

## **Judy's story:**

### **Who's Afraid of Hip Joint Degeneration?**

I was. Especially when I realised in 2011 it was underway after a heavy fall from my bike onto cement and my right hip. Once the initial acute pain lessened, steadily worsening pain in *both* joints came on, and quickly became chronic persistent pain, day and night.

I leapt into this challenge with "I can fix this!"

"No hip operations for me!" was my strategy, calling on osteopathy, physiotherapy, acupuncture, Bowen therapy, yoga (using a therapeutic approach) and Pilates to maintain core strength. I had to ease up on various much loved outdoor activities and stop some altogether. Still, I regarded that as a temporary situation that I would solve, given time and persistence with the right combination of body therapies.

### **LIVING IN HOPE**

A year later, I still could not sit or walk for longer than 30-40 minutes at a time and was finding my largely sedentary CEO job very hard to keep up, having to work with and around ongoing pain. Pain medication I tried had detrimental effects on mental focus and concentration. So I took on a lighter workload and adapted my work practices. This included cycling through a range of different working positions through the day: sitting at my desk with added hip-support; sitting on the floor with my laptop on my thighs; kneeling on my heels and working from a coffee table; working standing up with my laptop on high cabinets then taking a walk around the block and starting the cycle again. I took to standing up at meetings (although embarrassing to do so) rather than sitting for hours. I was still thinking I would solve this if I could spend less time sitting, using the time I had freed up for more rehabilitation, exercises and therapies and trialing non-drug ways to manage the pain and keep working.

From July 2012 I kept a journal to track how things were going day to day and at night, to note what treatment or activity helped or didn't; what made things harder. I stopped it at the end of 2013 and what a tale it tells! Dealing with hip pain really took over my life, so now I would say: don't take as long to act as I did, if you have hip discomfort!

## HOPE GIVES WAY TO FEAR

Until the end of 2012, I was doing all I could to avoid hip surgery, from fear of being out of the workforce for an extended time, and concern and shame that I had failed and been foolish about how I had used my body over 40 years. Being ambitious and competitive, I sure had used it! Vanity was at work, too: I had built a persona of being fit, flexible, strong and able for life - except I wasn't by this time. I catastrophised: surgery might set me on a path of ongoing medical interventions; I'm surely too young; I would have to have another within 20 years; I would have to forego much on my bucket list, to walk the Lycian Way; to kayak in Antarctic and Alaskan waters, to dance in Cuba; to cycle through New Zealand; through France. Would I have to trim my work ambitions and leisure pursuits permanently? Anyway, which hip needed the surgery more? How long would I be out of action if they were done consecutively or simultaneously?

So much doubt in the face of countless reports of others' justifiable delight at their successful recoveries - one at least, right under my nose! I did know, because of being close to Eve witnessing her bilateral procedure, her speedy recovery and dedicated rehabilitation, that they could be done together in some cases. It could be that, for suitable candidates simultaneous procedures could be better or at least no harder to recover from than consecutive procedures.

## REMEDIES AND RECOVERY

By the end of 2012, with ever-worsening pain, I finally accepted that any lasting solution was beyond me and I needed help. Lucky for me, it came soon. Thanks to the same surgeon who

treated Eve, I was able to have a total bilateral hip replacement in April 2013. My recovery was different to hers, in some ways, longer and more difficult. I had to learn to work with *my* body and its unique responses to all that had happened over the previous two years and post-surgery; that I was a different build to others. Although slower than I wanted, it was miraculous. My journal records the days I found I could walk without sticks, then further and further; when I could sleep on my sides after so long; no longer needed post-op pain medication, could sleep through the night; could swim longer, further, then could cycle, kayak, hike again. And do sedentary work for a whole day at a time! Remarkably, as each turning point or yielding was reached, it sustained.

I am now back to my old self, with all the capacity and capability I had prior to the fall and a lot more wisdom about how to look after my body. Thank heaven for swimming: it was the exercise I *could* do for long periods without pain and could resume very soon after the operation.

### WISDOM GAINED

At what point did some wisdom cut in? In stages and it always had to overcome with my ambitiousness and tendency to compete with myself. I had to learn to live attentively in *my* body once pain became my 24/7 companion. I had for so long endeavoured do what others' could do, out there on the leading edge, with weak perception of internal warning signs to pull back. Pain is a sharp and uncompromising teacher and a precious guru. I learned to listen inside-out, instead of outside-in; it certainly helped to seek medical and alternative-practitioner advice on the condition, likely progression, remedies, and vital to then try them on attentively, patiently, let my physical experience point up the truth for me, and their aftermath. RESTING became essential. Pain is very tiring. Ongoing pain uses up a lot of energy, though I could not see that often that until I had almost run out of it. From the end of 2012 for about 10 months, I often had to stop, leave it alone, do nothing, have an afternoon sleep instead of trying to work a way

out of my limitations.

### A STORY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

The remarkable recovery I have had took some time. It required patience and dedicated non-judgmental rebuilding work. It included amazement at the process of healing and how it has its own intelligence and timing. Thanks to a remarkable team of supporters - medical specialists, health and rehabilitation professionals and my wonderful circle of friends who know how bodies work and heal and how to maintain morale in recovery and my own getting of wisdom, I am through it. It's a miracle and a daily joy to be free of pain, with the flexibility, mobility and endurance I feared was gone for good.