

never say never

An accident hasn't stopped this Wanaka house painter.

If you walk around the front of a certain Wanaka home, you will find a well established, beautifully maintained garden. You are also likely to hear a cheery voice spring from beneath the verandah. "G'day, do you want a cup of tea?"

This is Geoff Wilson – house painter and paraplegic. The result of a fall from a larch tree four years ago, Geoff is wheelchair bound. Not that it seems to stop him. "Must have stood on a branch and down I went, six or eight metres probably. Not very high, but just the way I landed on my shoulders," he explains.

After three months in Burwood Spinal Unit, he returned to work. He is clearly grateful to have had a group of loyal and hard working employees to help him through the adjustments to his working life.

Geoff started in business at an early age and was keen to show entrepreneurial flair, after some forceful encouragement from his father. "I was in the last few years at school, sort of mucking around, making a nuisance of myself, and my father decided I needed a trade for myself, something to get my teeth into, so he gave me this job painting." Geoff finished his apprenticeship, and then went into partnership with his employer.

After some time, Geoff and then girlfriend (now wife) Vicki headed overseas for 18 months. On their return, he bought out his partner, and has been painting on his own account for 25 years, the last four in a wheelchair. "That's been a whole new challenge."

Was Geoff worried about not being able to maintain his business after the accident? Not at all - "If you do a good job you tend to get invited back."

"It's a lesson in patience being in a wheelchair, it can be quite frustrating, and you need to be patient and rely on others, just to get help, I was always so independent before, and charging off in all different directions. "It's just a matter of applying yourself, and you can manage most things."




Above Geoff has kept up his painting business by employing others to do most of the hands-on work.

As a result of the accident Geoff has hired more staff – around four at present. While Geoff tries to be hands-on when he can, his role is now mostly supervisory. It "depends on the job, and how easily I can get into it. If it's flat it's all right, but there are certainly some challenges with multi-level houses. I find it difficult to get around most building sites without having someone clearing the way."

His spare time is taken up with family, and a few hobbies. "I love to sail, it's my summer pastime." Geoff has a specially built seat (at the wheel, of course – he is captain), and a handy crew to assist him on and off the yacht. There is a bit of healthy debate at times," says Geoff, "but there is no point in being skipper if you can't get your way, is there?" And if he's not on the water, Geoff is under it – scuba diving. "I love to head up the West Coast for some crayfish."

Geoff also skis in winter, recently switching from Cardrona to his preferred Treble Cone, where his specially adapted apparatus, which he describes as "a sports car seat on a ski" is essential. He may have broken a few of them over the years, but the thrill of skiing makes it worthwhile. "It certainly makes a huge difference if you've got something to look forward to like that," says Geoff. **H**

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