



The Stimulus

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Jonathan Salm - a story about love and the healing power of music

I sat at Jo's on a sunny afternoon with the winter sun bathing his lovely large garden in light and his chickens watching us through the window on his deck. Jo's story is a fascinating one. From his early life in Mozambique, living in Durban and then coming to NZ, his journey with his Parkinson's has had some truly incredible moments.

Jo is married to Ingrid and between them they have six children from previous marriages, with Jo having three daughters and a son. A keen runner, Jo started noticing some cramping in his foot in 1994, which turned out to be early dystonia – a first sign of the Parkinson's. Coming to NZ in that same year, Jo was referred to a neurologist who sent him for several tests but the process of diagnosis did not go smoothly for him and coincidentally one day, whilst at a Special Olympics practice session with his son (who has Downs Syndrome), Jo met a lady who appeared to have the same 'pill rolling' tick in her hand, as Jo had begun to develop. When he asked her about it, she told him she had Parkinson's and so Jo sought a second opinion with another neurologist.



Within half an hour of meeting him, the diagnosis was made and Jo's journey with Parkinson's began. Jo enjoyed meeting with the neurologist and their many conversations together, but in 2004, when the then Van der Veer Institute was formed, and the neurologist suggested that Jo might like to become a research subject for our very own Prof Tim Anderson. The idea of being at the 'cutting edge' of Parkinson's research really appealed to Jo and so he changed specialists to become what he calls 'a willing research guinea pig'.

Jo says that he was given advice by a health professional to stop running and in his words 'forget about any kind of sport or exercise except swimming'. Advice Jo now regrets taking as he feels his fitness was compromised earlier than it needed to be and that perhaps he should have stayed more active within the bounds of his condition.

Sadly, Jo's first marriage came to an end in 2000. Whilst on one of his regular trips to Durban to visit his parents, Jo met up with a few friends, one of whom was a woman whom he had known some years prior. To cut a long story short, romance bloomed and Jo and Ingrid were married and have been very happy ever since.

Jo's work career has been pretty varied, with time spent in the shipping industry, with his own timber mill and computer training business, as well as writing software and providing sales and support of accounting packages. He retired formally in 2004, when his condition made working difficult.

Ten years ago he went to see a faith healer at the behest of a friend and Jo feels that this helped him, especially with his depression and anxiety but admits that it is not for everyone.

Today, Jo is immersed in the Cantabrainers Choir, of which he is a founding member. In fact, the name of the choir came from Jo himself, which he is understandably proud of. Jo has sung in many choirs in the past and the chance to once again, be part of a musical group has been a real joy for him. He tells me he truly looks forward to Wednesdays when choir practice is on and also is able to pick up and transport another woman who is a member. Jo feels the choir has given him back his self-confidence and the excitement and enthusiasm of the members of the choir and the leaders is very infectious. He's even arranged music for them to sing and is an enthusiastic soloist!

Spending some time with Jo showed me that even in the midst of personal hardship, seeking out joyful things and activities is the key to being happy. Jo's lively mind and enthusiasm for the choir that now gives him so much, was very inspirational.