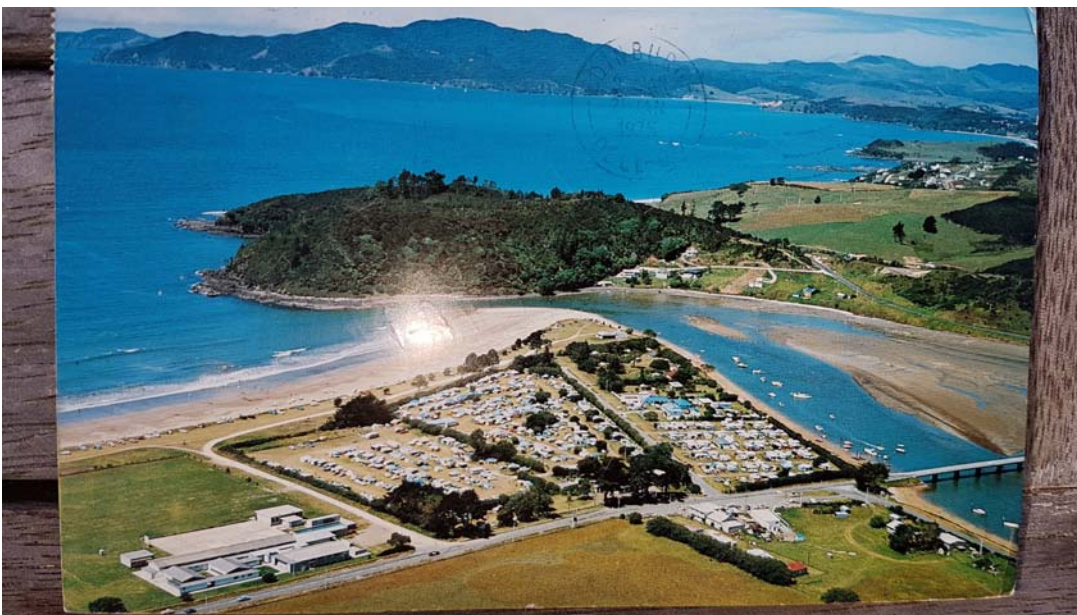


## Kerikeri Dreaming

My first visit to Kerikeri and Northland was long ago, and I dreamed of living there, promising myself I would do that sooner rather than later. Forty years later, I am now making preparations to move to Northland. By chance I found a postcard I'd sent to my parents in Edinburgh. They had kept it, helping me to recall many years ago, in January, 1975 when I had sent the card from Whangarei – after three years of high school teaching I had decided to go to Northland in the school holidays. I drove there in my little Anglia van with a tent and mattress in the back to explore the Bay of Islands. Here is the message I wrote on the postcard:

**Whangarei, Wed. Jan. 15, '75**

*On way back to Auck. then to Rotorua and Hawkes Bay (for wine) and back to Masterton by Saturday. Was very tempted not to keep certain assignments down south but the weather has been unsettled here, very hot and thundery. I've just run up Mount Parihaka and am off to find some sea to swim in. I heard an old man say he's seen more thunder in the past three weeks than in the whole of his life. Going round Auck. vineyards tomorrow, then Hawkes Bay on Friday. Taipa District High School is at the bottom left of the card. Whangaroa College at Kaeo would do me! Hope you're well. Love, Graham*



***The postcard of Taipa, Northland***

I returned to Northland several times, the first time being with my parents in 1973 when we went to Kerikeri, Kaitiaha and points north. My parents were thrilled with the warmth. “Nothing like January in Edinburgh, I can tell you,” my Mother said. And when she could hardly put her feet down on the hot sand at Taupo Bay beach, she exclaimed, “Now this is the real New Zealand!”

And Northland certainly feels like the real New Zealand to me. I'm sure that most visitors to New Zealand expect some South Pacific light and a lot of sunshine. But most of New Zealand in summer has temperatures around the mid-20s only for a couple of months. Northland though can expect consistency of good warm weather in its sub-tropicality, with temperatures in the high 20s for four or five months. And for me that would have to be one of the main reasons for moving to Kerikeri.



*Taupo Bay, Northland*

I hinted at another attraction already in that I had visited before, albeit long ago when Kerikeri was a one-street town with a dairy, a pub, a hotel, tearooms, possibly a few shops; of course the Stone Store and the Kemp House were there, the former operating as a general store and selling petrol to the yachties who came up the inlet. Notwithstanding the lack of more sophisticated facilities back then, I fell in love with the area, its rough-edged feeling, rich in nature with the constant beauties of the sea and its crashing surf, brilliant white sands and exotic bush. I loved tootling about in my van, going from beach to beach. It felt like the ends of the earth but the people were friendly (about 30% of Northland's 150,000 population is Maori) and the sea was warm enough for good long swimming. And the Kerikeri oranges! Surely the juiciest sweetest ever, like big tangerines, fatter and more succulent – a taste of heaven under a thin easy-peel skin. I hope there are still some orange groves alongside the kiwifruit orchards.

Why has it taken so long to follow my heart's desire to return to live in Northland? The previous visits were holidays during school summer break – I had a good teaching job in Masterton, then more teaching in Wellington before



*Kerikeri oranges, “a taste of heaven”*

life elsewhere seriously intervened with working in Queensland, then far overseas to teach English in Tokyo for many years.

The return for a few days in March this year took me back to my golden holidays of long ago. I was sharply reminded of stopping at the Kaeo Hotel for a much-needed seven-ounce glass of Lion or DB. When I saw the signpost for Taupo Bay I remembered that I’d turned off to explore and go for a swim 40 years before; the ferny ponga trees, the wine-red pohutakawa and the flapping flax all reminded me of the beauty of Northland nature and took me back to younger days. Most of all though it was the warmth, both of the weather and the people.

I was welcomed at the Farmers’ Market, The Old Packhouse Market to use the full name, on Saturday morning, not that I went there long ago – this market has been held for nearly 20 years and is the biggest in Northland with over 60 stalls of artisan and health food, arts and crafts, wines, teas, clothing, plants and flowers. I talked to an enthusiastic maker of beeswax wrapping and bought a pack of five sheets. It was great being able to talk to the creators of various wares, the growers of organic produce, and the purveyors of Max coffee, a rich and strong brew. The maker of artisan breads and pastries was very busy. And the icecream dispenser had a line of people happy to wait for deliciousness, perhaps also because they could listen to the live music, different each Saturday.

We were joined on the March visit by my sister-in-law who is also a Northland fan, loving the warmth as much as I do. At our motel, the Colonial House, there were people from other countries, and at the airport we heard different accents and languages – English, American, French and Italian. At one of the many

cafés on the main street we met some people passing through – they were from Australia. Things have changed in Kerikeri with its international flavour, certainly more interesting than 40 years ago.

Dreams do come true, even if it's Kerikeri dreaming almost a lifetime.

