



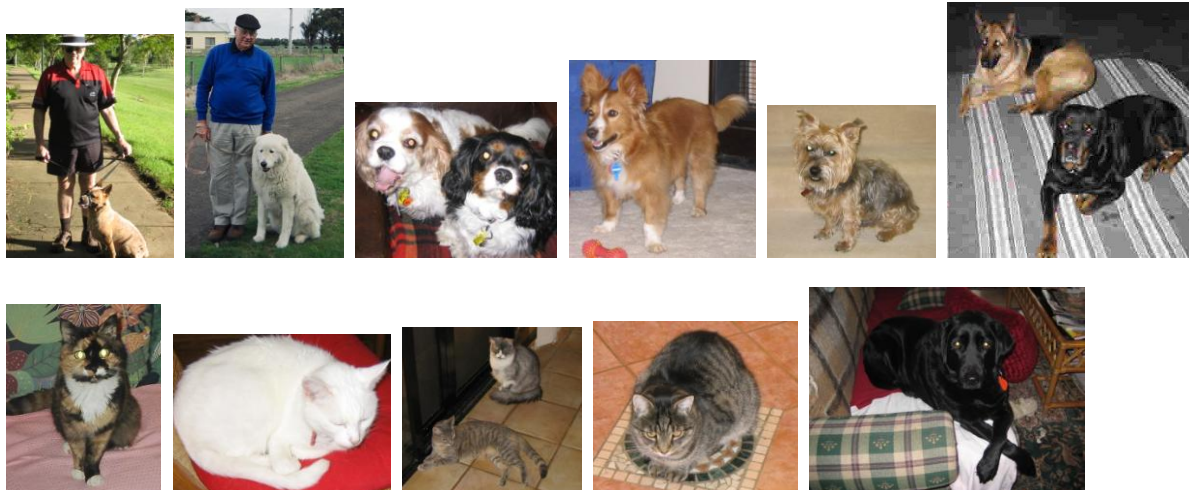
Our Story as International Professional House Sitters

Who would have thought, back in 2000 when Alan decided it was time to take an early retirement at 61, when I suggested we try House Sitting as a way of alternative travel that we would still be enjoying the adventure some nine years later as well as having advanced bookings anywhere between 12 to 24 months all the time.....currently our bookings are now to mid 2012 with a few gaps for more house sits, a cruise or two or three and some time in Europe! Yep! SKIN (spending kids' inheritance NOW) is our aim, should there be anything left when we are gone – it will be pure bad management on our part – of course the stock market seems to have the same agenda up and down again!!

Once Alan retired in March 2001, I immediately registered for a house sit in Tasmania for we wanted to get as far away from Alan's work scene as possible, the registration with the data base was finalized on the Tuesday and by Friday we had our first enquiry from a lady in Tasmania who wanted us for some six weeks in the September, this lady said 'I haven't done this before' and my reply was 'neither have I', so we swapped details and I said I would get back to her with some formal procedure. This lady later increased the house sit, she needed us till the November. Our original plan was to just go to Tasmania for this time, however, while in Tasmania we had two more requests, one for two weeks and another for seven months, this seven month sit was extended to nine months so all in all we spent just a few days short of a year house sitting in Tasmania. We put a house sitter in our home for three months then kept extending it to finally 15 months.

On telling friends what our plans were for later in the year, a friend in Sydney asked us to house sit for her for two months before we were to go to Tasmania. While in Tasmania we had a call from another friend back in Townsville and accepted a month sit for a months over Christmas 2002, our Cairns family came to holiday in our home for this period. By the time we came back from Tasmania, we thought, wow, this is a lifestyle that we can easily cope with and promptly sold our properties so we could go off house sitting continuously in Australia.....no..... the World, and have been continuously house sitting ever since. Selling out in 2003 was a brave move for now we were totally out of our comfort zone and that was a lot scary for at the same time the stock market was having a one in 8 year slide.

Now we qualify to sing that song 'I've been everywhere, man'.....Sydney, Dodges Ferry, St Helens, Hobart, Townsville, Rose Valley, Sunbury, Mt Riverview, Shepparton, Port Ferry, Bray Park, Wentworth Falls, Hawks Neck, Bray Park, Hillbank, West Hindmarsh, Mawson Lakes, Queanbeyan, Wentworth Falls, Robina, Narangba, Robina, Darwin, Gordonvale, Townsville, Lilydale, Denver USA, Darwin, Robina, Mawson Lakes, Sydney, Bilambil Heights, Cairns, Townsville, Mooloolaba, Melbourne, Jimboomba, Perth, Darwin, Gold Coast and lots more to go!! Could also make a new song naming the breeds of pets that have been left in our care.....the strangest pet.....a Proserpine Python.....thank goodness it had been fed then it slept the 10 days of the sit.



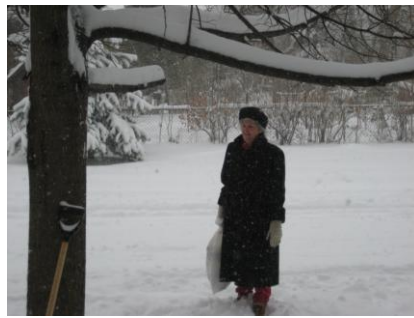
Just a few of these precious pets left in our care - aren't they all posers

Our experiences have been varied, particularly with the weather, for North Queenslanders who are use to the hot humid type weather to experience a cold summer in Tasmania.....yes sitting in front of a raging fireplace for the summer and on Christmas Day with heaters on, dressed in several layers of clothes, socks, boots, hat, gloves and scarf and the full length woollen coat for outdoors.....who would have thought. We keep saying that we have to get sits so that we are in the north for the winters and south in the summers.....however it doesn't work like that.....southern folk want to escape the winters and the northern folk



want to escape the summers..... that's how house sitting has panned out.....so one might say that we have come accustom to the winters in the south and now finding it hard to cope with the northern humidity – who would have thought!.....now we have a regular southern host who wants to travel in the summer from 2010 so our 8 year dream is about to happen.

Our three month house sit in Denver, Colorado, USA was an experience of a life time, I (Alan was still not driving at this stage) was driving on the wrong side of the road in a strange car for starters.....those crazy yanks. We arrived in the autumn in all its colours, then came the first snow fall just two weeks into our sit.....now remember we are born and bred North Queenslanders.....snow, powder champagne snow.....and to have lots and lots of real Christmas Trees dripping in snow.....we were ecstatic.....to be able to enjoy seeing the snow falling from the warmth of the home..... to make my first snow lady..... lady, because I am a Red Hatter. All we wanted was a White Christmas so every time I wrote home I would say 'let it snow, let it snow, let it snow'. The locals kept telling us that it seldom snows in Denver on a Christmas Day, they say January is when the heavy snow starts.....guess what.....we woke on Christmas morning to a white out.....there was already several inches of snow and it snowed all day.....fantastic.....the best snow fall on a Christmas Day for 107 years it was reported the next day.....and it was all our fault. The snow chores were definitely a new experience....how to dress to shovel the path and to put the rubbish out.



On Christmas Day our hosts' Christmas Day routine was to go out with the family for breakfast at a local restaurant then back home for lunch with the family and friends, so our host gets the car out and for 7 blocks we slid and slipped in the snow covered street, then we came to a halt, no further would the car go in this deep snow, only reverse would the car move, our host reversed into the gutter and there the car stayed all day and we had to 'snowshoe', well as close as we would get to snowshoeing, all the way home for eggs on toast for our breakfast. The family and friends arrived for lunch, the grand children and I tried to make a huge snow man but the snow was so dry we couldn't form a ball but it was good for a snow fight. The next day saw a dumping of some 10 feet of snow in the mountains and it was still snowing in June so our host informed us. Denver is know to have 300 hundred days of sunshine a year, that's what was lovely about our snow experience.....it could be minus 10, snow of the ground and sunshine, postcard perfect.....just magical.....to us!.....at the start of the snow season, however, would not like to live there in the peak of snow season for it is so dangerous. As we had no pets in this house sit it was possible to take off for a few days at a time, so we visited New Mexico, Nevada and Ohio. Our Denver host has now extended an open invitation to house sit any time we want.

Friends often ask if we ever get a house sit that we would rather not do or is horrible.....the answer is NO...for a start we do not look for the ones that want you to *work* in lieu, and folk who want a sitter have pride in their home and their precious pets so spoilt that they would not cope with extended times in kennels let a lone the cost. 90% of the time we look for long term house sits of 3 months and longer and the folk wanting sitters for this length of time generally plan a long way ahead and this allows us to talk to these folk on a regular basis...email and digital cameras.....how did we get by without them for four decades.....we ask for a photo of their home with some inside shots, our hosts and the precious pets, we send our resume with our photo and references.....so by the time we meet we almost know one another and it is like meeting up with 'friends'. The main reason folk require house sitters is primarily for their precious spoilt pets and secondly security for their homes.....our hosts come home from a wonderful holiday to a fresh clean home, maintained garden, contented pets and a home cooked meal.....how good is that!!

House sitting is a gut reaction and a lot of trust from both parties and it always amazes us how much we often have in common.....there is a saying that you do not meet people by accident, beginning to believe this. We often ask our hosts why they chose us and they all say it is our positive attitude and the professionalism we present, of course, we do have excellent references but have never had to have a police clearance. We have had hosts who rings to see when we are free so that they can book their future holiday and another host that says if he cannot get us he will just close up his home for he has tried other sitters but none as good as us....careful....watch the halo! We keep telling him he has to plan well in advance! We find now that we are extended family of some of our hosts' families and having regular contact with these folk.....the Christmas mailing list is forever growing too.

Have done several repeat house sits, one three times and feel that this speaks volumes of our high standards, reliability, trust worthiness and integrity. Our host's privacy is of the utmost importance to us, the care of their home as if our own, the care of their precious pets allows us to have 'Clayton' and adored pets that we are happy to play, walk and bath.....and we might add..... have never had a precious pet fret on us yet, for one of us remains in the new house sit for the first 48 hours and this ensures security for the precious pet.....you know..... it is the one that feeds them!!..... a garden to potter in and all this gives us a normal lifestyle as a local in a new community rather than just a tourist. We generally keep the grey matter going by doing volunteer work, join groups of various activities, and this we found very rewarding, a way to network and to learn the local knowledge.

This is how it works. Over the years we have worked out a formal procedure that we forward to our host to complete and return, this allows us to have open communication with our hosts and this in turn brings a happy outcome for us both with a WORRY FREE holiday for our hosts. No money changes hands, our travel expense is ours, we pay for our telephone calls, our host pay for their pets' food, our host pay for the gas and electricity unless the house sit is more than three months then we pay, our host pay for water and rates. We do not use our hosts' computer, we feel that ones computer is personal; we carry our own laptop and combination printer copier. Should we consume pantry and fridge foods we replace for our hosts return and on our hosts return we generally provide a home cooked meal to share. Generally we arrive at least a day before our hosts' departure to meet the precious pets, to learn how our hosts' home appliances function and any other unique features of our hosts' home, leave the day after our hosts arrival or sometimes the day they arrive home and always open for discussion on our arrival and departure.

As fate would have it.....November 2004 turned our world upside down, Alan was a passenger on the Tilt Train that crashed just south of Bundaberg and his injuries while not life threatening, were serious and we were about to go to Adelaide for an 8 month house sit. With doctors permission Alan flew to Adelaide while I kept our original plan and drove to Sydney then I and the car trained it to Adelaide.....no way was Alan going to travel by train! We did three house sits in Adelaide over 16 months so Alan could have his continued extensive treatment and therapies, whilst this slowed us down it hasn't stopped our adventures, however, for a while there we were very uncertain of our future in house sitting.

What do we do if we don't have a house sit.....we visit family, take a holiday, after all this house sitting is 24/7.....but someone has to do it!!.....if fact we have to block out times to do just that. Usually we plan our sits so that we have a few days between sits so we can visit particular areas on our journey.....eg The Great Ocean Road, Flinders Rangers, Eyre and Yorke Peninsula's, Bourke and the like.

How long will we continue to house sit? Having now completed 40 house sits in Australia and one in Denver, Colorado, USA with several pre bookings to mid 2012, while we have our health.....who knows. You know, home is where you make it and do we really need all those possessions?.....well.....!! What doesn't fit in our Mercedes we don't need.....you should see what does fit in!! But then again it is horses for courses.....house sitting doesn't suit everyone..... and just as well!!

Cheers

Thelma