

## How to escape grinch's clinch

I had good intentions for this column. What with trying to make sense of all kinds of serious issues over past months, the one before Xmas needed to be full of good cheer.

Sorry. Can't be done. My plan to avoid grinchness was cruelly dealt to by circumstances beyond my control: I crocked my back. I wasn't able to stand long enough to have a pee or walk far enough to collect the mail. Christmas at the Bowl was heard but not seen.

I recall Mum used to go on about something she called "sciatica" from time to time, but after a while, being males, we looked away and put it down to something women get from causes unknown.

My version was brought on by lifting something too heavy. Something went pop in an area I can't see and bingo, I'm disabled. I've been to the physio, of course. She's seen it often enough, knew exactly where to place her wonderfully healing hands, sent me away with some exercises and fine hopes I would be right in a week or several.

There is progress. Now, I don't have to kneel on the floor to put my socks on or flip the back of my slippers up over my heels (wouldn't you think they'd design a better slipper to prevent that – I must look like Tony Soprano getting his morning paper as I shuffle around, heels exposed). I can clean my teeth without having to sit down, and pee standing up again, which is a milestone more than you need to know.

But I haven't been able cook or put the rubbish bin out or stick the security camera back on its high mount or load the dishwasher or fire up the barbecue or decorate the Xmas tree or hang the washing or get the mail, or any of the usual household chores any respectable retired man does willingly in the fanciful belief he's pulling his weight round the home.

More important, I wasn't able to go out and do "research" for a cheerful column. Research for cheerless columns is easy thanks to the 'net, but when you want to write about positive stuff you have to go out and look for it. I'd already spotted several promising opportunities that came from invitations of the kind columnists attract.

One was to visit someone named Cameron S. Curd, Kaitiaki Pukapuka-a-Rohe, district archivist of the Aotea Utanganui Museum of South Taranaki in Pātea to have a look at their latest exhibition, "The Big Bang", about a hypothetical eruption of Mt Taranaki. Sincere apologies, Cam, but once I'm un-crocked, we'll make it down, if not for the big bang, then for whatever follows it.

There was an invite to the launch of this summer's TSB light show at Pukekura Park and the Bowl of Brooklands, but that would have entailed a walk and standing around. So no luck there.

There were Xmas functions for various organisations, and the Community Circle's seasonal gathering for "active" citizens (plainly ruled me out), and so on. They would surely have produced generous thoughts, but those chances to observe Taranaki as it starts to think about the festive and holiday seasons were missed. Grinch clinched.

I can still sit in front of a computer, though, so there's always the 2500-page Mt Messenger bypass decision with which to while away time. Got to be a column in there, somewhere. Oh joy.

I sense the PC people sitting down to their keyboards, but be assured the above is not intended to belittle the disabled. The opposite. Through what's happened to me over the last couple of weeks I have become more aware of what life could be like for those suddenly denied natural mobility.

Meantime though, the intended theme for this column seemed a lost cause - until last Saturday, when there it was, an opportunity to embrace positivity. The newly resurrected Anglican parish men's breakfast meeting group invited me along as guest speaker. It meant getting up at the barely godly hour of 6.30am, but feeling the back was making progress I agreed, because it was a chance to experience our community at its best.

And it was a very good best. Twenty aged men like me communing over bacon and eggs, smiling at my anecdotes and showing interest in how columns like this are born. Thanks guys. Merry Christmas to you and everyone, especially those less able than before.