
[Stirring From An Old Life](#)

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on Apr 06, 2013

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After unloading Stephanie and her world onto the pavement, we hugged and said our goodbyes with big smiles, and promises to keep in touch. Watching in the rear-view mirror as her figure grew smaller and smaller, then disappear round a corner into Cathedral Square in Christchurch, I had to smile. She was towing a purple tartan suitcase, wearing a funky polka dot backpack, with a pair of fifties retro sunglasses perched on her nose. Her confident stride and endless good humour taking her to 'base'; a young travelers hostel in the heart of the city. Then she was gone, to her future, a little bit of my heart went with her.

In the evening traffic jam out of Christchurch and on the way back to Mayfield, my home. I reflected on conversations we'd had during her "pit stop" at my place on her travels across the length and breadth of New Zealand. She was heading north after spending time in Fiordland, Queenstown and Te Anau on the trip of a lifetime. She arrived on a big green 'Kiwi' bus, looking just a little tired and a little cold as I picked her up from the bus stop on a wet grey Canterbury day. There was a big grin and a "Magic" when she saw the log burner going full blaze, you could see her start to unwind, needing motionless calm and warmth to recharge.

The next three days were rained in. Steph spent much of those days relaxing on a sofa under a duvet, content in front of the fire, with her nose in a book she was luxuriously determined to finish. To "Chill" properly is an art form and Steph had the gift.

Surfacing occasionally from the recharge, we talked about her adventures: glaciers, tandem skydiving, life on the road, her trip to date through Laos, Cambodia and Australia and the way back home via Fiji and America. We talked about her future, what it may bring, and about the face piercings she got put in. These puzzle me, you think you know someone fairly well and they do something to make you think again. In truth I have never figured out why she got two studs and a ring in her lip plus six others dotted around her body, location undivulged. I asked Steph if she planned to get anything else done, more piercings, studs? What about tattoos? Under raised eyebrows a curious expression of devilment appeared in her eyes as she said "Who knows what the future will bring?". After knowing her for half her life, this I think was the real Steph, rarely seen, rarely encountered, but always a lot of fun.

The sun finally shone and the next couple of days were spent on a road trip to Erewhon for a hike in the high country also helping to paint the weather-worn deck. To climb 'Edoras' hill, Steph had chosen a natty pair of pink and white flip flops, which as it turned out were perfect for crossing streams. Except of course when they get twisted off and yours truly has to go and retrieve them as they float rapidly downstream. Too soon, it was time for her to go and catch up with friends at "base" then on to Kaikoura to swim with Dolphins. I am sure she has a guardian angel walking with her.

Returning home, and after finishing my chores, I sat down with a glass of wine gathering the memories of a time not so long ago when a young man sat in a restaurant in

Peshawar, Pakistan, talking about past, present and future adventures. The buzz, excitement and comradeship of that day, my twenty-fifth birthday, and of those times on the road amongst friends were brought alive once more. The romance of travel, the journey, the wonder, the snow capped mountains, spices in the bazaar, beach parties, starlit skies, beautiful sunsets and dry deserts, all for the seeing, tasting and feeling.

It is hard to know where my journey to Tanzania began. Where does a journey ever begin? Steph's departure had unsettled me. I felt like putting a pack on my back and wandering the earth too. It crystalised plans, ideas, thoughts and feelings emerging into my South Island life, uneasily set aside, over the past year.

It was time to move on, time for a change.

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