



Settling Down

Tom and I moved house just before Christmas. It was time to be a homeowner again, to put down roots and to belong.

Our new home is everything I could have imagined – and more. Light, spacious and graceful with marvelous energy. Tom loves the garden and especially the tall puriri tree. His days are spent sleeping under the camellia hedge and admiring the goldfish. He regularly presents me with gifts of skinks and cicadas and horror of horrors, the occasional bird. Although how he gets them through the formidable barrier of two cat doors is beyond me!

We came here to settle, which is something I haven't really felt since returning home from year-long travels, almost 16 months ago. When we moved in, friends said 'Oh, you'll never want to leave this place!' and my heart lurched.

In my younger years, Mum and Dad always talked of 'settling down' as the goal. It was the expected path, the way life was supposed to be, apparently. You know the formula: Get a job. Get married. Settle down. Raise a family. Many of us rolled with that recipe because it was the norm and because other ways were either dismissed or unimaginable. Those who followed Robert Frost's 'road less travelled' often became outsiders, on paths that were frequently more difficult, but almost always more true.

One of the many ironies of getting to our later decades is the realisation that so many of us find ourselves on paths that are very different to where we started. We discover too, that the road less travelled is actually a well-worn track. I mean, are you where you thought you'd be at this stage?

The question 'what are you settling for?' evokes images of compromise and regret. Settling has become synonymous with giving up, with letting go of our dreams for the sake of familiarity and security.

With this much in mind, I've been aware of a thread of restlessness, a constant low level hum of anxious questioning. This is a lovely place to live, but is it really where I want to be? Or am I settling for the wrong dream?

Recently I chanced upon a small gem of a book by Australian philosopher Robert E. Goodin, called *On Settling*. While it was primarily written to address the effects of settlement on indigenous Australians, obviously conversations about what we settle for go far wider than that.

What intrigued and has me re-thinking my perception of settling as relinquishing possibility, is his assertion that we need to settle in order to strive. That settling-down, settling-in, and settling-for actually provide us with a baseline from which to launch. Far from being a place we are anxious to leave, i.e. 'anywhere but here,' settling is the springboard. We need to settle in order to anchor what we are striving for. Striving without settling is exhausting. That constant movement from one thing or place to the next. Yet settling without striving is decay. That's where we lose imagination and hope that life can ever be different. Striving while settled, though, is laying foundations before you build the house. It's using a base to create your next step. And that's an exciting prospect.

As with all things, it's perception that counts. This useful shift seems to be adding patience to my impatience and helping me appreciate my home alongside dreams and aspirations for the future.

From my southern window, the mountain cone of Kakepuku stands proud on the horizon. It's my maunga, the mountain of my childhood and has always been one of my anchors. Having that view was pivotal in choosing where I live, acting as a reminder of the ground from which I have sprung.

Tom and I are settled here. For now. And that's all I need, in order to imagine where we are going next.

Jenny Magee works with Boomers to make the most of the second half of their lives. Her latest book **A Bold Life – How Boomer Women are Reinventing Life Beyond Fifty** is available at good bookstores or from www.jennymagee.com If you are looking to make significant changes, contact Jenny via email to jenny@jennymagee.com

