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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 1 August 2020 – “Falling over a common experience for disabled people”

My friend Robbie cracked his rib last weekend. He came off his e-bike whilst enthusiastically riding down a grass track from Beach Rd to the Onerahi Scout Club. He's off work for a week resting up. Broken ribs hurt. I know. Although I didn't know it at the time, I broke several ribs two days before I was due to fly to meet my wife in Los Angeles for a much anticipated trip through California. The injury had occurred in Kawakawa in the Ngati Hine Heath Trust building. We were holding a Hui on developing a non- disabling community with Ngahau Davis, a charismatic community leader from Moerewa. I was about to open the hui when I fell backwards into a door frame. The Ngati Hine Health Trust is a solid building with solid door frames. I was instantly winded but after doing my impression of a gasping fish for a couple of minutes, I got up and opened the hui. The next day I knew I had done something bad, but I was determined to carry on with the planned holiday I went to the Doctor who declared I had sprained my back, gave me some Panadol and told me it would clear up in a few days. I didn't realise the full extent of the discomfort the injury was going to cause until I got out of the car at the Onerahi Airport. Pain shot through my side, like a very angry rampant electric eel. My eyes bulged in sheer disbelief. Prior to this, my wife, who was attending training in California, had organised for me to travel with her colleague's husband. At the time I wasn't too keen on the idea, stubbornly wanting to travel on my own independently. I am embarrassed to say that prior to check in, I even quietly made sure I was seated separately from him as I didn't want some bloke I didn't know cramping my style. However once I realised I was wracked in pain and probably had a broken rib, I was extremely grateful of his jovial company and his attentive support. When we arrived at Auckland Airport, he wheeled me in a wheelchair to the bar for some self-medication before boarding the plane for the long haul to Los Angeles. I was rather quiet and sheepish as he had ask the cabin crew to be re-seated next to me, astonished that they had seated us separately.

My Doctor thankfully had given me two sleeping pills for the flight and after a couple of merlots I slept right through it. On arrival I awoke and noticed that a 1.5 water bottle next to me was empty. I asked what happened to it and my companion told me that in the middle

of the night I woke up and drank the entire bottle and went straight back to sleep. I had no recollection!

When I met my wife at the Cadillac Hotel in Venice Beach she knew something was wrong by the strained look on my face. After hearing my harrowed story she declared in her usual optimistic forthright fashion that we would buy some over the counter pain killers and go forth and enjoy our holiday which we did : LA, Los Vegas, San Francisco and San Diego -we had a blast even though it was punctuated with spasms of pain. When we arrived back home I went for an X-ray. It turned out I had three broken ribs! I'm kind of glad I didn't know that before settling off. The knowledge would surely have made it feel worse. Falling over is unfortunately a common aspect of Cerebral Palsy, but hey, what's also common with disabled people is that we fall down -and we get back up again.

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