many things packed into a year which seems to have lasted for 5. And yet they happened in spurts, packed in around some very slow times. We started the year with friends, including a beautiful beachside holiday with our best friends, and couldn't have asked for a better beginning to 2021. Another dear friend had a photo exhibition in February, and we also escaped with one of our closest friends to see Frozen the Musical, a delightful Sydney weekend. We snatched coast weekend after coast weekend, wherever we could, including a sunny day trip on Easter day. We had outings to the Arboretum, including to see the balloons flying overhead, to Tidbinbilla (koalas!), walks up Mt Taylor and bike rides round the lake.

The day to day was full of energy (on the kids' part), and full of digging deep and carrying on, on our part. There was school, dancing, bounce class; Pete started running again part-way through the year, and of course we can't escape from work. Lucy started fulltime school with huge enthusiasm (and a fractured wrist by the end of the first week, though her enthusiasm never waned). Chloe was very grateful to be in a class with her two best friends again. My dancing picked back up and I have been feeling stronger and fitter than I have in years. Everything seemed to be looking up, early in 2021.

Halfway through the year, though, covid escaped quarantine in Sydney. And suddenly nothing was looking up any more. Canberra watched anxiously as covid crept closer across NSW. Dear friends were heartbroken at being unable to see their family and friends locked down with no warning. Coast trips were no longer on the cards. We were lucky to be able to celebrate our 15th wedding anniversary with friends from near and far, both gathered in our home and, later in the day, gathered on our computer screen (while the kids slept over at a friend's house). Eventually, though, covid reached us too, and home we stayed. 10 weeks of home, complete with remote learning and working from home. Partway through, they started to allow minimal contact with other people. So then played hard with the kids next door, and we started to reconnect in person with our closest friends bit by bit, carefully and outdoors. Our village has been so important this year. Always there, always supporting, always caring.

We did eventually come out the other end of lockdown and the kids went back to school, back to their social lives, back to dancing. Pete was able to attend Bathurst races, we managed to get to the coast for Lucy's birthday, and the dance school still filmed all the end of year show dances everyone had worked so hard on - and this year the Junior Dancer all-rounder award was given to Chloe! We are so very proud of the way she has stepped up at school and at dancing this year. And at the same time, Lucy absolutely blossomed at school. She learned to read properly over lockdown (not my doing!!) and hasn't looked back since. Her teacher has been absolutely wonderful, and she is so excited to see what her new school year brings. She dives forward into everything in life with great enthusiasm and joy and energy and we love to watch her grow and learn what she likes to do.

Alongside all of that, there has been wave after wave of despair this year, particularly around my work-life. Every border change arriving just as things had started to look up again, sending me back into the depths of

my duvet for a few hours before having to shake it off and go face the latest work challenges. After the lockdown came a fresh quarantine for the girls as covid hit the school, Pete stepping up to look after the kids stuck home together as I was able to return (masked) to work. And most recently one of Chloe's oldest, closest friends diagnosed with leukaemia and sent to Sydney for months with her Mum – an ongoing challenge they are meeting daily with strength and grace.

So overall, 2021 has been about resilience, finding the strength day after day to step up and meet the new challenges, deal with the new curveballs that have come our way. About reaching out in hope again, only to meet a new obstacle. About not giving up. About finding ways to get through with the support and strength and caring and love of the people around us (locally and internationally). About finding ways as a family to keep on smiling through this rollercoaster ride of a year. Chloe and Lucy have been wonderful (mostly). They fight as all siblings fight, of course, but they also have incredibly big, caring hearts and when they see Pete and I upset they focus in hard on what they can do to help us feel better. I couldn't ask for lovelier kids. And Pete, well, Pete just quietly steps up and does what needs doing. If I need to get out for a walk and leave the kids at home, then he says ok. If I need to escape to the coast for a weekend to breathe the sea air, then he says ok. If a friend needs me to take a day out and leave the kids with him, then he says ok. He is wonderful and supportive and our family is all the stronger for him.

Tonight, we are heading into 2022 feeling tired. I am hopeful, but wary of being too hopeful. Is the light at the end of a tunnel an on-coming train, like it sometimes seemed to be last year? But I am also feeling loved, and so thankful for it. And so, I think my words of 2022 are going to be 'finding joy in the moment', 'love your people', 'gratitude', and 'science is amazing'.

2022 is likely to still be full of covid curveballs, and plenty of other challenges along the way. 2021 though has shown us each individually and as a family that we have a strength and resilience we hadn't tapped yet. We can do this together, as a family, as a village, and with our extended family and friends. 2022 has promise! A planned holiday that's been in my head for 20 years is finally trying to become reality. Covid, well, who knows. The girls have more dance classes, new books to enjoy, we are learning more every day about what makes them tick, and we already have coast trips planned. 2022 will be okay, no matter what hits us we will get through it, together. Just like we got through 2021. With chocolate.



Poster by Chloe