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*The Northern Advocate*

*"A different Light"*

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## Geneva Tino on a journey that will take her places

Stephen Hawking is the poster boy for assistive technology - now we have a Northland woman making massive strides using similar technology.

For thousands of years, storytelling has given our species an edge. It's given us the ability to store information and pass it down through the generations.

Neurologically, we process stories as mnemonic tools or techniques to remember things.

The Baker Baker dichotomy articulates this concept very well. It's a lot harder to remember the surname Baker than it is to think of a portly, ruddy-faced baker wearing a big tall hat.

Modern-day marketers are constantly striving to tell a story about a product, service or organisation that can be elevated into a viral digital maelstrom that they hope will translate into huge brand recognition and sales.

It's that time of the year when we are preparing to celebrate the Day of the Disabled Person.

We hold off producing too much promotional material until we find out what the United Nation's annual theme for the International Day will be.

And you know what? I don't know why I bother waiting. It's always a stunning anticlimax.

I know, they need to make it high-level, lofty and inspirational but do they have to make it homogenised at best and spectacularly boring at worst?

Last year the theme was "Achieving 17 goals for the future we want"; No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

May I say ... snore? May I say ... groan, and may I say that I won't bore you with the other eight goals?

This year the theme is "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all". Wow.

Okay, I have a story. It's a fairly untold story because the protagonist is non-verbal. This year I was a judge for the Attitude Awards. For those who aren't familiar with the awards I can tell you it's a big deal.

More than 300 people in glitz and glamour, celebrities, ministers, sirs and dames come together to acknowledge and celebrate attitudes that are both associated with disabled people and surpass disability.

Judging these awards is always a convoluted process, with seven awards that span employers, sportspeople, entrepreneurs and artists.

This year I had to declare a conflict of interest. I am also on the board of Talklink, a national organisation that provides assistive communication technology to people who are non-verbal.

Internationally, Stephen Hawking is the poster boy for assistive technology unleashing a brain as big as the black hole he discovered.

Now we have our very own poster girl. Geneva Tino is a young Maori woman from Ngapuhi, Te Aupouri and Ngati Awai descent. You can almost see the mana shimmering around her.

She not only took out the Spirit of Attitude Award but also nailed the Supreme Award.



Geneva has fairly intense athetoid cerebral palsy. It's a type of cerebral palsy that has a very high representation of high intelligence and devastatingly good looks (I have athetoid cerebral palsy, funnily enough!).

Geneva uses preprogrammed phrases that she accesses through a digital device. This is known as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) communication.

She is completing her bachelor's degree in communication and working on giving New Zealand AAC communications a Kiwi accent and incorporating te reo as opposed to having an American twang represent New Zealanders who use AAC communication.

Geneva is telling a relatively untold story on a journey that I'm sure will take her far.

This year Tiaho Trust will celebrate the International Day of the Disabled Person a week later on November 8 at Forum North. We won't be telling the story of this year's theme, we will be enjoying the smorgasbord of diversity that disability offers. Join us and be part of that story.

■ **Post Script:** I want to say big thanks to an old school mate and entrepreneur extraordinaire Marcus from Te Mara Estate who responded to last fortnight's column by lending us a venue (31 Walton St) where we can exhibit the more risqué components of the photo exhibition Intimate Encounters.

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