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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 10 October 2020 – “When Good Times Go Bad”

Last week it was the school holidays and time to take our mokopuna away on a trip. Last holidays we went to Rotorua, this time we decided to stay and play in our own back yard and headed for Paihia. The epicentre of tourism in Northland, Paihia is a bustling township packed with islands and entrepreneurs. Our granddaughter thrives on action and we had to build at least one major activity into each day we were away. On the first day on route to the Bay we jumped on the train in Kawakawa. It was the first time we had taken the Bay of Islands Vintage Railway Train trip and I was somewhat circumspect as to whether I would be able to don the train on my mobility scooter. To my surprise we were, although we did need the spontaneous assistance of other fellow local tourists who pushed me up the rather steep ramp to the open carriage. We saw Kawakawa in a different light as we lurched and rolled down State Highway 1 through the middle of town.

After checking in to our hotel our granddaughter Isla, insisted on going straight to the swimming pool and even though it was a spectacularly sunny spring day, her teeth were chattering uncontrollably with cold in minutes and her grandmother was chilled to the bone not long after. This turned out to be daily activity that was non-negotiable in Isla's eyes. The next day we set out on that quintessential Bay of Islands attraction the 'dolphin cruise'. Again I was pleasantly surprised I was able to pilot my mobility scooter onto the boat. Although the trip was rather breezy and the boat rocked and rolled on the Pacific Ocean the local pod of dolphins did not disappoint by making their presence known, frolicking in the wake of the boat.

On our second to last day in Paihia we participated in a guided tour of the Treaty of Waitangi Grounds. This time I knew exactly what the deal would be as we had conducted an Accessibility Audit of the grounds late last year. However, we did get momentarily lost looking for an accessible route back from the Meeting House to the main carpark. They really could do with an Accessible Map.

Finally, it was time to go home. On the way we went through Kerikeri dropping in at the Makana Chocolate Factory, narrowly missing Judith Collins who had the same idea. We arrived home that afternoon and while I was unpacking my bag, I heard from the kitchen a loud crash followed by an uncontrollable crying and wailing of my granddaughter punctuated by exclamations of shock from my wife Sally. They appeared in the hallway. Isla forearm was clearly misshaped in an angle that had a sickening look of a badly broken arm. She had fallen off her chair in the kitchen and obviously broken it. When good times turn bad. Not wanting to put her through a bumpy ride from Ruakaka into town and being horrified at the delicate state of her arm we rang an Ambulance. After a long stint of gentle distracting techniques and strategies the Ambulance officers made a welcome appearance and administered pain relief and a temporary splint. Then granddaughter and grandmother were in the ambulance off to the sanctuary of the Health System. The next day Isla appeared happily into sight, smiling and skipping around with a huge plaster up to her shoulder. Her resilience was remarkable. She is a living, breathing, skipping reminder that we all have the ability to be resilient. She reminds me to accentuate the positive and choose not to be ground down by the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune: whether it be level 2 or 3, a temporary broken limb or a permanent impairment.

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