

Well. 2023 has definitely had its challenges – what year doesn't, particularly with kids? They are constantly growing, changing, learning and developing and we spent all our time trying to keep up with the next stage!

We began the year with a neurodivergency diagnosis for Chloe, which came as no surprise to us at all but did provide us with additional tools to get support systems into place at school and dancing, which have helped as the year went on. There were some particularly challenging moments at the start of the year but as life settled into a more predictable routine and things made a bit more sense they've improved pretty consistently. She's definitely hit the tween stage, and often brings the attitude of a teenager with her, but she is also an absolute delight, kind and caring and incredibly thoughtful.

Lucie settled in well to her new class at school, but discovered that not all your classmates are always going to be nice to you and that's been an ongoing emotional rollercoaster for her. We hope that next year will give her a better environment. Despite that, she excelled at school and has had some lovely times through the year with a couple of her closer friends from her class. She loves everyone and everything, and mostly everyone and everything loves her back!

The word of the year for 2023 however was not challenge. It was **dance**. We knew when Chloe said that she wanted to join a crew in 2023 that it would be a bigger year than we've dealt with before, but we hadn't realised just how big. Not only did she join the junior crew, Reckless, but on top of that she has continued multiple other styles of dancing – tap, ballet, acro, contemporary and lyrical. I suggested that maybe she wanted to just set up a bed at the dance school when we worked out that her schedule would have her there six days a week! Lucie and I then worked our schedules out to go alongside Chloe's so that everyone could do the dancing they wanted to do, and Lucie's 3 days a week combined with my two-ish, on top of all of Chloe's mean that I reckoned by the end of term 1 my car could've driven itself between home and dancing without me. We are fortunate to live close by, allowing me to run up and down multiple times in a night if necessary!

And so it hasn't just been classes (and new dance shoes). For Chloe there were also showcases at competitions, the mid-year performance, a performance at an art gallery event for AusDance Week, and a video project. Both girls took tap exams (with excellent results), and of course there was the big end of year show – I don't recommend, from a parent stress level, trying to keep 11 different show costumes together, in one piece and clean! And finally for me there was also a performance, as for the first time the adult division of the dance school has expanded into so many styles and classes that they gave us an opportunity to put on our own show, Revue-style. It was an intense 8 weeks of Sunday rehearsals combined with daily home practice, but a lot of fun, and the way it was organised brought together a lot of the adult dancers that don't usually cross paths, so it brought our community a really lovely opportunity in so many ways. We're all looking forward to the next one!

Dance really did take over our lives a bit this year, and so there haven't been the constant stream of coast weekends and getaways we've been able to manage in previous years – because Saturdays have been taken up not just with dance classes but also swimming lessons and in the winter, soccer for Lucie as well. We thought perhaps it would be good for Lucie to branch out a little from the dancing, given how wide her sister's shadow was cast this year, and not only did she pick up soccer but she also joined our local Joeys group, which has given her some fun experiences including nature walks both day and night, her first camp (in the scout hut!) and she even taught her first dance class to her fellow Joeys!

Despite all of that going on, we wouldn't be us without at least a bit of travel - though I definitely came off best in this corner. The kids and I started and ended the year at the beach – in January with

several friends down at Jervis Bay, which is always a delight, and then as the school year ended we took ourselves for some R&R at Bermagui with its beautiful ocean pools to snorkel and swim for a few days before Christmas. We snuck in a couple of long weekends as well, one in March and one in October. Pete managed to escape to spend a weekend with a friend watching the V8s at Bathurst, as well as joining us for a couple of days in Jervis Bay at the start of the year, and as for me, well, work has been good to me this year. Alongside a couple of working weekends in Brisbane there was also a week floating up the Mekong through Vietnam and Cambodia, a team weekend in the Southern Highlands and a short cruise with a friend (and 1300 other travel agents) on a delightful cruise ship that ventured to Australia for the first time this year – which was so much fun I've already booked to take another friend back on the same ship in a year's time! And last but not least I was also able to join a Taize-based retreat on the outskirts of Sydney early in the year, a beautiful weekend of prayer and music and gardens.

And in amongst the busyness of dance, and work, and soccer, and joeys, and swimming lessons, and more dance, and the bits of travel that have snuck in, there have also been 40ths (Pete, of course, and a couple of my other close friends as well – although I will always be the oldest!), days out for both adults and kids, and playdates - even sleepovers - for both girls. And Pete & I both do our best to keep up with our friends as much as possible wherever and however we can - over drinks, dessert, a cuppa, a dance class, running errands together, or whatever else we can come up with! Busy lives all around mean you make it work even if it seems unconventional.

Finally, this year, to go with all the dancing, we've had fun expanding our musical repertoire. Through the year we've picked up a number of new soundtracks to sing along to in the car or to dance to. Chloe has developed a love for Taylor Swift, Lucie holds fast to KISS, but they both also know all the words to Matilda the Musical, several Legally Blonde songs, most of SIX the musical, a fair bit of Michael Jackson and P!nk, and any number of others as we have dived into a number of Broadway soundtracks as well as the pop they bring home from school and the varying tunes that they have danced to through the year! It's a delightful exploration that I look forward to continuing with them next year.

And so with that, we wish you all a 2024 of softness, joy, sea air, good music, comfortable friendships and new adventures. Deep peace of the running wave to you, and deep peace of the shining stars to you. Look out for those stars, they shine on us all, no matter where in the world you are – just a little reminder that even if we're half a world away from you, we don't forget you.

Much love,
The Taylors.

