



Tania Shaw



There have been so many spirited and inspirational people that have come through my door; some I've "forgotten" only to have them brought back to life with a chance remark, or conversation with their loved one... The lessons I have learnt through these people have been gifts to me and I'd like to pay homage to them with the telling of their stories. It would be impossible to gain permission from all the families so out of respect for their privacy I'll use pseudonyms – Tania Shaw.

Jack

I met Jack at the very beginning of my work in oncology massage (pre OMT) and boy did I learn some powerful lessons with him. Jack was a family man, twice over in fact, and loved each of his children and his wife with his entire being; you could feel how much this family were together the minute you walked into their home. His sense of humour was legendary and I got a taste of it as soon as we met. "You can do anything you want to me today; just don't step on me oxygen tube mate, I'm not quite ready to go yet" and gave me a wry grin. Well that set the scene there and then! After getting him comfortable seated at the dining table with pillows etc I then proceeded to give him a massage that I thought was a fair go at making him more relaxed. He gave me another wry grin at the end of the session and said "you were doing alright til you pulled me toes mate". My earlier training in massage involved gently pulling on the toes at the end of the foot massage... big lesson learnt there with respect to old habits, I hadn't even realised I'd done it.

Jack's family were constantly by his side; his children would walk by and hug or kiss him with a "you alright Dad?", and I came to know them well. There were also the phone calls his wife cheerfully and wearily answered; friends wanting to visit or check in. I learnt that he was a mentor to many and friend to all and decided his wife had a Superwoman cape stashed under her every day clothes.

One day I walked in to see Jack looking paler than before; the change in just a couple of days was evident. I remember him looking up at me and saying "Not long now mate". I caught my breath... what on earth do you say to that? Well, not much at all I've since come to learn. I think I said something along the lines of "Are you all sorted with everything? Anything you need me to do?" but really, it was a moment that didn't need commenting on. We smiled at each other and I went about doing what I knew best, and that was to ease the deep ache in his shoulders and his back from the effort of breathing and from being sedentary in awkward positions for so long. The day he left the planet was the day I sat my muscle exam for my Diploma of Remedial Massage. His wife rang to tell me in the morning and said thank you for everything, you made the difference between Jack being in pain and not as much pain. I was able to express to her later how much I appreciated being in their lives at such an intimate time; how blessed I was to meet them and to share in some of Jack's valuable time. Jack's face was floating in front of me the whole time I was frantically writing in the names of the muscles around the figure on the page... I like to think he was helping.



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I attended his funeral and the hall was overflowing. I sat at the very back hoping I was far enough away to not feel the full impact of the emotion that was so tangibly present. I was wrong of course. I didn't realise that these days there are power point presentations up on a very big screen. Watching the pictures flash past was a treat, seeing another aspect of Jack's life that I was unfamiliar with until the picture of Jack sitting on the lounge with his children came up. He was bald from chemo and that was the Jack I knew.

Never underestimate the power of images, they have an immense impact and I was grateful I was sitting down with a fist full of tissues.

Jack's funeral service was a beautiful tribute to him; his wife said he would have loved all the fuss that was made of him but can she go home now please? We joked about the proverbial desert island, free from technology and well meaning but emotionally draining relatives and friends, stocked to the hilt with red wine, food and hammocks.

That very gentle and humble man lives on in his talented children who are a testament to the values and ethics by which he lived his life. Thank you Jack.