



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

"A Different Light"

A Different Light –17th February 2024 – “Showing commitment is all part of life”

Has love been in the air for anyone this week? Has anyone set sail on the seas of passion? Do you participate in Valentine’s Day? Or do you view it as an overly commercialized and superficial construct that pressurises one to buy gifts and plan elaborate gestures that can create unnecessary stress and expectations?

Valentine’s Day has been around for yonks! Its murky origins are rooted in both Christian and ancient Roman traditions.

One legend associates Valentine’s Day with Saint Valentine, a Christian martyr who lived in the 3rd century AD. According to popular belief, Valentine was a Roman priest who performed secret marriages against the orders of Emperor Claudius II, who had banned marriages for young men, believing that single men made better soldiers. Valentine was eventually caught, imprisoned, and executed on February 14th. How grim!

I myself have always done my best to exploit the opportunity to celebrate love and affection for my wife and soul mate of the last 37 years. Of course, on the odd occasion, I have forgotten which has been awkward but forgiven (in due course!) I met my wife in the 80’s. She was a goth. She said “I like your shirt its colourful, I can’t wear colours I only wear black”. To which I replied in one of my rare suave moments “yes but your lips are red”.

Relationships and rituals over a long duration take commitment. Generally speaking, disabled people show commitment on a daily basis, as they navigate the world, with its numerous barriers within the built environment, as well as within communities and societies they live in. Now don’t get me wrong, New Zealand is doing pretty well in that regard. But to show commitment to the

ongoing course of disability rights, it helps to remember that we still live in a disabling world.

My mokopuna recently taught me a lesson in commitment. I took the day off last week, initially to attend a four hour Strategic Planning Session via zoom for an organisation called Talklink , for whom I am a Board Trustee. The day before my daughter asked me if I could look after our granddaughter who was off school with a bad cold, to which of course I agreed. After two hours of the Strategic Planning by zoom, I decided to end my participation and committed my time with Isla. I thought I would need a range of activities to keep her occupied, but she was actually more than happy to just talk, so long as I committed my full attention to her. We did however play a game of snakes and ladders which seemed to continue forever...

Today when this column is published, Tiaho Trust will be showing its commitment to giving disabled people a chance to “catch a wave” at the 10th Ruakaka Surf Day. This is a day when disabled people have this opportunity to surf, with the support of committed volunteers including professionals, such as Tutukaka Surf, Waipu Learn 2 Surf, Ruakaka Surf Lifesaving Club and Tiaho staff.

I initially got the concept of holding a Surf Day from Gary Butt, a veteran surfer. In 1963, Gary won the New Zealand Surf National Junior Champions. He brought the concept of Adaptive Surfing over from Hawaii in 2012 from a group of surfers called Kore Kauai. He has been the ringleader for over 12 years for the “Have a go Surfing Days” throughout New Zealand. I’m sure he has started to grow gills over the years. He is now 75 years old, still committed to surfing, on the seas of passion.

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