

What do you do when you start 2022 with your best friend's daughter (who is also your daughter's best friend) having recently been rushed to Sydney, a 3.5hr drive away, for Leukaemia treatment? You say "well, I can't cook, but I can drive" and you visit, and visit, and visit and visit. In January I took both the girls with me a couple of times for mini-breaks, and we explored Coogee and its beaches and pools as well as spending precious time with our friends. Through the rest of the year I visited every week that I could, and was also able to bring Chloe up with me to spend some time with Ashley every couple of months. We missed them hugely all year and are so glad to have them back in their own home as 2022 ends.

In all of it though, I am so so thankful to have been in a position to support our friends through this nightmare of a year. I am glad that I had a way to help both of them while they lived away from their home and their family. I am so grateful to Pete, Chloe & Lucy for stepping up in their own ways to support me doing what I did. I am incredibly grateful for the amount of togetherness and time I have been able to spend with my best friend this last year, despite living in different cities for almost all of it. I have watched on in awe as Ashley and Femke have travelled their hard, complicated and uncertain rollercoaster of treatment with so much strength and grace as curveball after curveball came their way, and I have been incredibly proud and blessed to be part of a community that came together to support their family through it all. Finally, now, they are home, and it feels so very special to be able to just pop in, planned or on a whim, and to know that at last they are just a few minutes away again.

It wasn't all hard, though. Even in the Sydney days, although some were hard and sad, we still found joy and delight through the year - in icecreams and sunshine along the beachwalk, meeting new and beautiful friends, taking Chloe and Ashley on adventures for pancakes, and burgers, and to the Aquarium, spending an evening together watching Eurovision with our village friends on the other end of our phone, Starlight room quiztimes and so many other little moments that were special.

Alongside all that, there has been a rollercoaster year at home in Canberra too. Ups and downs at school for Chloe as her class rolled through multiple teachers, and both girls struggled while the school was still separated at the start of the year and they couldn't see each other across the unit divisions. But as the year went on the school was reunited, both girls made new friends in their own classes, Chloe finally got a teacher who seems to be here to stay for a bit, and things calmed down for them both, culminating in Lucy being awarded the Year 1 Academic Excellence award at the final assembly of the year.

My work has been a bit of a journey this year as well. From the closures that marked 2020 to the ongoing 2021 rollercoaster of interstate borders opening and closing, to a sudden reopening of Australia's borders at the end of 2021, we have never really known what was going to happen. Well, what happened is that travel didn't just bounce back, it trampoline to insanity in 3 seconds flat. We all looked at each other at the end of February trying to work out what had just happened. The next few months were like being trampled by a wave - in a good way, but we were still completely bowled over. I was in fact so grateful through the next few months to have the weekly Sydney trips continuing as they gave me a really clear cut day off each week!

Eventually, however, the wave wasn't stopping and with the departure of a couple of our other longstanding team members making it ever hard to keep on top of my sanity, I decided it was time to find a new corner to sell travel from. I reached out to the manager of our local Travel Associates - the boutique arm of Flight Centre - to see if he thought there might be a space for me in his office. A week later we'd had coffee and set up my transfer for the start of August. Keeping it in the Flight Centre group meant that I could take everything I was working on and simply keep working on it from the new space. Office hours instead of retail, and a calm quiet corner to work in as part of a hugely experienced team meant that the second half of the year saw my work stress levels drop by about 95%. So far, it's been an excellent move and I'm excited to see what 2023 brings into this space.

Pete has been the absolute prop & mainstay of the family. I realise I say this every year, but I do because it continues to be true. The girls and I are all over the place so much between school and work and swimming and dancing and social lives and we simply could not do it without his steady presence and willingness to give his



time to drive people around. He's continued to work at Wildbear, always focused on how he can improve their systems and meet their needs before they even realise they need him. He has been able to continue to work partly from home which has been invaluable in allowing for school runs and dance class runs. His soccer team had a good year this year, reaching finals, and he managed a couple of escapes as well – to Brisbane with the team for a weekend comp with old friends, and to Bathurst to watch the V8s whizz round the track (despite worries it might get rained off). He's dabbled here and there in cycling and running, taking part in a September ride to raise funds for charity and completing several challenges of distance-over-time running or walking when he's been able to fit them in.

The other big parts of our lives this year have been dancing, and holidays. I've joked over the year that we might as well move into our beloved dance school – between the three of us (myself, Chloe & Lucy) we've been there 5 days a week all year, taking part in 10 classes a week. The girls have come on in leaps and bounds (sometimes quite literally) and produced brilliant performances in the end of year show. On top of that, having been invited to join the junior development hip hop crew in term 2 (which Chloe and I ultimately decided we just couldn't manage this year), we are so proud of Chloe for successfully auditioning for both crew and troupe at the end of 2022, and so excited for her to be joining the Reckless crew in 2023. She doesn't want to give up her other dance styles though, and so we are stepping up next year from 5 days a week, to 6! Lucy has enjoyed her dancing, but I think she's a bit less sure that it's her only out of school home, and so is looking forward in 2023 to taking on Soccajoeys and Joeys to broaden her activities a bit alongside continuing to dance in a variety of styles. And I am very much looking forward to keeping on with whatever jazz and ballet classes I can get my hands on, alongside the bounce classes that keep me fit and are trying to get me feeling trim again.

Finally, but very much not least, we have still managed to explore this beautiful country we live in - in spades. Not only have we had some time visiting Sydney and Coogee, we have been to our usual haunt at Broulee – with one memorable weekend with our beautiful photographer friend Belle and her daughter, my pointe shoes and a couple of suitable floaty dresses! I escaped (kid-free) to Malua Bay with friends for a weekend, our January holidays also included a week at Huskisson with several other friends who joined us for all or part of the week, I had a little work 3-day trip on a beautiful small luxury cruise ship visiting Tasmania for the first time, but to top it all off were two particular holidays.

In June & July, we flew west for a holiday that has been 20 years of dreaming in the making. We cajoled Grandma & Grandpa into joining us for as much of our busy trip as they thought they could handle, flew over to Perth, collected a hire car and drove 5000kms in 3 weeks. Well, Pete drove (all 5000 of them)! We visited Rottnest to see the quokkas, spent a few days at beautiful Karjini National park, snorkelled with whalesharks and manta rays and turtles on the Ningaloo Reef, celebrated our anniversary with flame grilled burgers and live music on an outback Station, admired the whales from Coral Bay and dolphins at both Coral Bay and Monkey Mia, fed the pelicans and wandered the gorges at Kalbarri, swam with sealions (at least, Pete & I did) at Jurien Bay, marvelled at the pink lake at Port Gregory and wandered through the Pinnacle Desert at Nambung National Park at sunset. We rounded the road trip off with a delightful family gathering for lunch and bowling in Perth, before the girls and I waved Pete off to head home and took ourselves south for a week with Auntie Laraine in Busselton. The weather was so delightful while we roadtripped, but the southwest in winter is another matter. Fortunately, we were there to see the family and not the beaches! We had a lovely week enjoying Laraine, John & Michael's company, continuing to spend time with Grandma & Grandpa and visiting Liz & Ian in Augusta as well, and travelled home feeling like we had done well from our trip and keen to get back to our Canberra house and school and dance classes and friends!

And then, to round off what has been quite a year in every way, one of my oldest and dearest friends, Carole, flew out to join us for 2 weeks as school finished for Christmas. Despite a wet start to the summer, we headed down to the coast and the sun came out while we introduced Carole to chicken schnitzels, looked for kangaroos, watched dolphins in the bay and stingrays in the creek, and showed off our delightful South Coast NSW beaches,



from Broulee to Pambula Beach, with creeks and rivermouths just perfect for swimming and paddleboards and surfbeaches to jump waves or boogieboard, topping it off with a Christmas day outing to the beautiful Blue Pool at Bermagui for something a little different. Our last few days together, back in Canberra, included outings to the National Arboretum, Tidbinbilla to see the koalas (but no platypus that we could spot), and Gibraltar Falls, before we waved her bus off to Sydney just yesterday.

And now 2023 is almost here, and I am no longer nearly 40 but in fact definitely 40, with plans for 2023 that include getting the garden colourful, some interior decorating, maybe buying and occasionally wearing lipstick, and some more holiday dreaming. Pete is already booked in for Bathurst and I am planning to join a Taize retreat. There will no doubt be coast weekends, trips to the ice rink, adventures and birthday parties and playdates for the girls slotted in amongst the dance classes and other activities we're excited to begin in February.

2022, you were a real rollercoaster of a year, with a lot of hard things and a lot of incredible people and some amazing adventures and unexpected paths opening up. We have all grown and learned and watched and experienced so much this year and I am so proud of all of us for what we've done. It's time to move on though, to a new year.

So, welcome, 2023. We have our village, our community, our friends and each other. We're excited for what you have in store for us, and while we know there will probably be curveballs, we know that with the people around us, we can handle whatever you might bring.



*Family photo the only way we know how. Kalbarri National Park*

Footer images: WA landscapes

