

2018

Well. When 2018 started I knew changes were coming. Work was changing in a big way and no-one could predict how that would go. Chloe was starting pre-school, another big change for everyone, and at the same time she was moving from Blueberries to junior ballet, and starting swimming lessons. Mornings and afternoons next door once a week, with next door's eldest at ours another day a week. We had plans for a few outings to the beach, and a holiday with the A-W Grandparents to Queensland in the middle of the year. A gentle home life to go along with all the changes.



And then work happened, and work happened some more, and suddenly in May it looked like I would be eligible to head to Germany for a weekend in July at the company's expense. And then if I was flying all the way to Germany, maybe I could fly to England while I was in the area. And so the concept of the fastest tour of South-West UK I've ever done developed and became a reality as everything fell into place around it. At the same time a very dear, very long-standing friend got in touch to excitedly tell me she was engaged! Of course I would be going back for her wedding. I couldn't imagine not being there. And so a second trip to England within the same year suddenly also became a reality for me. This one with the kids, a very different trip to the first. And my year changed even more from what I was expecting. "When we're busy making our plans, God laughs". Oh, yes, he does.

While Chloe was settling in and making new friends at school and ballet, and Lucy was becoming more and more chatty and, well, Lucy-ish, I was trying desperately to extract myself from the mass of work that was landing on me – but in the end, that mass of work is what got me to Europe in July.



I was working with a new team, a new boss, in my old spot, with my old clients and several of my colleagues' old clients too. It's been a rollercoaster, at work and at home. The kids are growing ever older, smarter, more mature and thinking more. Chloe took part in her first dance school concert in November. Lucy is learning to distinguish what she wants from what Chloe tells her she wants. Both kids continue to love the water, and the swimming lessons changed Chloe's confidence beyond all recognition in just a few short weeks.

Church has been more regular in our lives this year. A wonderful response from our lovely Maggie last Christmas drew Lucy into kids' church alongside Chloe, and it made a huge difference. We may not be able to avoid the consumerism we live in, but we can teach them the additional values alongside it. Santa might be coming, however much we want to avoid it, but at least they know he's coming with presents because it's Jesus' birthday.

The two visits to England were something quite incredible. The first trip, so short but so precious, time with my closest people that was just for us. It takes having kids to understand quite how precious that time can be. We made the absolute most of it. And the opportunity to finally, *finally* visit Mair in her own house in Germany. It's one thing to hear about a house, and people, and see pictures, and quite another to be there, and see the house and the garden and the village and meet the people. It was so short, and exhausting, the whole trip, and so incredibly worth it. Rounded off by a work-funded weekend in Berlin with a conference hosted by Michael McIntyre, which included Jimmy Carr as one of the guests. British Comedy at its best. I couldn't have picked a better Global to qualify for, even if it happened unintentionally while I was just trying to keep afloat through all the changes at work.



I flew home, unpacked, repacked and then we headed with my Dad & Ruth to the Whitsundays for a week. A very different week. 'You're going to relax, then?' everyone said. "Um, well, I'm taking 2 small children and I'll have just been away without them for a week", said I. Relaxing was not on the cards. Sunshine, and beach, and pool, and a day out without them, and dinner out while the grandparents babysat cheerfully again and again – those were on the cards. Along with the early mornings, and midnight

wakeups, and endless requests for snuggles. And the cockatoos that stole the bathers and dropped them on the roof the other side of the street! We had a lovely time. I was still exhausted by the end of it!

Another 10 weeks and we were packing again, this time me and the kids, ready to head to England. The little chant in my head "It's ok, Grandpa will be at the airport" got us through the long hours of flying, and the 7 hour transit. Thankfully, through Singapore, where the pool was used well. The two weeks in England were much, much more than I had hoped. More time, though with the attention more spread, and again, the people that mattered. Some came just to see us (thankyou thankyou thankyou). Others were there for the same reason we were. Old haunts were visited, memories revisited and lots of gentle chatter, play and exploration. A sleepover with the grandparents, walking Nana's dog, baking, paddling... there was so much joy and love and laughter around (with a tantrum or two thrown in). And to top it all off such a beautiful wedding in such a special place, and I was so thankful we were able to not just be there, but actually enjoy it.



We're home now, the jetlag has worn off, work is still unsettled but somehow muddling through, and soon we will head to the coast for our Christmas holiday in our favourite spot. Our littlest Lucy has just turned three, with a purple fairy cake and beach party at the river giving her a wonderfully happy few days. She is ever determined, stubborn, independent, cheeky, and wonderfully, wonderfully loving. Our bigger Chloe is preparing for fulltime school next year at kindergarten with her new group of schoolfriends. She is ever a bright, shining, whirling dervish of chatter and ballet and emotions both up and down.

I haven't really mentioned Pete. He's been there all along. Right beside me in everything, supporting me, encouraging me, taking on endless little jobs every day, every week, every month and every year, helping this little family be what it is. Staying calm when the emotions fly between the kids and I. He is truly the rock of our family, and we would not be where we are without him in our lives. We couldn't love him any more than we do.



Our village has been there too. Through the ups and the downs, while we've questioned our sanity, our actions, our plans and our ideas. When we've needed help and support, and we've also helped to support others. Our village is the best. 'Putting Chloe on my calendar' says one. 'Putting 'bring coffee' on my calendar' says another. It takes a village to raise a child, the old wisdom says. It sure does. It's not the same village that they were talking about, but it doesn't really matter how you get your village. Everyone needs a village. Our village is our extended family, and we couldn't do this without them either. I am so grateful for so many people in our lives that have meant this year, this unbelievable out of the blue year somehow turned into what it did without falling apart.



Ohana means family. Family means nobody gets left behind, or forgotten. Our house is called Ohana, because we are a family. The best family anyone could ask for. And together as our little family unit, and with our extended family and village family, we will take what 2019 may have for us, and we will turn it into another year of growth, and new experiences, and love between us, in many shapes and forms and words - and Ohana will continue to live on in our little house, for many more years to come.



(for an idea of our year in pictures: see below!)

