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## "A different Light"

**A Different Light 20 January 2018 – When good turns to bad, what makes it good again?**

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**I**t was another spectacular Northland summer morning. Pataua North. Quintessential Tai Tokerau East Coast; sparkling turquoise moana, dusky white sand, Pataua Mountain looming to the right, all craggy rock with a sub-tropical bush on top.

I was sitting with Marcus and Janine on their beach house deck eating breakfast and cheerfully analysing and dissecting the revelry and reunions of the night before. Chuckling, I stood up and I strived to go to the toilet. A small single room, in which both feet skidded out in front of me and I went down, wedging myself between the wall and the toilet, with my pants down. All coolness and dignity drained out of me and were replaced by humiliation and panic. The more I tried to free myself, the more wedged in I got. When good times turn bad!

Marcus liberated me without making a fuss or unleashing scorn, showing some concern but not too much. Soon things were good again, the shame washed away by the camaraderie of old friends.

This 'Good times turn bad and then good again' process is one with which I have a long acquaintance. I was three years old when a doctor did a house call to my parents' house in Fiji and injected me with penicillin. This triggered an instant allergic reaction, causing me to go into anaphylactic shock, stopping my heart. My father resuscitated me, while the doctor was searching for his adrenalin. I now know not to take penicillin.

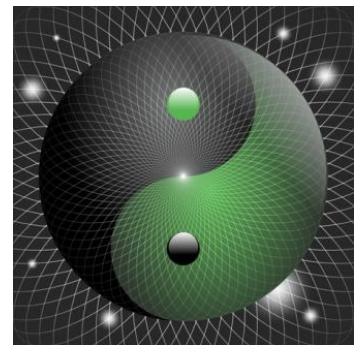
At nine years of age, I was in my brother's canoe, at Manganese Point, puddling around in three feet of water, gazing at the orangey-brown pipi shells, through the clear water, when the canoe tipped over. I gazed up at the shimmering sky, from under the surface for quite a while until again my father came to the rescue and lifted me out. I recovered in the warm morning sun.

Sixteen years old in the Regent with a bunch of friends at Graham's parents' house, laughing hysterically in adolescent raptures, I leant back on a piano stool, which of

course had no back to it. I put my head through a glass cabinet. After my friends hauled me up I thought I was unscathed, however they were horrified. *"What? What?"* I asked in response to their horrified faces. *"Stay still"* they said, *"just stay still"*. *"What?"* I was starting to become agitated thinking the worst- I did not need another neurological issue on top of cerebral palsy. It was at this point that I felt warm drips down my back. Apparently I had an eight inch shard of glass, sticking out of the back of my head. My friend Greg instructed me to, *"just stay still- I've got it"* as he confidently pulled it out: job done. A half an hour wait and a couple of stitches later, we were back to The Clash and beer.

Age 21, Jakarta. A backpackers' hostel, a mezzanine floor with a staircase that was more like a ladder and just as steep. Shit, I thought, I had better go down here on my bum. I instantly started careering down the stairs on my bum and then my foot hit a step sending me into a forward roll off the side of the stairs sailing through five feet of mid-air my head landing on bare concrete. Blood, lots of it. The public Jakarta hospital, fourteen stitches, 600 US dollars and a near miss with an injection of penicillin later, I was having gadu gadu and a beer with Jo my travelling companion.

Good times will inevitably turn bad sometimes. It's just the way life is. It's the essential emotional juxtaposition, the yin and yang of contentment and consternation. The essential ingredient, the common denominator, which acts as a fulcrum to restore balance and harmony, are friends and whanau. Without them, we are lost, with them, through the ups and downs, through the slings and arrows, we prevail and thrive.



*Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability - A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.*