

## A different Light – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2020

February has been hot and busy. No doubt it will get hotter and busier with the weekends having the most activity. While February is punctuated by long weekends which are greatly relished it's also a time where Northland seems to crank into gear. We recently conducted an Accessibility Assessment at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. The job was bigger than expected with multiple events and multiple accessible routes to describe, analyse and make recommendations. We covered a lot of ground over the two days. Arlene my colleague was complaining of sore feet, not to mention a sore knee when she decided to knee my mobility scooter through the frustration of trying to assemble it. (She claims however that I dropped it on her knee getting the scooter out of the boot). I didn't know what she was moaning about: I was fine. It might have helped that I was on my scooter the whole day!

The accessibility at Waitangi has greatly improved over the last two years thanks to local disability advocate Kim Robinson making the Powers-That-Be aware of access issues in the Treaty Grounds and on the day. The National Waitangi Trust was very open and receptive to our Assessment and while there was obviously no time to implement our recommendations for this Waitangi Day, they will have a good pathway forward.

My last weekend was elongated as I cunningly took Friday off which joined up with Waitangi Day on Thursday. Over the weekend we hosted our friend Helen from Auckland. Her birthday was on Saturday, and Hel, who calls a spade a spade, made her birthday demands clear. The itinerary included a Champagne breakfast and elongated lunch out and then some binge watching on Netflix with the day being smattered with drinks of bubbles and the befouling of popular songs with impromptu unsavoury lyrics. By early evening we were exhausted.

Sunday was our mokopuna's birthday party. She would be five in the next week. Her party involved around 50 people. She has a big whanau. The weekend was particularly busy for them as they had a tangi up North on the Saturday, her birthday party on the Sunday and then back up North that afternoon with the burial being the next day. The party was a great success, celebrating that milestone of turning five, while pausing to give thanks and acknowledgement to the precious one who had passed on .

The reason we celebrated her birthday last weekend is because this weekend is my brother's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party. We have all been summoned out to Matapouri that weekend for another round of birthday celebrations. While we are unsure of what that will entail, I'm sure that no doubt it will be eventful and stylish. He has effectively stolen my wife's birthday Saturday as they share a Birth Day – so somewhere amongst it all I better not lose sight of that.

There is no let up. The next weekend is Tiaho Trust's Ruakaka Surf Day, an annual event that gives disabled people a day a go at 'catching a wave'. Everyone involved on the day has a bit smile on their face. If anyone would like to be involved as a volunteer (either on land or in the water), feel free to call us and register. Surfs up!

### ***Postscript***

At the time writing this column I heard about the passing of Chris Keay, a well known person in the Disability Community of Whangarei. Known for his cheerful outlook and outgoing nature, he will be missed and remembered. .

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