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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 3rd February 2024 – “Oops, I did it again, Jonny Wilkinson cracks a rib”

Oops, I did it again. No fool like an old fool. Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. These cliches spring to mind this week. The first one is not really cliché, it's a line out of a Britney Spears song. I wish I was frolicking around like Britney Spears right now, instead I am avoiding sneezing, coughing, laughing and even deep breathing. Why? Because I have cracked a rib. Again! Each time I do any of those things that cause me to inflate my diaphragm my eyes pop out in an intense spasm of pain. Anyone who has broken a rib will know exactly what I mean. I've done it a few times to various degrees of severity, hence 'oops I did it (yet) again'. Falling over comes with the territory when you have Cerebral Palsy. You would think I would have devised a method to avoid such mishaps over the past 50+ years but, alas, no.

The first time I did it was spectacular. I was just about to open a hui at the Ngati Hine Health Trust in Kawakawa, when I fell backwards and caught the edge of a door frame (solid Rimu, if I remember rightly), right on the side of my back. I was winded but managed to open the hui with a short speech. Now the thing about broken ribs is the full magnitude of agony doesn't really get a grip on you until a few days later. The timing of the onset of the Devils grip of pain coincided with the start of an overseas trip, to Los Angeles, where I was to meet my wife over there after she had ended her conference in Bakersfield. As I got out of the car at the Onerahi airport I knew I was in trouble when a spasm of agony rippled through me. I spent the bulk of the holiday through California; Vegas; San Francisco and San Diego self-medicating with brutal cocktails, from dusk to dawn. In San Diego I went on my brother-in-law's friend's boat to go big game fishing. The Californian who owned the boat kept on yelling 'you get to take the first strike dude' as he buckled a humungous rod and reel to me. I silently prayed that no first strike would happen as I couldn't imagine fighting a ginormous fish in my fragile state.

You see when you have Cerebral Palsy, pain makes you spasm and when you have a broken rib a spasm will give your pain, a vicious cycle. I could actually feel the ribs grating together.

The second time it happened I was hastily trying to get to the long drop at my brother's bach in Matapouri. My feet slipped out from under me and my ribs took the full brunt of the door step. For some reason the recovery didn't seem too bad, or maybe the memory was

hazed out by painkillers. The third time seemed to be far more savage. I was in the kitchen and suddenly spasmed which sent me in to fall quick sidesteps at a 45 degree angle landing on the edge of the bar top. It seemed like any movement sent me into long periods of grunting, huffing and sweating.

This time was relatively simple, to the extent of being ridiculous. I fell on the back of a plastic chair which somehow had amazing rigid qualities to it. It did not hurt straight away. Maybe it had something to do with the couple of Negronis I had imbibed at the time (no fool like an old fool!). I knew what to expect and I'm doing my best to compartmentalise the pain, not to mention the bad luck. One has to be philosophical about things and try to put ill fate to good use. When one must endure 'slings and arrows' I am channelling 'sticks and stones' (and rigid plastic chairs) may break your bones but words will never hurt you.

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

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