

2024

31 December 2024
Wanniassa, ACT

As 2024 draws to a close, I've been wondering what to say about this year. A year that I saw in on a city dance floor and am sending off curled up in the big armchair in a quiet house, hoping that tonight the girls will sleep soundly, and we'll all start 2025 feeling well rested.

It's been a big year of change for all of us, one of the biggest I can think of, as for the first time since I was 17, I've been single this year. Single, and yet of course still Mum. A decision, in January, that for everyone's sake we should divide our family, saw Pete move into an apartment a short drive away and everyone having to recalibrate to a new way of living over the year.

For the girls, of course, it's been an incredibly hard year as they have slowly started to get used to moving between two homes every week, always missing 'the other parent', and I'm ever grateful for the layers of support that surround them while they find their way through. I asked what they'd highlight from this year and Chloe's answer was her friends. "They're amazing". She's nearly 11, and over the year the friendships have twisted and turned a bit, but she's got some very solid people in her corner and she has leaned on them hard when she's needed to, not just school friends but the people she's grown up with as her supports as well, both her age and her safe grown-ups. Both she and I are so glad that she has them.

Lucie, missing her closest school friend (who moved away at the start of the year), has thrown her heart into her dancing, and stepping up from recreational classes to join the new junior performance troupe at our dance school gave her a new set of friends. They've been there week in, week out, a beautiful little group of girls, always kind and caring, along with a group of teachers supporting them that she just loves (and they love her right back). She still finds it hard to express how she's feeling, because she really is still learning to understand what she's feeling for herself, but she has never failed to come home from her troupe classes with a smile on her face. She's very much looking forward to next year as she moves up a troupe level to the next age group, and takes on an expanded challenge with the same group of girls plus a few additional friends, and an extra favourite teacher back in her timetable as well. The dance school really is her third home, her safe place, and her warm hug community.

And so with the changes in our home making everything feel rocked off its feet, continuing on with their dancing for both girls has been not just fun, but also reassuringly familiar. Chloe took part for a second year in crew (hip-hop), plus a couple of extra classes that helped keep her busy instead of waiting around for her sister. On top of classes 4 days a week, there have also been a number of competitions and performances for both girls, with Chloe's crew even travelling to Sydney for WSB national finals in June, and Lucie's troupe winning 1st place at one of the Eisteddfods they competed at in September, along with energetic performances at mid-year and end of year with the dance school. I'm so very proud of them both, they always give it their all and I love to watch them shine doing something they both love. Chloe will also continue crew next year. Alongside that, she's taking on/continuing with several other styles, and is very much looking forward to having a couple of her favourite teachers back to teach her again. She loves to dance, but she *particularly* loves to dance with her people, and 2025 is looking really positive for that.

They've both continued to do well at school, too. This year Chloe's class had a couple of extra opportunities, taking part in Wakakirri, an inclusive dance piece performed on stage at Canberra Theatre, and also Y5 camp, staying at a nearby scout centre for a couple of nights. It was her first venture of the kind, so we were a bit unsure about how it would go, but she had a fun (and exhausting) time and came home singing its praises. She's a bit unsure about being year 6 next year – it's getting a bit too close to high school time for her liking – but I know they'll both face the new school year with determination and find a way through the hard bits, just like they have this year.

And as for me, it's been a year of two halves, as every week has divided itself into "Mum" days and "Cat" days alongside the girls' split schedule. Alongside the half-a-week-at-a-time schedule, it has been such an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows, and the overriding feelings for me this year are two dimensions of this; grief, and gratitude. Grief for what was lost, what couldn't be, a future that's had to be shattered before it can be rebuilt. Gratitude for the people I have surrounding me who have picked

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me up over, and over, and over again in so many ways. Grief for friends that have chosen to walk a different path this year. Gratitude for new friends making their way into my life instead, filling an unexpectedly empty space. Grief catching me unexpectedly off guard so often for one reason or another. Gratitude for having time to be quiet and listen to who I am and what I need, to be able to be kind to myself in those moments. My heart breaks for the girls regularly, wishing so hard that they didn't have to walk this path of only being able to have one of their parents at a time, all this upheaval and change they've had to deal with over the year that wasn't their fault. And then amidst all of that, there have been so many individual moments of joy.

Joy in the rap battle the girls held in the living room the weekend we came home from the store with karaoke microphones. Joy in bouncing on the trampoline, and outings to the pool, and friends giggling over pizza in the hammock. Joy in making friendship bracelets with me, and borrowing my pretty boots to put on a fashion show. Joy in decorating biscuits, making Pete a birthday cake, learning to make banana bread, and telling me I've forgotten the lyrics again and no, I still can't dance hip-hop properly. Our soundtrack is musicals, Taylor Swift, random kid-friendly pop, and the occasional cameo from Kiss.

Alongside the little moments that shone at home, I've also adventured. I've been to see P!nk, and Taylor Swift, and to the theatre, both here and in Sydney. The girls and I started the year with friends at the coast in January. I made my way to the Gold Coast in February for a work weekend and followed that up with a wonderful 5 days in Portugal in July also ~technically~ for work, but mostly delighting in the company of a couple of my nearest and dearest who came across Europe to meet me there for that short time. My travel year rounded out with a couple of days at the coast post-Christmas; waves and sunshine and good friends are such good balms for the soul. Most of all though this year, the smaller joys have shone through for me as well, as I've focused on making time to just be with my friends, and with myself. And of course, I've danced this year too. The dance community refills my heart week in and week out, with an extra boost at our mid-year Revue where the schedule brings in opportunities to dance favourite styles with both old and new friends I don't necessarily see in the week.

And finally, although we may not have gone far as a family this year, we did have a visit from one of our family's dearest friends – Nana (Carole) joined us for the school holiday fortnight at the end of term 3 and we had such a lovely time with her. The kids and I between us took her to Tulip Top Gardens, the arboretum, the pool, the mall, and the theatre, and generally enjoyed being around each other for those couple of weeks. We lost count of the uno games that were played, and she surprised herself with her trampoline bouncing capabilities in our back yard. With regular calls to Grandma & Grandpa, postcards arriving year round from Aunty Mair, and hellos dropping in here and there from a few others, the kids know they have a world-wide family that loves them dearly, and we are grateful for that too.

It's been a year full of dance and a year full of feelings and a year full of love and laughter and tears and anger and every other imaginable feeling that you can think would be a part of a year of grief and joy combined. It's been incredibly heartwarming to see how loved and supported the girls have been, and I don't think I can express how cared for I have felt by the friends that have held me up this year. With the sort of people we've got around us, I know that one day, eventually, the girls will join me in feeling that the joys outweigh the sadness. And until that time comes, we'll keep on dancing, and we'll keep on loving, and we'll sit with all those big feelings while we keep on wearing Mum's pretty boots as often as we can.

