



Hayley Moeller



I have met and worked with many, many beautiful people. Most of them I could tell a story about so it is very difficult to write of just one – but this particular story is of a man that I did have a special bond with and I feel privileged to have spent time with him. This story and accompanying photos have been published with the permission of Joe’s family – Hayley Moeller

Story of Joe

I first met Joe at the Hospice – he was in there for some respite, one of our “frequent flyers” as we call them. That is, he regularly comes in to the hospice for respite and pain control, but then returns home again.

Joe was an immigrant from Iran and would speak of his delight and luck at having come to Australia. He was very thankful for the opportunities that Australia had afforded him and his family. Joe when in good health, had been a vibrant active man, and now in his sickness he was frustrated at all the things he could no longer do. Nonetheless he was always cheerful, always cracking jokes and loved to have a chat. He also loved massage and found that it gave him much comfort and relief.

Joe had a brain tumor, and was completely paralysed down his left hand side. His left hand was “stuck” in a clenched position with his fingers digging into his palm. This would annoy him no end, and he would use much of his strength from his right side, desperately trying to prise his fingers open – and would take great delight when able to do so. With the massage I would spend a lot of time massaging his left side – and in particular his fingers – we were able to prise all the fingers open and he loved it when we did. His left leg and foot benefited greatly from the massage as he was unable to move it himself.

After Joe returned home I continued to treat him in his home and we developed a lovely relationship throughout this time. By this time he was bed-ridden and left at home alone for most of the day. This I know drove him bananas both with boredom and frustration. But still he was always cheerful and positive. He was sure that he was going to beat this, and that he would walk again.

One day when I visited him at home we had a most unusual and in hindsight amusing encounter (although at the time I wasn’t terribly amused). He and his wife own four dachshund dogs which they kept locked up in another room. On this particular day, somehow the dogs got out of their room, and all four came screaming into his room where I was in the middle of massaging him. I believe the dogs thought I was causing him harm, which they didn’t like – and all four of the little snappy dogs latched onto my lower leg. Luckily I had full length trousers on or they would have broken skin for sure. So there I was



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mid-massage with four dachshunds hanging off my leg. Poor Joe, unable to do anything – was both horrified but also laughing hysterically. Once his wife came and removed the dogs – he and I burst into laughter together. He was extremely apologetic, but it was a very funny moment that both of us often referred back to and would laugh about.

I continued to treat Joe as his health deteriorated – it was difficult to watch a man so full of life slipping away. He was admitted to the Hospice for end of life care and I continued to massage him in there weekly. One day I arrived at his room to find it completely empty – even his bed was not there. On enquiry from the nurses, I was told that he had wanted to go outside, so they had wheeled him outside in his bed and set him up in the Hospice’s lovely outdoor gazebo for the morning. There I found him in the most beautiful location – gazing out to the lovely lake view and enjoying the fresh outdoor air. It was here that I massaged him that day – and I found it so magical that I asked him if I could please take a photo – to which he agreed, and asked “shall I brush my hair for it?” Always the joker! The photos are at the end of this article.

The last time that I treated Joe – he was no longer able to speak. As I massaged him, he held my hand very tightly and it was with difficulty that I got him to let go. At the end of the massage he was trying desperately to tell me something, but was only able to whisper. I put my ear right up to his lips and listened very hard – but I was still unable to make out what he was saying. I know that this would have frustrated him. I held his hand and said my goodbyes, pretty sure that I would not see him again. I told the nurses of him trying to tell me something, and they said he was probably just trying to say “how are you today” – which is how he would always greet people. It is with great fondness that I remember Joe and the special times we had together. Joe died 3 days after this last massage.

