



Changing LANDSCAPES

By Gael McInnes

Whilst lunching recently at a café in a busy local shopping mall, I was amazed at the changing landscape. Not only had shops changed owners and names, but the populace was much more diverse. I asked myself, “Where have you been?” Working fulltime for the past 40-odd years actually, so lunching out has been a rarity.

It seemed as though I was a ‘foreigner’ in the land of my birth. Colourful sareed women, two and three generations together, and a turban topped man were sitting at a nearby table, chattering in a language I couldn’t decipher. The lady who served me coffee spoke with a ‘foreign’ accent.

The skin colours of those walking through the mall were all different shades, and made my distinct white colouring, although lightly tanned, pale into insignificance – or did I stand out?

Later on I saw some of ‘my own kind’, all shapes and sizes, mainly elderly, and alone. Some used walking sticks, others leant heavily on their trusty walking frames, and another ‘drove’ past on a motorised scooter. I pondered on their situations, the ‘aloneness’, compared to the three generations. Where were their families, their support systems? Did they have any?

Facing many challenges

A lot of new immigrants have moved into my neighbourhood. The spicy odours that waft daily through my kitchen window sometimes compete and conflict with my own meal preparation.

Rubbish day has brought disaster in the past, as many ‘un-recyclables’ have been left kerb-side for blowing in the wind! A pastime for me has been donning disposable gloves to help keep my cul-de-sac litter free. It’s improving, as the message gets through.

My letterbox gets cluttered with all manner of advertising material, despite the ‘No junk mail’ label. Other times I get nothing at all, even missing out on my local ‘Courier’, as it appears those delivering cannot read or are confused.

Challenges for sure, but I have made friends with Filipinos, Indians from Fiji, India and South Africa, Asians and Zimbabweans. A diversity of colour mixes and varying degrees of English comprehension. They have come to our clean green country for a better life, to give their children a chance of a good education and available health care. Being involved in both the Education and Health sectors, I can readily see that these groups of people can bring many a challenge.

Ethnic eating places are now part of the local scene, as are the owners of

the corner dairies. I have my favourite Vietnamese Bakery and Take-away. Temples of varying ethnic ideologies now dot the landscape, alongside our own Christian Churches. At times I think it makes for a dangerous mix – the unknown, the strange traditions, sights, smells, language barriers.

Meeting the challenges

The challenge for me, as a Christian, is to welcome them, make them feel at home, offer assistance and help integrate them into the Kiwi way of life. The New Zealand flag flies proudly above the house of my Kiwi neighbours. It’s comforting.

I’m so grateful that I am able to spend my life in a democratic society, and in peace and comfort. I want it to stay that way. This means living with my neighbours peaceably. Instead of criticizing them and their ‘strange’ customs, I get to know them, learn from them and respect them. I learn not only to tolerate our differences, but to celebrate them. We all have something to offer to our society and local communities. I don’t have to change my belief system to accommodate theirs. But I do need to set the best example I can of being a good Kiwi citizen.

Gael McInnes, who lives in South Auckland, is a recently retired nurse and midwife, experienced in holistic care. Gael worked in diverse health arenas and taught at tertiary level.

