

19 July, 2010

Dear All,

It is one month since Mary-Jane and I departed from Cairns. That means 30 days that on most of those days I wanted to write this and thank you for one of the most memorable farewell nights I have received in my life. The club management and specially Rob, Roxanne, Laurie and everyone else behind the preparations of such a well orchestrated event ,my wife and I, we both thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

A special thanks goes to the swimmers and Clinton, Helen, Tessa - a huge thank you for their wonderful power point presentations. They will always have a place in my heart.

Katie, Ciara, Rachel, Tegan, Isabel, Georgia, Stephy, Emily, Rohan, Holly, Tiarny, Tiara, Sarah, Emma, Charlotte, Sophie, Freya, Quittery, Robyn and of course the boys, Matthew, Jack Gerrard, Jack Hare, Aiden, Nick, Mark, Daniel, Lachlan, Ryan, Max, Wilson, Dylan, Jordan, Lewis and little Bobby I will miss you all very much.

The parents both members and non members of the club I thank you all for attending and your help during the five years and for entrusting me with the development of your precious child.

I also would like to thank the parents and the swimmers for the wonderful presents I received before and during the night.

A special thanks from us to the Westbys for travelling from Brisbane to be with us on the night.

The final thank you goes to the club for awarding me with the "Life membership award" It is an honour which I will treasure forever.

As you all know we started our journey to Albury next day, Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June. Not as early a start as I had planned however it was a decent start time.. 7am.

With some help from Laurie in re-packing the trailer and finding places in my already over packed car for some items left out from the previous days packing, we finally were almost underway when we found a place for the last item, the most valuable item - a big heavy tool box which Laurie tied up in top of the tyre of the trailer!!! And would you believe it – it stayed there for the entire journey!

Our first stop was Innisfail for coffee of course at McDonalds and then we kept on pushing along to reach Townsville just in time for lunch and petrol.

From Townsville our next destination was Roxanne and Trevor's beach house at Midge's Point near Proserpine, Mackay. We arrived there at 6pm, thanks to the GPS navigation gadget I have installed in my car. What a great place on the beach, and of course the boat under the house. At their advice we went and dined at the local pub and I must admit the food was excellent.

Next day we left Midge's Point at 7.45 after having breakfast at a truck gas station on the highway.

Next stop was 322Km away Marlborough which we reached at approx.11.20 am. We had lunch and filled the tank with petrol and headed towards Rockhampton.

We reached Rockies at approx. 6.30pm and found a place to stay in the other side of town (Comfort Inn) as we did not want to cross town in the peak traffic in the morning.

The motel owner asked us to detach the trailer as the motel was full and he did not want us to take a large space in his car park!

That created the problem of having to chain the trailer to something and of course I did not have a chain and padlock and we ended up with us parking in his reserved house carpark and he chained the trailer to a post and consequently he had to wake up next morning at 4.00am to unchain the trailer.

We had a dinner at "Cambridge Hotel Motel" a place which I recommend to any one travelling to Rockhampton...as the food and service was excellent.

We left Rockhampton next day at 6am heading in land! We got warning from the gas station attendant about the difficulties of climbing Mt. Morgan and this worried us as he described the ascent as it was like climbing Mt. Everest!

I was really worried how my CRV Honda pulling a heavy trailer would manage the supposedly this treacherous mountain road.

To my surprise we got through towns like Banana, Theodore and we never encounter any difficult road conditions, and then I remember that the highest mountain in Australia is Mt Kosciuszko with a height of 2228m.!!

The road and the sceneries were so exciting that we kept on driving until we reached Goondiwindi and we went even further and travelled to Moree. Big mistake.

Moree is a town which is the preferred stop for truckies travelling between NSW and Queensland. We tried every decent motel accommodation in town with no success.

Finally just before we thought we were going to spend a night in the car we found this place called "Jackroo Motor Inn" across from an Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.

The motel had an enormous dog chained at front entrance- but it was friendly!

The parking area was very small and stretched my driving skills to the limit specially handling of the trailer when reversing.

Eventually by unhooking and physically pushing the trailer into the allocated place I managed to save some face in front of my wife who was patiently waiting and wondering when the show was going to end.

We went across the road to dine at Kentucky!! And then we realised the need of the big dog chained at the entrance of the Motel. The area was a meeting place of gangs of youth and we got back to our Motel very quickly.

Our Motel room was next to the office and we were entertained most of the evening by the ringing of the Motel's telephone.

We left Moree next morning at 6am with no incidents as this time I did the manoeuvring of the trailer manually and all went well to the delight of Mary-Jane!

We headed towards Dubbo passing through Narrabri, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra and reached Dubbo at 4.30 PM and travelling 781Km. and achieving our aim to reach Dubbo, and leaving 580 Km for the last day of our trip.

After 4 days of travelling we needed to splash ourselves with some well earned comfort. We booked for the night on the best and most expensive motel Dubbo could offer “Abel Tasman Motor Inn” and had a great dinner across the road at the Dubbo RSL club and to my delight it was Senior’s night and every one with a senior card was getting a very substantial discount on their meals and drinks! To my surprise I was not asked to produce my identification card and of course I had to ask Mary-Jane the most obvious question, quote: Do I look as old as those guys? and the answer was, quote: Not as bad, this worried me a bit at the time!

After an excellent night’s sleep we headed towards final destination Albury NSW. We stopped for breakfast at McDonalds in Parkes. We were amused to hear what patrons visiting at that time in the morning had to say about the dumping of Kevin Rudd and the Labour Party in general. I will not go into the politics as this is a subject which is a personal matter for each of us!

After breakfast we were very excited as we knew we were in our last leg of our journey. In our way to Albury we past West Wylong and headed towards Wagga Wagga some 135Km away.

We reached Wagga Wagga just in time for lunch and we indulged ourselves with some good food and of course Mary-Jane had to celebrate the fact that we were just 135 Km from our new home, with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc.

We reached our final destination, the home of our dear friends in Table Top near Albury on Thursday 24 June at approx. 5pm after 5 days on the road!

The highlights of the trip:

- The number of trucks we encounter travelling from NSW to Queensland. It looked like one way traffic. I can count very easily the number of trucks going the other way!
- The great night we had in Trevor and Roxanne’s place in Midge’s Point(Thank you Roxanne and Trevor)
- The variety of sceneries and wild life we encounter. The change in demographic population and nature.
- The way my car and my trailer performed in a not so kind roads to travel and got us safely to Albury.

In Albury we had a very good night sleep in an environment in which we were received with open hearts by the entire family.

I got up early next morning to peep over the fences to my old property which we owned before we moved to Cairns. The property looked great the only missing were the animals, my miniature bull, the alpacas which we had to the keep the grass under control. I have to mention that the temperature outside was 3 degrees Celsius!!! And it needed a quick change in the way we were used to dress in Cairns.

Friday we spent trying to get some good deals on a new fridge and other items we needed on our new home which we were taking possession on Monday the 28 June.

Saturday on the road again this time with no trailer for a surprise arrival to my granddaughter Abbie's birthday party (2 years old) in Melbourne.

It was a big pleasant surprise to everyone as no one expected us that after 2500 Km of travel for us to jump in the car again for 320Km trip to Melbourne, however it was special to us to meet and being with our entire family again! It was an exciting time.

Sunday we travelled back to Albury for our 3pm appointment with the Real Estate and final inspection of our home in Howlong.

The inspection went very well and we were looking with excitement to take possession of the home next day, 28 June.

We took possession of the house on the 28 June and the unpleasant job of unpacking started. The first few nights we slept on a mattress on the floor as the job of finding everything and assembling the beds was harder than I would imagine as all the brackets, bolts etc were very hard to find among two containers of boxes!!

Thursday we travelled back to Melbourne for Jack's introduction to his new team and coach, Ian Pope. It was very exciting for me to be asked by Ian to coach Saturday morning and believe it or not Jack was in my group of 15 swimmers (middle distance). Jack did a very good workout. It was also very nice to meet Nichola, Vetu and Colin Friday afternoon for coffee.

Saturday our children and Sarah's (my daughter in law) family had a birthday party for me and Mary-Jane.(Michael 4/07/ and Mary-Jane 12/07!!) One of the presents received was Tickets to "West Side Story and one night accommodation to the Regent Hotel in Melbourne in early September.

We came back to Howlong Sunday morning (temperature 1 degree Celsius!). Monday we had our wood heater installed in our kitchen and next day 4cubic meters of wood was delivered! And we are laughing ever since.

You all know by now Kotuku's performances in New Zealand and Short Course Nationals. .... Unbelievable results and this I hope is going to stop some people questioning her move to Melbourne. Morgan I am not claiming her I am just happy for the family which made so many sacrifices for their child. I was even more thrilled when both Kotuku and Ian rung me from Brisbane straight after the race with the news and to thank me for the part I had in the development of this wonderful swimmer.

I was also impressed with all the results from the first SC TAS carnival. Good job swimmers and good job Morgan.

I will end this email by thanking few very dear friends which I will always remember:

1. All the swimmers. Please send me an email from time to time and give me news with your swimming results trail.
2. The parents for entrusting your child/n in my care.
3. Morgan Knabe for being a good learner and friend.
4. The Commander in Chief (Roxanne) for all her support during the 5 years I spent in Cairns.

5. Laurie and Pamela for putting up with me and Mary-Jane for 3 months, for their hospitality.
6. Rod and Novella Jackson for been good friends.
7. The Jones, Gilholm, McCarty, Cescotto, Esposito, Hare, Harris, Simpson, Houston, Schmidt families for all their support.
8. Nichola for everything she has done for me and Mary-Jane(medically)
9. Rob and Karen for their support and help with all the intricate aspects of the swimming coach life and being good friends.
10. The School Staff and Principal Mr Christopher Daunt Watney. (Christopher size does not matter in swimming!)

I will miss you very much and if by any chance you are travelling this way please drop by, we will be very happy to see you... our address is:

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**“Thank You Again For All The Gifts And Good Wishes”**

**Love you all,**

**Michael and Mary-Jane**

Ps. I still wear the TAS cap.