



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 5 December 2020 – “Catching up with old friends - priceless”

As one gets older (*that opening line is getting all too familiar!*) one can start losing touch with friends. The needs of family and work can get complex and all encompassing.

The big gaps between catch-ups with key groups of friends mean that get-togethers are increasingly planned to last over a longer period of time – weekends, long weekends and minibreaks. So when you do get together with those comrades from yester year it can be EPIC. Such was last weekend.

When our friend Greg texted a few weeks ago about a boat trip at the end of November we were all a tad apprehensive. We’ve all had past experience. We knew that these re-unions could last for days and take far longer to recover. For days leading up to the foray we texted nervous but rueful questions to each other. “How many nights are you staying for”? And “let’s make a pact to look out for each other”.

But not long after we set off from the Marsden Cove marina with the sun glittering on the water we had settled back into that comfortable mode you only get into when you are with old friends. Greg handed me the wheel and we motored towards Tutukaka, skirting around Guano Rock. We moored into an inlet not far from Tutukaka. I went downstairs onto the main floor and with the boat still rocking, Owen offered me a hand which I stubbornly refused. Five seconds later I managed to lurch myself into a forward dive down the steps into the bottom berth. Time seemed to slow right down as I plummeted towards the steps, wondering how bad the inevitable impact would be. Of course, I managed to connect with one of the bottom steps using my forehead. Blood immediately started to drip out profusely, turning my white shirt into a massacre scene. After the use of several band-aids which were applied one after the other, the bleeding subsided and I could get back to the revelry and cavorting.

There were 12 of us on board, friends, brothers and sons. There were a couple of chaps I hadn't met before. I overheard one of them talking about me and my origin. The conversation went "how long have you known Jonny?", "we've known him for ages", "has he always had that condition (I guess he meant Cerebral Palsy)?" "yeah, yeah" came the reply. Later into the weekend I was talking to the same newly acquainted person and he expressed how impressed he was at my inclusion in the group and the way I was treated with such respect. At the time I was surprised by this comment, but after some reflection it made me appreciate just how inclusive and accommodating my friends have been throughout my life. Cheers, guys!

The weekend continued over the next 3 nights with jovial comradery, laughing, looking at the turquoise sea crashing on Celtic Rock, a wee landmark covered in subtropical vegetation. Time passed in a blur of savagely poured cocktails, fishing and loud snoring. It was a weekend of intense fun, although as expected, by the end of it I did feel jaded and vaguely jittery with the odd bump and scrape, not to mention a ding to the forehead and sunburnt shins. It's great catching up with old friends, priceless, it just takes a little longer to recover each time. Remember to re-connect with those old mates, and remember to accept a hand when they offer it to you.

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