

# WORD ON THE STREET

## Grace at the Fence

Most afternoons, a little girl named Grace spots me across the fence. She yells my name like she owns it, waves, and grins as if the world owes her nothing but a smile. Nothing spectacular happens, but those moments stick. Her name has been working on me.

Grace—both the child and the idea—lands hard and simple. No fanfare. A wave. A grin. A reminder that not everything in our neighbourhood is heavy. That hope is possible even in the middle of mess. *Grace is the daily practice of holding hope for one another while walking honestly through the mess of shared life.*

At Christmas we remember Mary, described as “full of grace,” not because her life was easy, but because grace left no room for self-pity or fear. She carried hope while standing squarely in reality. And maybe that’s what grace really is—the quiet ground between sorrow and wholeness, where we learn to live truthfully and still believe.

In this newsletter, you’ll read stories shaped by that kind of grace—ordinary people choosing hope, showing up, and holding each other steady even when life is messy.

And sometimes it all starts with a little girl at the fence, yelling your name and refusing to be ignored



## Bursts of Colour at the Back Door

*Written by Rebecca Rhodes (UNOH Randwick Park)*

The Southern Lights are bursts of exquisite colour and majestic beauty, like fireworks in our neighbourhood during the season of Diwali. Grace, I think, is like the Southern Lights. Moments of grace burst into our lives and hearts as a spectacle that cannot be darkened. Grace is colourful light, an unmerited gift from God. This year my whānau and I have witnessed, experienced, and received heaps of grace from God. This grace has come in many forms, but specifically through two wāhine, gentle and strong, who are participating with God in the transformation of the spaces and the people around them.

There is a knock at the backdoor. I want to pretend I’m not home because I feel scattered and tired from the day, but Jubilee answers, and Pauline stands there, an arm full of vegetable seedlings and says, “Jubilee, are you ready to garden?” A full hour later Pauline and eight-year old Jubilee are engrossed in planting and weeding in the back garden. Jubilee likes to do everything slowly, she walks slowly, works slowly, and tells stories slowly. But that’s ok, because Pauline is present, patient, and listening. My kids (and us adults!) can count on this deep, abiding grace from Jesus... the patience and presence of Pauline. She is a burst of exquisite colour.

“I will make a hāngī.” We are one week away from wrapping up our neighbourhood Bible Study for the year. Most weeks the heavy lifting for kai preparation falls to me. This is a joy, but some weeks it can feel daunting to cook (Just feeding my own family can feel daunting!). So if I’m honest I wasn’t sure how we were going to pull off our final Bible-Study-Christmas-Party-all-wrapped-in-one event. But Krystal did. She made hāngī. She gathered and brought her entire whānau, kids and nieces and aunties and uncles. She made sure every single person, long time relatives and friends and people she just met, felt like they belonged. Krystal’s life is one of majestic beauty, full of grace that pours out to those around her.

Receiving acts of grace this year from the Lord through these two wāhine has been one of the greatest privileges and joys of my life.



# An Interruption Called Grace

written by Steve Molen (UNOH Clendon Park)

Let me share a story from our neighbourhood.

A homeless man sat outside one of our church rental shops, blocking customers. His presence was both an interruption and an invitation; an interruption because shop owners were complaining and an invitation because it was also a chance to reflect Jesus in the neighbourhood.

I gently moved him away from the doorway, and from our family, store we gave him a new blanket, some clothes, and a wheely trolley, along with a hamburger from McDonald's. The next day, we visited his family and helped him find his daughter's phone number.

At this part of the story I must admit I felt pretty good about myself almost Mother Teresa-ish, Jesus-like, holy and grace-filled.

But the story doesn't end there. During our encounter, in a wild fit of rage he punched the van, threw clothes and blankets at the wall undressed in front of church members, and kicked in the glass door.

I'd love to say I whispered "Father forgive him for he knows not what he does" but honestly, I just wanted to punch him in the face and kick him in the goolies, but of course, I didn't.

Instead, my wife—the true heroine—rang the insurance company, fixed the door, exuded love and we all peacefully moved on, including the homeless man.

So what are the takeaways?

- Neighbouring is messy.
- We are all a bit broken.
- Grace is not always easy.
- It's not all about us.

As Colossians 3:12-14 reminds us: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive as the Lord forgives us. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Not always easy but that's the call of Christ

That's neighbouring.





# The Fragrance...

Written by Dave Tims (UNOH Randwick Park)

*I've lived long enough in my neighbourhood to see something I still struggle to put into words. I think the best word for it is grace. Not the kind of grace people talk about in books or sermons, but the kind you witness up close—when someone hands their life over to Jesus and everything begins to shift. It doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen for everyone, but when it does, you can see the old life slowly fall away and something new rise up in its place.*

*It always reminds me of how Jesus Himself showed up. No wonder the world didn't recognise him. The Creator of the universe arrived not in a palace but in the home of a tradesman. While wise men searched in a royal court, shepherds—people nobody noticed—found him lying in a feed trough. And later, when people hoped for a warrior to defeat their enemies, Jesus chose instead to lay down his life and forgive them. That's grace—unexpected, upside-down, quietly powerful.*

*The way of Jesus has never matched the way of the world. We chase comfort; he was born into a poor family. We look for status and importance; he taught us to lay down our lives for others. Christmas, for me, always highlights the gap between the world we've built and the one Jesus lived in and longed for.*



*Sometimes I catch myself searching for Jesus in the wrong places too. I think maybe I'll find him by getting close to leaders I admire, or by being around people who seem strong in their faith. But then I remember where Jesus said he'd be found: among the hungry, the poor, the stranger, the prisoner, and honestly, that's exactly where I've found him—right here in the neighbourhood.*

*There's a certain joy I see when someone who's lived a hard life—a life shaped by addiction, poverty, violence, and disappointment—finally breathes again because they've encountered Jesus. It's like watching someone step out of an old skin. I've seen guys who were written off by society, find steady work, start caring for their families, and walk alongside neighbours who are still trapped in the struggles they escaped. I've watched women who carried deep shame begin to forgive themselves, and then ask forgiveness from the people they had hurt. Grace becomes real in those moments. Not an idea—something you can feel.*

*Living here has taught me more about grace than anything I've read. It's a hard thing to understand until you see it with your own eyes. But when someone chooses Jesus and lets go of the weight they've carried, grace becomes like a fragrance—you can't always describe it, but you know it's there. You see it in patience where there used to be anger, in hope where there used to be despair, in a new way of being that wasn't possible before.*

*Grace doesn't erase the past. But it does transform the struggle into something new. And maybe grace is understood best by those who had the most to forgive, and the most to be forgiven for. Because when they begin to live the new life Jesus offers, you can see it—plain and simple. Something old has gone. Something new has begun.*

Facilitating a Residents Association meeting with Auckland Council and 150 locals on winter sports field drainage.



Co-chair Miri and Dave on the TVNZ Breakfast Show discussing traffic concerns in Randwick.



Purchased 10 worm farms for Pauline (see next story).



## Blessings in Ordinary Moments

*Written by Kara Mirvic (UNOH Clendon)*

When my two granddaughters came to live with me one month ago, it felt like God had placed a new chapter of grace right here in my home. Their laughter fills the rooms; their presence reminds me of the responsibility and joy of caring for the next generation. Though the adjustment has brought challenges, I see God's hand guiding me—strengthening me with patience, love, and wisdom.

As the weeks move toward Christmas, we have found ourselves drawn into the rhythm of community life. At church, the girls join in singing, their voices blending with others in praise. At the community centre, we joined with other whānau for meals together. At the neighbourhood Christmas party, we have met neighbours we had never spoken to before. Each encounter felt like a gift, a reminder that God's grace is not only for our family but is shared through fellowship with others.

My granddaughters are thriving in this environment—learning the joy of giving, the beauty of friendship, and the meaning of Emmanuel, “God with us.” I watch them growing in confidence, surrounded by people who care. And I, too, am blessed: my heart stirs as I see how God's grace works through ordinary moments—sharing a meal, decorating the church, singing a song.

God's grace has carried us through change, opened doors to new relationships, and reminded us that His love is always present. Caring for my granddaughters is not just a duty—it is a blessing, a living testimony of His faithfulness. And through the community around us, I see how His grace binds us together, making Christmas not only a season of joy but a celebration of His unending love.



Clendon UNOH celebrating Christmas with neighbours.





# One Knock Changed Two Homes...

*Written by Pauline Jones (UNOH Randwick Park)*

My name is Pauline. I live in Randwick Park with my adult son. It's not an easy place to live. Money is tight for a lot of people. Houses are crowded. Stress sits close to the surface. But it's home, and it's where I've learned to put my hands in the soil and keep showing up.

Gardening has always been my thing. It slows me down. It feeds people. Over the years I've helped neighbours grow what they can, when they can. UNOH noticed that I kept doing this anyway, without asking for anything back, and they found a bit of funding so we could do it properly. The idea was simple: build twenty vegetable boxes and ten worm farms, spread across local homes, so whānau could grow some of their own kai. Nothing fancy. Just practical help that might make life a bit easier.

Around the same time, I had a worry sitting heavy with me. My mum is 88. She can't walk at all. The chair she had wasn't safe, and I'd been praying for something better for a long time. I didn't have the money for specialised equipment, so I left it there and carried on with what was in front of me.

One of the families on the list for a vegetable box was a Islander family I'd known years ago. They'd moved one street over. We hadn't kept in touch much, but they were always in my mind. Big household. Hard-working. No space, no garden. When the funding came through, they were an obvious choice.

I knocked on the door one day to talk about the garden. Inside, I noticed a whole lot of hospital equipment stacked up. Chairs. Frames. Things you don't usually see sitting around a house. Before I'd even said anything about the veggie box, I felt this quiet nudge: one of these is for your mum.

I asked what they were doing with the equipment. She told me she worked in radiology at the hospital and had collected it for someone who no longer needed it. Most of it was going to be sent to Fiji in a container. I mentioned, almost awkwardly, that my mum needed a different kind of chair. Something safe. Something that would actually support her body.

She didn't hesitate. She said, "You can have one." I asked how much it would cost. She said she wouldn't take any money. Not even a donation.

The chair she gave me was worth thousands. It moulds to the body, holds you securely, tilts so you don't fall forward. It fits straight into the car without changing anything. I can lift Mum in, strap her safely, and close the boot like normal. For months she'd been stuck inside, staring at the same walls. Now I can take her out. Around the block. Into the fresh air. Just being seen again.

The timing was messy and real. I ended up picking the chair up close to midnight because she wasn't home earlier. I was determined not to miss her. We wrestled it into the car together in the dark, laughing at how ridiculous the whole thing felt.

At the same time, we dropped off their vegetable box. The soil still needs sorting. Their work hours are long. Nothing about it is instant. But the box is there. The worms will come. Food will grow in time.

There's another part of this story that isn't tidy. Her son-in-law lives there too, with twins. He's rough around the edges.

The way he talks, the way he carries himself, it stirred up old memories for me. I didn't like being there when he answered the door. Everything in me wanted to avoid him.

But this project meant I had to keep going back. Passing messages. Coordinating times.

Standing in the doorway with someone who made me uncomfortable. I had to look past what was triggering me and see the person underneath. Slowly, he became part of how things got done. Relaying information. Helping move things.

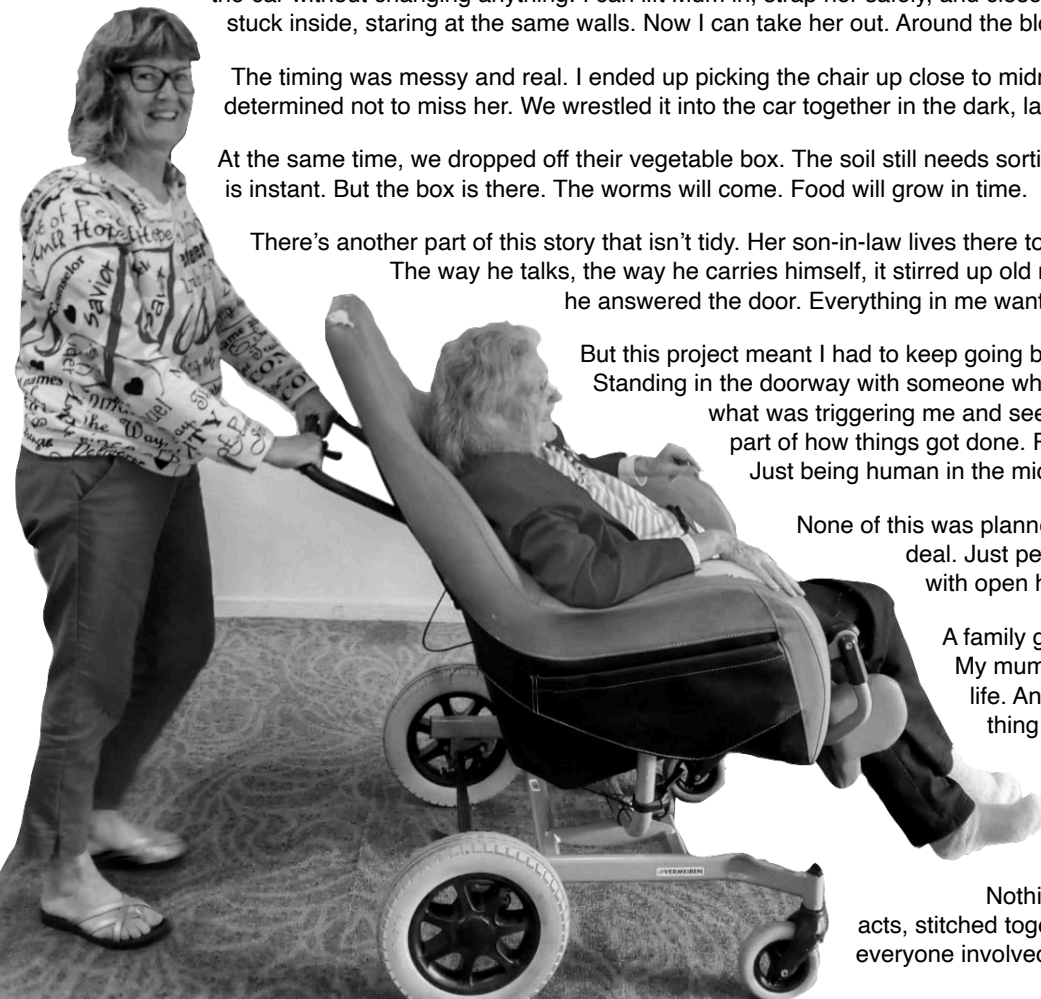
Just being human in the middle of it.

None of this was planned. There was no exchange agreed on. No deal. Just people responding to what was in front of them with open hands instead of clenched ones.

A family got a garden they wouldn't have had otherwise. My mum got a chair that has given her back a piece of life. And I was reminded that sometimes the good thing you're hoping for doesn't come through the straight line you expect. It comes sideways, through a neighbour's front door, while you're busy doing the next right thing.

That's how it often works around here.

Nothing polished. Nothing sentimental. Just small acts, stitched together, that make the load a bit lighter for everyone involved.



# Grace leads to Hope...

Written by Eric Mailau (UNOH Wainuiomata)

2020 I was knocked out in a game of rugby, still don't remember the ordeal. A fellow player named Fitu, whom I didn't know, cried and prayed healing over me that day. I was told he prayed for God's Grace and Mercy for me to be healed in Jesus's name.

It is common in Samoan/Tongan prayers to end with a liturgical piece that puts the whole prayer at God's feet: as if to say by your Grace let this be. Fitu repeated this part multiple times over me that day, in the hope that God showed me underserved favour.

This is what we sometimes define Christian 'Grace' to be; underserving favour. The ultimate exemplar being Christ; God tying himself to humanity in Christmas.

This year, I reconnected with Fitu and got to know him as a God fearing man that is very expressive of his faith. He loves his music and plays drums for the church worship team and

a local band. Fitu also struggles with the vice of substance abuse and this has a very tight grip on him! He's had many people over the years lay hands and prayed over him; usually about repentance and receiving forgiveness.

One of the last, full of hope words I remember Fitu saying "this is going to be my comeback story"

A good friend Taniela brought a group of us men around Fitu to do more than just pray with the hope of supporting him kick the habit. So we tied ourselves to Fitu over a period of time to fight his addiction. This led to a point of needing professional help and I'm happy to say Fitu is a month into his rehab. Fitu has Hope. Hope of getting clean, being a better husband, better father.

Fitu will do his rehab by himself, but we will pray for him, we will visit when we're allowed, we will celebrate Christmas with him, we will encourage and shield him over that time, and we will throw a party to celebrate when he finishes! One of the last, full of hope words I remember Fitu saying "this is going to be my comeback story". I truly hope so uso (brother)!

Ko e kelesi 'a e Eiki,  
mo e 'ofa 'a e 'Otua,  
feohi 'o e laumalie  
ma'oni'oni. 'Emeni.  
(May it be) By the Grace of  
our Lord (Jesus Christ),  
love of the Father, and the  
fellowship of the Holy  
Spirit. Amen.



Photo of Eric during the game when he was actually knocked out.