

For the living to keep living and the dreams to be realised - in a hurry!

This wasn't part of the life plan.

Emotions I had not allowed to come forth for decades surfaced the first few times I found myself staring at the ceiling through the custom built green plastic mask, laying with my head and shoulders immobilised, strapped firmly to the Radio Treatment bed.

The first treatment was 29th of December 2015 and suddenly tears mixed with memories, flashes of various life events with my wife Viv; our two sons; Grayson at just turned 18, about to start a double science degree and Mitchell 9 (and a half!). No way under the mask to wipe the tears away.

The Squamous Cell Carcinoma diagnosis in the second week of October 2015 had been a shock ... but you can't change it and you have to deal with the cards you are dealt ... PET scan to see how far it had spread then tonsils out either side of Labour weekend; teeth extracted in preparation for Radio Therapy and then left hand side radical neck dissection to remove lymph-nodes at the end of November. Then the countdown leading up to the 29th of December and the first of 30 'zaps' under the massive RT machine.

In the back of your mind ... have they got it all? Will I be around to see our boys grow up and eventually sit on the front porch in a rocker reminiscing with Viv about the life experiences we had?

The lead fingers inside the RT machine moving back and forth opening and closing to allow the radiation through at the right trajectory ... a bit like the thoughts racing from one topic to another.

The family had managed to cope pretty damn well through the initial stages ... even Grayson in his final year of High School, about to sit NCEA Level 3 and then in Mid December head down to the Royal Society of New Zealand's Powering the Potential National Science Fair in Wellington. Our son one of 40 Top Secondary School Science Students from throughout New Zealand selected to attend! Some youngsters would have crumpled with the extra stress and worry, but not Grayson. Although he had had his moments he had held it together and January saw NCEA Level 3 Endorsed with Excellence arrive in the mail!

I can remember our broker Chris Billing telling me once when talking about insurances, the agent / advisor is really one of the few people via the insurance company, who provide practical help in the form of a 'cheque' in what is a family crisis time. Watching as we get older the premiums go up you do wonder if all the years of paying are worth it.

That is until out of the blue, what was initially thought to be an infection and resulting swollen lymph gland under the jaw and as in previous times a course of anti-biotics would sort it out. A subsequent needle aspiration and resulting tests ... antibiotics wouldn't solve this one! An uninvited unequivocal invitation to join what is colloquially known as the Head and Necker's Club in Cancer circles!

A few phone calls with Chris and Carole, scanned and emailed letters confirming diagnosis and the 'Life Insurance for the Living' claim through Sovereign was settled within a matter

of days. It would prove invaluable as the next 'surprise' turned up in the second week of my treatment.

Due to the diagnosis, there would be extra expenses - coverage of the family accommodation business while we made trips south to Auckland from the Bay of Islands for treatment, or even visiting friends and other family, if the prognosis took a turn for the worse!

In August 2015, I had taken then 17 year old Grayson back to the United States to meet his Grandfather and other family members for the first time and to sort out his entitlement to US citizenship. The two week trip culminated in a meeting with former Black Stick, Chris Clements who is now the USA National Men's Field Hockey Coach. The meeting at the Team USA Olympic Training Centre in Chula Vista, near San Diego, California, was an initial evaluation of Grayson as a potential International Level Goal Keeper.

Like any New Zealand born hockey player, playing for the Black Sticks would be the ultimate dream for Grayson and the Olympics the pinnacle, but life's roads are not necessarily straight ones. The USA evaluation went very well and we departed back for New Zealand ... and heard nothing.

8 January still not at the half way stage of the treatment and an email out of the blue, Chris Clements:- can Grayson make an invitation only Jr Men's (Under 21) Selection Camp back in Chula Vista second week in February? A months' notice but despite everything going on between weekly treatments for me in Auckland, the seven day a week accommodation business to run, then a close family friend passing away a week later ... the pressures mounted.

The insurance claim meant the immediate financial pressures could be looked after; so tickets booked, Travel Insurance thanks to NZI including coverage (while not playing) on Grayson's \$3500 goal keeping gear put in place and the countdown began to the very early hours of February 10th and his departure, the day after my final treatment.

Treatment is bad enough, but Viv being the partner at home, dealing with the business in the peak time of year plus running the family on her own, and being the executor and trustee for the family friend that passed away, began to take its toll!

Saturday night Waitangi Day, I am home and we are all together with a couple of family friends wishing Grayson all the best for the USA Trials and reassuring him travelling on your own would be fine! The saying is the final straw, Grayson and I about to head off on the Monday for my final two treatment session then put Grayson on the plane ... Viv had reached the end of her rope had tied a knot and was just hanging on. She needed a break.

A quick visit to the computer, back to the dining table, Viv I can get you on the same flights there and back as Grayson (Viv hates flying) are you going Yes or No? Must have been a weak moment and Viv said yes! Two minutes later flights were booked, accommodation being sought near the training centre and arrangements being made for coverage till I could get back from Auckland to man the business. Viv would get to watch her son try out for an international side; thanks to the Life for the Living and Progressive Care Protection Insurance Policy.

Final warm down at the Selection Camp, Viv is leaning over the fence at the edge of the turf chatting to the coach about when the Team USA shop would be open again ... A

surreptitious look around at who was near ... Chris Clements said, 'Viv go on- line when you get home, order what you need and get it sent to me here ... we want Grayson to come on the Holland tour with us ... he's in the squad!'"

They arrived home three days later and official confirmation came through, (See link) [Team USA Under 21's](#) -what had once been the chubby boy originally from Greenhithe School in Auckland, then Paihia School and on to Kerikeri High School, is indeed in the USA Under 21 Squad going to Holland in March. That is followed in late April/May to Toronto for the Pan American Field Hockey Champs. If successful in reaching the final, it will be on to the FIH World Junior Champs at Delhi, India in December.

Needless to say his University Studies, a conjoint double Science degree, are temporarily on hold while he pursues his sporting dream.

For anyone doubting the value in keeping your life insurance up to date and reviewing it regularly to ensure it's still suited to your circumstances, we can only say don't doubt whether the premium is worth it - just find a way to do it. Getting diagnosed with a life threatening condition is not a recommended way to learn from experience - but if it happens, it does take pressures off when life keeps throwing you curve balls.

What it has done is allow us to continue supporting our son and his ambitions even though as a family we have been going through a very stressful time.

Obviously it is an ongoing journey ... with any sport the initial stages even of an international player are not fully funded by the national sporting body and our on-going quest is there to keep supporting him in every way we can.

It's also reassuring for us to know that Grayson is covered while travelling both medically and his personal gear (especially with the cost of his protective goal keeping gear) ... something we absolutely recommend to any young person heading out on an overseas adventure of any sort no matter how long it's for ... as parents it's the peace of mind knowing if anything were to go wrong, our son would be looked after.

For Grayson it's the next step being taken on a journey towards that Olympic dream ... knowing he has a mother, father (treatment complete and excellent prognosis!) and his little brother Mitch, as well as a whole lot of Kiwi supporters back in New Zealand, urging him on as the YanKIWI in the USA goal.

Mark Javins

March 2016