

Life Can Be Wonderful!

Oh yes we all have our problems – worry, aches and pains and disappointments but a visit with a Hospice Durham client quickly puts things in a different perspective – our problems all become insignificant in comparison to infirmities many endure.

Take for example, the man who for many years viewed the landscape from the top of a hydro pole while working on transformers. When I first met him, he was for the tenth year sitting in a wheelchair – but still with a smile on his face. Words like discomfort or pain never crossed his lips.

Another man with a suitcase full of medals marking his achievements including an Olympic Bronze Medal who today requires the assistance of a walker just to get around the house – his only complaint – “there’s not enough time in a day to get the things done”.

Every hour spent with a client strengthens the bond of friendship. Clients open the door of their heart disclosing their innermost secrets and aspirations if the one they trust will just listen. Invariably the Hospice Worker finds inspiration and courage from every visit.

One client, I’ll call Jeff had our services for over a year. On one occasion, he brought tears to my eyes.

A little background on Jeff – wheelchair bound and unable to walk for sometime.

Here’s what happened:

During the spring and summer we regularly dumped his wheelchair into the back of my wagon and we’d drive to a park with asphalt trails – a different one almost every week. Fortunately we were both interested in the outdoors and bird-watching. Because I spent my summer weekends at a trailer park just north of Peterborough, Jeff would often ask me about the birds and pet raccoons that we fed.

On one occasion, Jeff asked if sometime he could go to the camp with me. “Maybe”, I answered as I did a quick mental note of Hospice Durham’s do and don’t list. “I’ll let you know next week”.

With a cautionary affirmative from the office and “I think it’d do Jeff good”, from his doctor, I chose a beautiful summery day in mid-September to travel almost to Apsley with my client.

Because the camp has a good sand beach I had asked Jeff if he had a bathing suit. “I think I can find one” was his reply.

With some difficulty I got Jeff and his chair through the sand to the water’s edge. After removing shoes, socks, trousers and shirt, I eased the chair into the lake to a depth Jeff could almost float into the water. Such a beautiful day and we were perhaps fortunately the only one in the lake. I ‘dragged’ my client into deeper water and much to his surprise he had little difficulty swimming a few strokes.

“Let’s rest a moment”, I said, as we felt the sandy bottom under our feet with water almost up to our neck. We remarked how the cedars at the shoreline were all uniformly trimmed, caused by the deer in the winter months as they stood on the frozen lake, munching the new growth.

“Shall we call it a day”, I asked as I started toward the shore. “OK”, came the reply. Suddenly a great shout broke the peacefulness of the lake.

With arms high over his head Jeff shouted “Morley, I’m walking.”

Indeed it was a great experience – just to walk unassisted the first time in years.

Article by Morley Chesher