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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 15th March 2025 – “ Stung by memories of a phobia ”

When I googled “black wasps”, some sites said that they were large. Some said they were tiny. Another website it said they very rarely stung humans. It was then I knew I had the wrong wasp.

Last weekend, I climbed out of our pool feeling that invigorating freshness one gets when one plunges in cool water. I do miss the beach but getting down to it was getting harder and harder. When we lived in Ruakaka I used to be able to drive onto the beach in an old 4-wheel drive Suzuki until vehicle access to Ruakaka Beach was severely restricted, thwarting my access to the sea. Back to the pool. As my wife lay back on a recliner, I opted for a sturdier and more upright wrought iron outdoor chair. As I looked up to the cloudless sky, I saw what looked to be a black mason bee coming towards me. I nonchalantly batted it away with a backhand. But the critter made a bee line for my finger and a sharp pain instantly ensued. Bastard! Another one appeared and an even sharper pain erupted on my hand. Suddenly, they were swarming around me. I started yelling hysterically. Sally, my wife came over and heroically grabbed me, herself getting stung in the process. We went back into the house as quickly as possible, which was not that quick. It was traumatizing. The pain from the stings seemed to increase every minute.

I have a bad history with wasps. I remember when I was 7 years old, a large wasp landed on my hand and repeatedly stung it. This made me spasm so rigidly that I could not knock it off. My mother eventually came to the rescue. The memory of the incident remains crystal clear.

Then when I was around 11, I remember my brother sadistically squirting a wasp which was in the grass with a water pistol, while I cautiously observed some distance away. Out the blue, the wasp flew up and made a direct bee line for me. Back then I could run (after a fashion), but the wasp was quickly gaining on me, when my mother slapped it away with a Women’s Weekly magazine. Even though I escaped a stinging the memory still haunts me.

Then there was the spa pool wasp attack in Onerahi, where unbeknown to me a wasp nest was under construction under the spa pool switch. When I turned on the switch I got stung and then chased into the bedroom and into the bathroom with the vindictive swine in hot pursuit. Again, back then it was Sally to the rescue.

Every time I see a wasp I go into panic mode; some people say that wasps smell fear- that they are triggered by human adrenalin and attack accordingly. It’s the same with dogs. I have somewhat of a phobia around potentially fierce dogs, such as Pitbulls, Dobermans,

Ridgebacks, hell even Staffies can make me twitch somewhat. They too can smell fear. It's a perpetuating syndrome.

However, the latest incident was not a result of my hysterical wasp phobia. On closer inspection the wasps had been busily building a nest under the very wrought iron chair I was sitting on. It hasn't done much for my wasp phobia. I will be looking very carefully where I sit in future. Black, red or yellow as Shakespeare once advised, "if it appears waspish best avoid the sting".

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