

*Dear friends,*

December 2019, the days here in **TONGA** are getting longer and warmer, time for a review.

For Christmas 2018 I baked some cookies and I think our neighbours, who celebrated Christmas with us here in **ANALULU** on **FOFOA**, did like them too.



Three days later, we were all invited to **HUNGA** for the dedication of a memorial stone to commemorate the road construction 10 years ago with singing and speeches. Doctor Viliami Tangi from Hunga and his wife Naite, whom we both know for 25 years, were honored guests. Viliami, now Lord Tangi of Vaonukonuka, was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health for some time. Uhila and Saia, the parents of our landowner Fataua, and a few other "elders" of Hunga did reveal the stone. After that all came together for a big feast, in Tongan called Pola. (The choir stands in front of the new solar system for the village.)





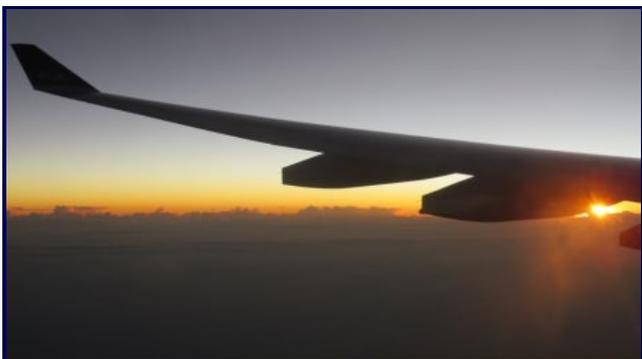
New Year's Eve we celebrated alone with half a bottle of sparkling wine, the other half we drank the next day, when it was midnight in Germany. The next weeks went by fast with preparations for our trip to Germany. This time we had not planned any exotic stop-overs. In his spare time Werner made some beautiful wood and bone carvings.



We had some stormy weather ahead of departure, so we stayed overnight in **NEIAFU** for safety, before heading straight to Fiji. Since the X-ray machine in Vava'u airport was broken, we had to unpack our two suitcases for a security check before departure. After arrival in **NANDI, FIJI**, we had to unpack again, but all was ok. We chose the **Hotel Grand Melanesian** near the airport for our overnight stay, because we had to get up very early in the morning, it was still dark when we took a taxi to the airport.



Fiji and British Airways transported us with 9 hours stop-over in **HONG KONG** Airport and 2 hours in **HEATHROW, ENGLAND** to **ZÜRICH** in **SWITZERLAND**. We managed to get quickly through all controls and took an earlier train than booked from Zürich to Tuttlingen. In **SCHAFFHAUSEN**, we were lucky that the conductors only made us leave the train because of the wrong ticket and we had to wait for "our" train for an hour. In **TUTTlingen** we boarded the local train to **WURLINGEN**, where my father was waiting for us with the car. In recent years, we had always interrupted the long flights for a few days and realized, that it is quite exhausting to fly straight through.



Three days later, we celebrated my father's 94th birthday. Some days later in the evening he stumbled over his chair as he got up and fell backwards with it. He hit his head on the floor only a few inches away from a sharp-edged metal piece of his rowing machine, on which he tore his little finger so badly, that we had to drive to the hospital. After a long wait in the emergency room, the doctor stitched a true masterpiece, but had problems to attach a bandage properly. The first fell off straight away, the second, when we were just outside the first door, the third held until we were home, where I secured it with adhesive tape.

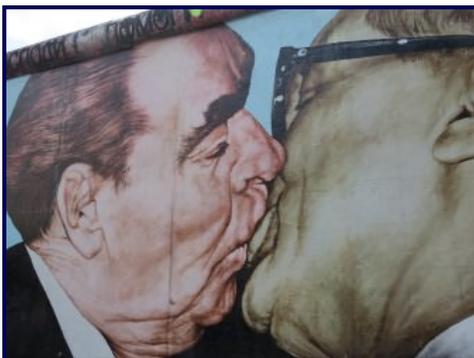


Werner and I made the usual doctors visits. Werner's eyes, on which he had surgery last year for cataracts, had to be treated with a laser. Visits with friends in the surrounding area, a concert in Trossingen, going to sauna and swimming pools, hiking and cycling in the area kept us busy.

Middle of May we boarded the train with 15 other members of the Deaf Association in **TUTTLINGEN**. The Tuttlinger MP Volker Kauder had invited our group and other interested people from the area to Berlin. Everything was paid for and well organized. We were picked up at the train station in **BERLIN** and taken to our hotel. Every day lunch and dinner were served in different restaurants. The next day we visited the **Federal Ministry for Economic** Cooperation and Development and the **Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe**, then followed an invitation to the **Landesvertretung Baden-Württemberg** with lunch and group picture and the visit of a plenary session in the **Bundestag**. After dinner we met with our sailor friends Claudia and Klaus, who we visited here in Berlin in 2015.



The next few days went in a flurry with a city tour past the **Brandenburg Gate**, **Checkpoint Charlie**,



the **Eastside Picture Gallery**,



**Bellevue Castle**, residence of the Federal President.

We had a look at an exhibition in the German Cathedral on the Gendarmenmarkt. Then we visited the **Federal Chancellery**. After the compulsory security check and a short film we saw the picture gallery of the former chancellors, and had a look at the press area and various meeting rooms, all well-known from television.



On the balcony for state guests we had a great view of the Parliament and took our group picture of the members of the Deaf Association right there. On Saturday we all went back to Tuttlingen by train.



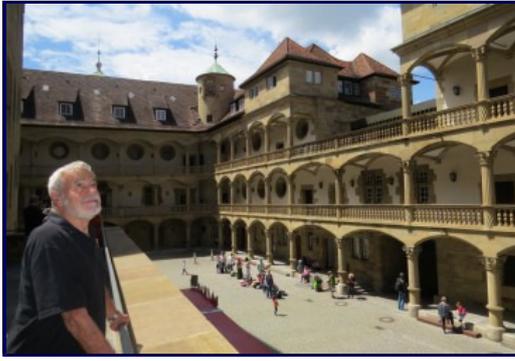
Saturday, May 26 was election day and after voting the whole family went to the annual festival of the brewery "Hirschbrauerei" Würlingen. In the evening, the first election results came in and we were happy, that our "green" friend Ralf (Charly) Abrahms had again won the mayoral election in Bad Harzburg. Congratulation!



A few days later we started our tour with my father's VW bus, which also can be used as a camper. The first stop was in **STUTT GART**, where a friend had provided us with discount tickets for the **Opera**. We saw "Iphigenia of Taurus", a very modern performance. Afterwards we strolled along the main street **Königstrasse** in the dusk and had some ice cream, despite the coolness of the



evening. The night we spent in the **City Hotel**, which is only 10 minutes walk from the Opera House and where we could park for free, a big advantage at the exorbitant parking prices in Stuttgart .



Therefore the next morning we used the opportunity to be in the middle of the city and walked to the **Landesmuseum Württemberg** in the **Old Castle**, which has very interesting exhibitions. In the afternoon, before the commuter traffic set in, we drove out of the valley to the Autobahn 8 in the direction of Munich. In the evening we stopped at the small **Riedel Lake** near the Danube, where we could overnight on a beautiful, empty forest parking lot and had a delicious dinner in the small restaurant right on the lake. On Saturday morning we continued our journey with a detour to the **Benedictine Monastery ELCHINGEN**, in the distance we already could see the shimmering snowy peaks of the Alps.

Late afternoon we arrived in **FELDMOCHING**, a northern district of Munich, at the house of my cousin Jürgen and his wife Christine, who lovingly welcomed and entertained us. We had not seen each other for ages and there was much to talk about. Daughter Silke had already picked out the best subway connections for us and the next morning we bought a five-day ticket for the subway, which departed just around the corner, and went into **MUNICH**.



We emerged from underground into brilliant sunshine right at the **town hall**, admired the carillon and climbed the town hall tower. From here we had a fantastic panoramic view of the city and the alpine peaks, which seemed close enough to touch. We strolled through the city, visiting many different churches and the **cathedral**, walked around the Stachus and Hofbräuhaus, past the Residence and the **Feldherrnhalle** to the courtyard garden, then I could not walk anymore and it was time for the drive home anyway.



The next day was dedicated to the **German Museum**, but unfortunately one day was too short to see everything. During our visit we had fun driving in the simulator of the lunar roving vehicle with a pair of 3D-data glasses right on the virtual lunar surface.





On Tuesday, together with Christine and Jürgen we went to the **Theresienwiese**, where the Oktoberfest takes place later in the year. Christine and we climbed into the hollow head of the **Bavaria** statue, where one certainly should not suffer from claustrophobia. Then our guides took us by foot and bus to the **Japanese Tower in the English Garden**, where we had real Bavarian beer and pretzels. We ended the tour in less Bavarian style in the Hamburg fish market, where we had delicious fish and shellfish to eat. After a digestive walk through the city to the subway we headed home again.



Wednesday we wanted to go to the **Alte Pinakothek**, but had to walk a lot, because we did not find it first. The great picture gallery of old masters made up for the effort. They even had some of the wonderfully detailed images of Canaletto.



Thursday we had an appointment with the creators of the TV series "**Crazy for the sea**" (**Verrückt nach Meer**). Director Gerrit Mannes, who shot the movie with us last year in March ([see Report 2018](#)) and producer Anne-Marie Riedel, have their office in the Moon street in Munich, where they welcomed us warmly and showed us around. Over a cup of coffee, they mentioned, that they were now shooting a series "Crazy for the River" (Verrückt nach Fluss) and were looking for somebody in Amsterdam who could drive protagonists and camera crew around by boat. Spontaneously we suggested Werner's son Ivo, who lives in the middle of Amsterdam, has a boat and speaks German. After consultation with him, we forwarded his email address and on 11.11.2019 this new episode of Amsterdam was broadcast on the ARD. Like the episode with us, it will also air on RBB and BR. I put "our" episode 301 "The Lobster King of Tonga" on my Dropbox, if you are interested, please download it [HERE](#). Unfortunately this is all only in German.



Our next appointment was later in the afternoon, so we decided spontaneously to visit the **Residenz**. According to [Wikipedia](#), it "is the former royal palace of the Wittelsbach monarchs of Bavaria. The Residenz is the largest city palace in Germany" and is today one of the most important art museums in Europe. The **Treasury** behind meter-thick steel doors was already very impressive, then we went into the premises of the Residenz. One room after another with pomp and splendor, the huge Renaissance Hall of Antiquities (Antiquarium), full of murals, unbelievable, what was there to see. When we looked at our watch, we started to run, but we did not manage to see everything. >Memory note: when we came to Munich again, plan at least a whole day for it.< It was time to make a visit to Werner's nephew Ingo, whom he had seen last many years ago. We had a good time and it was almost dark and raining when we finally made our way back to the subway.



The next day the sun was shining again and Jürgen drove us to **Oberschleissheim**, where we marvelled at the magnificent castle and gardens, and then on to the **Olympic Rowing Centre**, where the competitions took place in 1972. The former GDR took first place in the medal count ahead of the Soviet Union and New Zealand, Germany finished fourth.



On Saturday we ventured with our bus into the Munich inner city traffic to **Schwabing**. Here Anne lives, the protagonist in the "crazy sea" movie, who visited us in Tonga with her partner Tobi and the film crew. We had stayed in contact and she had invited us to visit her for a few days in her two-room apartment. First we wanted to sleep in the bus, but she moved out of her bedroom and slept on the couch. We got along splendidly and over the next days discovered Schwabing and the **English Garden** with her.



We were pretty impressed by the surfers of the Eisbach wave. The **Eisbach** (Icy Creek), which is really as cold as it sounds, leads through the English Garden and right at the beginning of the garden, after the stream shoots through a narrow bridge and has a lot of pressure, an artificial barrier has been built underwater that slows down the flow and creates a standing wave. Only the best surfers can stay on the wave for more than a few moments. Further down the stream there is a place for beginners, which to me seemed risky enough.



It was Pentecost weekend and in the evening from the balcony we saw outbursts of the fire and laser show in the sky of the **Rammstein** concert and from time to time even scraps of music penetrated through to us, although the venue in the Olympic Stadium was very far away. The residents nearby have probably endured enough noise even with earmuffs. (Picture from the web).



Our plan was to drive north from Munich and to visit the Therme Erding, but since it was Whit Monday, it was certainly very crowded there. Having the great Alpine panorama of the mountains right before our eyes, we spontaneously drove south to the **TEGERNSEE**. After a tiny boat ride and a quick tour of the city full of tourists, we wanted to head higher into the mountains, but received a severe weather warning. We searched for an alternative and discovered a bit to the east the Wendelstein mountain range, to which both a cable car and a railway lead. We drove past the **SCHLIERSEE** to the valley station of the cable car Wendelstein. After some searching for a free spot to stand overnight, we found a camper van site near **BAYRISCHZELL**, which cost 10 Euros, but we received a guest card for the area, which later allowed us to use the ring bus around the mountain

for free. In the evening we walked into the picturesque village and after a little tour enjoyed a delicious dinner on a rustic bench in front of the restaurant **Zur Post**. Just as we were on the way back, the storm started with a cloudburst and despite running we arrived at the bus a bit wet. Later I received an email from my worried father, asking if we and the bus were ok. The television news had reported on a bad storm in Munich and we learned from Jürgen, that unfortunately the storm and heavy hail had damaged garden and house considerably. Cars that were outside were literally smashed. We were glad, that we had only rain.



The next morning we parked the camper in the parking lot of the cable car and got on the ring bus, which took us in an hour over very narrow, curvy roads to the other side of the **WENDELSTEIN** mountains to the valley station **BRANNENBURG**. Since we had a bus ticket, even if it was free, the tickets for the drive with the rack railway and the subsequent departure by gondola were considerably cheaper. The electrically operated **Wendelsteinbahn** is the oldest active rack railway in Bavaria, one of the four remaining rack railways in Germany. Otto von Steinbeis paid out of his own pocket three million gold marks for the construction, which began on March 29, 1910. On May 12, 1912, the first train travelled the route, which is nearly 7.6 kilometres long and passes through seven tunnels, eight galleries and over twelve bridges. The valley station is at 508 m, the mountain station 1723 m high. After about 15 minutes drive uphill with great views, fog came up and became denser by the minute. We hoped that we would not have the same disaster as a few years ago on the Brocken, when we had such dense fog all the time on the summit that we could barely see a few meters.



But when we arrived after 25 minutes and went to the viewing platform, the fog started to clear slowly. Peak after peak, snow-covered and jagged, emerged from the fog. We climbed a narrow path another 100 meters higher, to reach the 1838m high summit, where there is also an observatory and the transmitter of the Bavarian Radio. Under an almost steely blue sky, we enjoyed the great panoramic view of all the peaks around. We also visited the highest church in Germany, the chapel on the summit and the small cave, the Geopark walkway was unfortunately still closed. More information at Wikipedia [Wendelstein](#)



We could hardly stop looking, but wanted to be in Erding the next morning and took the cable car down to the valley station where our camper waited. Driving north, we left Munich to the east and stayed overnight in a small forest parking lot close to Erding. On Wednesday morning, we drove into the parking lot of the spa, where we could stand the next night for free and right at opening time at 10 am we bought two day tickets for all areas. The "**Therme Erding**" is the largest spa in the world and simply overwhelming. Cameras and mobile phones are not allowed, this is a picture from the web. [Info here](#) There are various areas with 27 slides, 34 pools including a huge wave pool, various spa services, 35 different saunas and steam baths, which offer themed infusions, free masks, ice cream, beer and bread, etc. We tried our best to try out everything, but it was impossible. Werner said good night after the free glass of champagne in the hot tub at 9 pm, I stayed until the gate closed at 11 pm. Then not even the loudly croaking frogs in a moat near the bus could stop me from sleeping.





The next day we wanted to continue to Regensburg, but Werner's brother Heinz had no time that day, so we made a detour to the **BAVARIAN FOREST**, where we explored the area around Deggendorf on very narrow streets and found a nice campsite to stay near **VIECHTACH am PERLBACH**.



Friday to Monday we visited Heinz in **REGENSBURG**, strolled through the city, visited the new museum together and the opera to see a performance of the "Freischütz". We also watched beautiful old cars at the Classic Rally. The beetle reminded me of my second car, a yellow VW Beetle I had bought from the German post.



Monday we took the fastest roads to **BAD HARZBURG**, where Ulla and Charly already expected us. The next day they took us to **HALBERSTADT**, where Charly had been mayor before. They showed us around and we visited one of the oldest German literary museums in the **Gleimhaus**, the **Cathedral** with its treasury and finally the **Liebfrauenkirche** with the famous choir gates from the 13th century. The next day we all went to an interesting herbal park.



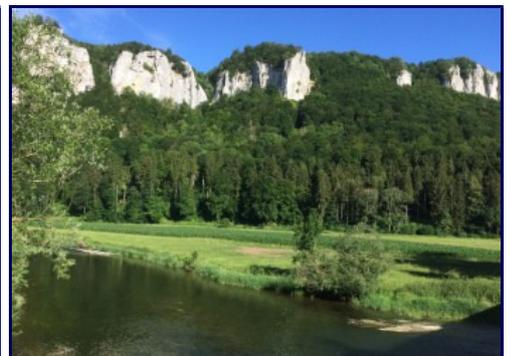
In the afternoon, Charly led us through "his" town of **BAD HARZBURG**, where there are still many beautiful old houses and street musicians in the pedestrian area.



Then we had to make our way home again, because on Saturday my brother Ingo and his partner Sonja celebrated with family and many friends their combined 110th birthday, he 60, she 50 years. It was a big party, well over a hundred guests, even the fanfare brass band from **WURMLINGEN** came to congratulate. A few downpours couldn't spoil the fun, even our dad was with us until well past midnight. Some weeks later all the "round" birthdays from 50 to 80 were celebrated in Wurmlingen with a parade through the village, church visit and a feast in the village hall.



On the 5th of July, another very hot, sunny day, Werner and I longed for some water sports. I had booked a kayak tour on the Danube as Werner's birthday present. From **HAUSEN IM TAL** we went down the river **Danube** to Sigmaringen, about 21 kilometres. Sometimes we paddled, or better slid, over very shallow spots, a few weeks later this tour would not have been possible due to lack of water. Passing the imposing limestone cliffs of the Danube valley, we conquered turn after turn of the river, past beaver dwellings in the bank area and abundant waterfowl. In several places we had to carry the two-seated-kayak around weirs and locks. We could have ended the tour earlier, but we were in such a good mood, the weather was fantastic and the whole tour was a complete success. In **SIGMARINGEN** we pulled the kayak out of the water up to the collection point and went back to the car by public bus after eating a nice cone of ice cream.



In the week before my birthday Werner took the train to visit his son Ivo in **AMSTERDAM** for a few days. On the 18th of July we celebrated my 65th birthday with the whole family in a pizzeria in Tuttlingen and Werner's 81th birthday with a barbecue party in the garden on July 30th.

In August, Ivo and his partner Linda visited us on their way south for a few days and we showed them the area, including the **Danube valley** from above, **Werenwag Castle** and the **Hohenzollern Castle** in **SIGMARINGEN**. (Picture of whole castle from Wikipedia)



In mid-August, my cousin Korinna and her husband Mathias had invited us to sail on **LAKE CONSTANCE**. They have an apartment in **WANGEN** and a Dehler sailing yacht in the small harbour there. The wind was a bit meager, but we could sail and enjoyed it very much to be moving on the water without engine again. It was another wonderful summer day and we could go swimming in the lake.

There was always something going on, a classic concert in the public swimming pool in **TROSSINGEN**, the



bike ride with a pothole that bent the front wheel of my bike and almost made me crash, beautiful walks with old friends.

In front of our house in **WURLINGEN**, the sterile lawn was transformed into a colorful flower meadow for the insects including the insect house.



And all of a sudden it was time to pack our bags again and get on the plane. We had tickets for September 3rd from Zürich via London and Hong Kong to Fiji. In the days before our departure British Airways employees had gone on strike and all hell had broken loose with demonstrations in Hong Kong. Fortunately, the strikers took a short break, so our flight was not cancelled. But the machine from London to Zürich had to turn back because of technical problems and we were anxiously waiting how long the delay would take. We only had two hours stop-over in London, where it takes more than an hour to get from one plane to another. Also the stop in Hong Kong was this time only three hours. Far more than an hour later as scheduled, we were able to leave **ZÜRICH**, the plane went full throttle, but arrival into **HEATHROW** airport was only 50 minutes before the departure of the Fiji machine to Hong Kong. We raced through Heathrow's huge Terminal 5, tried to rush through the security checkpoints, where



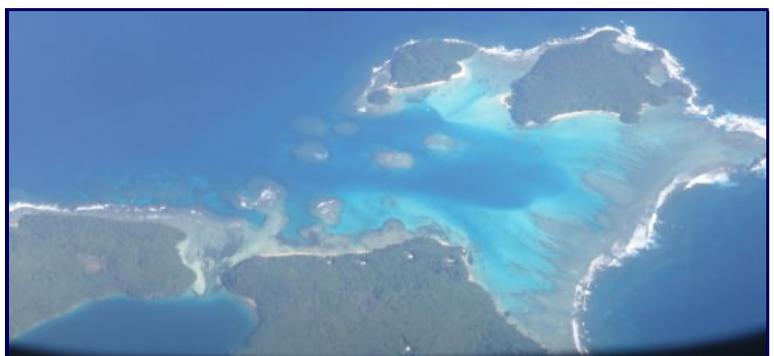
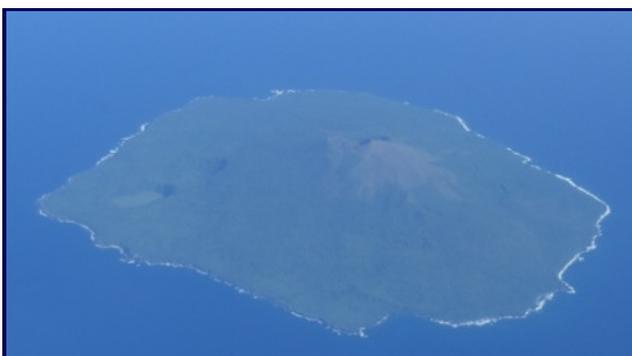
they absolutely wanted to see Werner's harmonicas in his hand luggage, and just reached the gate when the last passengers boarded. Out of breath, we fell into our seats and then noticed that the three seats in front of us were still empty. Werner quickly moved forward and I could stretch out over my three seats the entire journey. A man took the outer seat where Werner sat, but he still had a seat next to him free. We were lucky, because otherwise the plane was really full. 12 hours later we descended through the clouds into **HONG KONG** and were glad that the demonstrations were no longer affecting the airport, because before many flights had to be cancelled. After three hours we departed for Nadi in **FIJI** and again we were lucky to have at least all three seats for us for the next 10 hours. In the early morning we arrived in **NADI** where we had booked a room for the night at the **Tropic Capricorn** hotel on the beach.

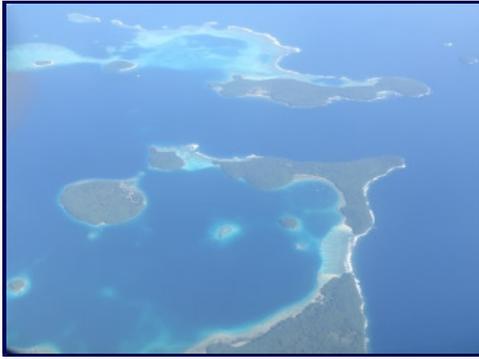


After a short nap and a swim in the ocean, we took a taxi to the **VUDAPOINT MARINA**, where we had been many years ago with our sailboat. We visited the Austrian sailors Margarethe und Leopold from YINYANG, who had wanted to meet us in Tonga while we were gone. As we strolled around the marina for a while, we encountered some other sailors who used to know us and we were all happy to meet again.



After a quiet night, we departed at noon from **NADI** to **VAVA'U** and had wonderful views of the many islands of Fiji and **TONGA**. We were able to see the volcanic island of **LATE** from above, also **FOFOA** and the **Blue Lagoon, Vaka'eitu, Kapa** and many other islands of the Vava'u Group. After landing we quickly got through all the controls and neighbor Karyn picked us up in the car. Neighbor Ross already waited for us with his boat at the harbor in **NEIAFU** and in no time we were back home on **FOFOA**, warmly welcomed by all. Tom-cat Puki was also happy to see us and followed us immediately to our house, where after a short time almost all systems were up and running again. The neighbors brought us some pizza for dinner, then we fell into bed exhausted.





The next few days we worked to make everything comfortable. The cockroaches and termites had done a "great" job, everything had to be washed off and cleaned. In one of the two batteries, three cells were without water, unfortunately it did not recover and had to be replaced. The fridge also developed some quirks. The bottom of the dinghy had to be glued back on, the garden screamed for an orderly hand, but the lawn mower first did not want to work either.



The water flow in the sewer pipe from sink and toilet was getting worse and worse. We poked with a spiral and tried everything to eliminate the jam. When nothing helped, we poured some chemistry in the sink, after that it was blocked totally. Werner dug out the top of the septic tank and opened the heavy concrete lid. What we found was amazing, not the expected overflow, but a dense network of roots that filled the entire pit and had grown from the outside under the lid. We chopped, pulled and tugged and finally pulled out a long string of fine roots that had grown three to four meters into the tubes, pretty much blocking them and the chemistry had made them swell up. It was a sight like in a Stephen King movie. We cleared everything out and cleaned the pit, the drain was no longer a problem. These are some of the troubles when leaving a house in the tropics alone for 6 months.

The sailors Karin and Kalle from MOANA and Lisa and Thomas from NES-PUCK visited us here and we had a good time together. We could launch our boat ANTAIA and for the refrigerator we ordered a spare part.



At the beginning of October, Ulla and Charly stayed a few days at the Blue Lagoon Resort at Fofia. They are also friends of the owner, who had introduced them to us many years ago. They visited us on Fofia and brought us the part for the fridge. One day Werner paddled in the kayak to Fofia to chat with them, and on the way back in the middle of the lagoon he lost his waterproof box with his hearing aids, which he had taken out of his ears for extra safety. Despite intensive search, in which all neighbors helped, the box was not found until today, probably it floated over the reef. I still hope for a miracle, as we had seen it a few years ago, when one of our friends lost a shoe at the other end of the lagoon, which reappeared just a few days later right at our beach. We were both very unhappy about the situation. In Germany Mr. Kramer (Fielmann), who had been looking after Werner's hearing aids for many years, immediately got some replacements and my father sent them to Tonga for a lot of money, but the mail took a very long

time.

Then a little miracle happened nevertheless. Just as the hearing aids were shipped off from Germany, we received news that the Starkey Hearing Foundation was coming to Neiafu to give out free hearing aids to anyone who needed it. Of course we went to Neiafu early in the morning. A large team of international helpers was there and on this one day in Neiafu hundreds of people were examined and equipped with hearing aids. The hearing test consisted of a few spoken words behind the subject's back. Werner had clean ears, so he did not have to go to the ear doctor, where a lot of people were waiting. He received the soft ear pieces, which fill the whole ear and after some waiting finally the devices themselves were fit. Werner got a stronger device for the right ear, both aids can be turned louder and quieter. Then a training followed and finally he got a medal, a set of batteries and a bag. Meanwhile, the hearing aids from Germany have arrived here after a whole month.



We installed the new part in the fridge, but it did not get colder than 15 degrees C plus and we ordered a new refrigerator in New Zealand, which is expected to arrive just before New Year's Eve. Werner injured himself twice on the same lower leg, I hurt my back, probably cracking a rib (very painful), but it heals and we strive to get everything under control again. Werner already made a new shelf with treated wood to replace the one the termites ate. The garden looks better every day, nearly ripe avocados and mangoes hanging from the trees. Everything is working as usual. It's just all a bit more difficult here than in "civilization", where you call the craftsman or just hop in the car to drive to the hardware store.



But that's how we like it and if we swim in the warm, turquoise blue water, harvest our many fruits in the garden or a Tongan gives us little fishes as a present, if we sit on our bench in the evening and look across the lagoon out to the sea with Late on the horizon, then we also know why.



*We hope you are all well and wish you a*

**VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS**

**AND A**

**HAPPY, HEALTHY NEW YEAR 2020 !**



We thank our hosts for their generous hospitality and all of you for your friendship, emails, good wishes and all the goodwill we received. We hope to meet you again or at least hear from you once in a while. If you also like to live your life here in these tropical islands, please contact us [here](#) .

*With our best regards from the South Seas*

*Elke & Werner*