

A Challenge

At my time of life I have faced a great many challenges, some very sad and difficult to come to terms with but this time I wanted to tell something more exciting. I cannot remember the year. It was when I was living in Chapman Street, Newlands and the fast ferry was still sailing between Wellington and Picton. I have lived in Linden for 15 years and Tawa for three so the timing would have been 20 to 22 years ago. A friend of mine, Toni asked me if I would like to join her and walk the Abel Tasman track. I said I most certainly would and arrangements were made for us to go that Easter. Toni made all the arrangements, registering us both and made a booking for the fast ferry. The weather was against us as the storm in the Cook Strait was too much for the more fragile fast ferry. As we were already at the wharf we made a hasty dash for the regular ferry. Much to our dismay we were told the ferry was fully booked and there was no space left for any extras. We were given a tag with a number and told to wait. We certainly didn't hold any hope but did as requested. There were a lot of people holding on to these tags so we didn't think we had a hope of going anyway. Toni then went up to the reception desk and when she came she said "don't say anything just follow me". We headed towards the gang plank carrying our bags. When we reached the top ready to step on board a staff member said "sorry there is no room for you". Of course we looked disappointed because this would be the end of our walk. Our disappointment obviously showed on our faces and the staff member then changed her mind and told us to hurry on board as they were about to sail.

In actual fact she was quite right every available seat was occupied. One of the stewards went into an office and brought out two chairs and I was very thankful they didn't have wheels. The storm was horrendous one could hear the straining of the chains holding the motor vehicles on the deck below. We reached Picton quite late in the evening, way too late to catch our connecting van to Nelson. Panic almost got the better of us as how were we going to get to our pick-up point in Nelson. We made enquiries at a car rental place and were told there was nothing available, unless of course we were prepared to take a car that hadn't been cleaned which were very happy to do. It was just by luck that Toni had her driver's license with her.

It was very late at night by the time we reached our destination. Toni's husband, Peter had rung through to the motel and informed them we were still on our way.

We had to be ready early the next morning to be picked up for the start of our walk. We boarded a boat to go along the coast to then realise we had to get off the boat onto even smaller rubber dinghies with outboard motors. Now the sea was still more than a little turbulent as the storm was still in full force. There was only one way to transfer from one boat to the dingy and that was jump. There was only one way for me to cope, be the first off so I didn't get myself into a tizz by watching others attempting the same, so I headed to the front of the queue and was first off. The chap steering the small boat had to rev the motor and then pull back to avoid the rocks. In comparison the next few days were sunny and calm. There were five of us ladies on that walk and all we had to do was carry our lunch. We stayed at five-star lodges and were treated to three course meals in the evenings and delicious breakfasts. This was the first time I had experienced paddling in a kayak. I was lucky enough to be in one with a very strong man and we just seem to glide across the water. My next try in the kayak was with my friend Toni and you can imagine, two strong right-handed women trying to paddle - well we went in circles until we got into a rhythm. The whole experience was both scary and very exhilarating.

When I arrived back home late at night a friend of mine was parked across the road from my place. She was there to tell me the house had been broken into while I was away. That was my next challenge, coming to terms with what had happened. I was told by the police that the weather conditions were perfect for burglaries - when the weather is bad neighbours tend to pull their curtains to shut out the weather and do not necessarily see what is happening at the neighbours. The place was fully alarmed so nothing much was taken. Even so it took me quite some time to recover. Every creak of the house had me on the alert.