



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

## "A different Light"

### A Different Light 22 December 2017 – A Year of Highballs and Lowballs

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**So here we are at the end of the year and I am going to do what columnist do when inspiration is at drought conditions, I am going to look back at the year that was by plagiaristic means.**

In March I embraced the concept of lowballs and highballs. 'Don't *lowball* me, man!' is a phrase I that I picked up from the goofball character played by Owen Wilson in the middle age male slapstick movie. 'So let's review the Year's lowballs and highballs trotted out in my column...

January started off when I met my friend Robby inside Nelson Airport's only arrival gate. 6 Foot 4 and 120kg with that spiky hair at the back you get from hours of driving. He was wearing his favourite "Tower of Terror" t-shirt. He looked like a giant Sonic The Hedgehog. "How are ya?" he said. "Do you want me to push him to the baggage claim", the stewardess interrupted. "Nah we're right", he replied, grabbing the Jetstar wheelchair. "How are ya?" he repeated, as he strode off with me down the tarmac. "Pissed off" I replied, adding for elucidation, "when you order wheelchair service on a flight it's like you instantly have a frontal lobotomy." Lowball. The rest of the road trip was thankfully more of a gigantic highball; eating, drinking and laughing while we meandered up the West Coast of the South Island (not to mention standing in the rain like shags in Greymouth!).

In February I wrote about my favourite obsession- cooking (High) -and bleated on about the times your gadgets break and you need a plan B (a lowball First World problem)

March brought a real lowball was when my old four wheel drive Suzuki that I use to access our local beach at Ruakaka was nicked. The highball was finding it unscathed, but the real lowball was Whangarei District Council blocked vehicle access to the beach, due to a small handful of hysterical evangelical environmentalists.

A highball in April was producing a training video called 'No Problem, You're Welcome'. When I say the title I can imagine saying it accompanied by a quick flick

of my head, a wink of my eye and click of my tongue. It's a training video for businesses to learn how to provide excellent service to disabled customers, clients and patients without inadvertently pissing them off. Another highball was that Whangarei District Council committed to training all of their front line staff.

In May we stayed at the Waitangi Copthorne. It's so essentially Northland. It's also had a blatantly inaccessible lowball feature, that made my toes curl every time I visited. It was a small but very strategic flight of stairs between the restaurant area and the popular pool and courtyard. The highball is that soon after the column was published in May the stairs were replaced with a ramp. Good on you Copthorne!

June saw, Minister Wagner lowballing the NZ disabled community when she tweeted "Busy with Disability meetings in Auckland- rather be out on the harbour!" – What I called doing a "Harbour Bridge" - meaning "I don't particularly like meeting with people I serve and I'm going to take the nearest off ramp". (Which she did on Election Day!)

In July after a year of waiting I finally had an appointment with a spinal surgeon after years of having a particularly dodgy neck which seems to be getting worse. Here is slice of the conversation at the appointment.

Surgeon; "ok, so what I recommend for you is to go in through the throat, take a piece of bone out of your hip and fuse some of the vertebrae together. Then you will need to wear a halo or a big collar for at least two months, you don't have to give me a decision right now, it's not like you've got cancer".

Me; (Internally), WTF! (Yep low, lowball)

August; just when I thought the general election was going to be fantastically boring, just when I was really starting to fret about the public turnout to the Tiaho Trust 'Meet the Candidates' event, just when I thought New Zealand politics was becoming painfully predictable, my little pony, (Judith Collin's nickname for Ardern) gallops past the post with 7 weeks to go. In September she got past the post by a nose for a highball finish.

During September I pondered on unintended consequences vs subconscious intentional sabotage. They're very closely linked and, like both microscopic amoeba and politicians (similar), they are all around us. Take Metiria Turei's fall from grace and her eventual resignation after she spilled about her historical benefit fraud. Was it a badly thought out plan to gain street cred? Was she being blackmailed? Or was she just sick of it and wanted to take a break subconsciously? Hmmm what was the lowdown?

In October we were in good olde bad olde Russell when one of our fave musicians Tom Petty passed away (downer for my wife). While we were there I procured a tattoo from Lady Gaga's song "**born this way**" as a permanent affirmation on my skin. ( Highball for me)

This year I was a judge for the Attitude Awards that were held In November. Geneva Tino, who is a young Maori woman, not only took out the Spirit of Attitude Award but also nailed the Supreme Award. Geneva has fairly intense athetoid cerebral palsy. As I pointed out at the time, I also share this type of cerebral palsy, a type which I have observed to have a very high representation of high intelligence and devastatingly good looks. Total Highball all round.

And here we are in December. That didn't take long. Thank you to the readers of this column, I wish you all a Highball Christmas and an inclusive New Year!

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