

THE POWER OF FRIENDS

Recently I met Ed for the first time. We had lunch with his friend Maggie at Skeeter Jacks. It wasn't long before we discovered that we have a mutual friend in Vancouver– Richard.

The more we talked it became obvious that Ed has many friends in Powell River and it was some of those friends who, with their support and encouragement helped Ed to recover from a heart attack and stroke. The doctors didn't think he could recover and allowed a DNR order to be placed on Ed. His friends intervened and the DNR order was removed. Ed then had an allergic reaction to a specific drug which could have caused the DNR order to be used. This powerful example truly speaks as to why we all need friends in our lives. This especially important when a person is deemed more vulnerable, has a disability, may not be able to speak for themselves, or be valued as a person in their own right by the medical profession.

Ed was born in Vancouver in 1949. He has a heritage of First Nations as his mother and grandmother came from the Soda Creek Band near Williams Lake. His mother died when he was only one and shortly after that he went into foster care in Richmond. He enjoyed living on a farm on No. 2 Rd. He moved to Woodlands Institution when he became a teenager. While living at Woodland it was his friends that made life a little easier. Ed returned to Woodlands for the 2007 Dedication Ceremony of the gardens in honour of all those who lived at Woodlands.

When Ed came to live in Powell River in 1969 he lived at Seaview (Banyan Centre) with his friend Richard. One day Ed and Richard decided to walk into Powell River (12 kms) and visit the Citizen Advocacy group. They told their story and that they wanted to live in Powell River and not south of town, which was too quiet for these young men – they wanted to be where the action was. Soon they moved to Maplewood in the townsite, which was much better than Banyan but Ed still wanted to live alone. Finally he moved into an apartment and was in total control of his life.

At weekends, his good friend, Charlie would often come and stay and then the fun would begin. They enjoyed going out drinking at the old Beach Garden's pub. Sometimes they would miss the bus and it would be a long walk home. They didn't care, they were free and having a good time.

Ed lived in various apartments and basement suites. He remembers one night when 2 kittens came through the window of his suite and as he likes cats, was more than happy for them to live with him. He always bought the best food for his pets and made sure they went to the vet on a regular basis.

In 1989 Ed met Maggie and together they explored different employment opportunities, most of which seemed to involve cleaning. Either barns, fields, parking lots or gardens. Ed is now retired and prefers a slower lifestyle. Maggie came into Ed's life as staff but soon a friendship developed and Ed got to know her family and often spent Christmas with them. It was through Maggie that Ed found out that he has a cousin. Ed and Maggie went on a road trip to Williams Lake to meet his cousin Barb and it was while they were there that they discovered that Ed also has a sister. They arranged to meet her for coffee and it was a real surprise for her as she had no idea she had a brother. Now Ed keeps in touch with his sister and cousins at Christmas and birthdays. He has learned more about his heritage and family and is proud of this and happy to know that he has some family.

Ed still likes to try new activities and has recently taken up horseback riding with the PR Therapeutic Riding Association and bowling through Special Olympics. He is very fond of Desi, the horse he rides every Tuesday. Horseback riding and bowling have helped Ed to recover from his stroke and heart attack. Once Ed left the hospital, with the help of friends, he chose to live in a HomeShare setting, rather than a group home. The first HomeShare wasn't a good fit for Ed, but now he lives with Jeremy and Jenn and their 3 young children. He is very happy and has adjusted well to the young children. Ed enjoys watching old westerns and listening to music, especially Elvis. He recently went with Jeremy to watch live wrestling in Powell River. Ed has always liked wrestling and he and Richard used to watch a lot of wrestling together. He also went to Victoria with friends to watch wrestling live and thoroughly enjoyed himself. Ed has a real twinkle in his eyes when he talks about his adventures with his friend Richard in Vancouver. They travelled by Skytrain and learned some hard lessons that not everyone is honest or friendly, but on the whole they enjoyed their adventures.

Ed can be stubborn when he wants to be and has been known to refuse to go out with relief staff. When he was so ill and had a tracheotomy he kept trying to pull out the tube and it wasn't until the tube was taken out and he could talk again that he physically started to improve. He refused to stay at the rehabilitation centre in Nanaimo as he didn't know anyone and wouldn't cooperate - he wanted to be back in Powell River with his friends and regular staff.

Ed always remembers his friends and staffs birthdays and sends them a card or gets them a little gift. He likes to joke with his friends and really enjoys company and loves having coffee in town and chatting with people he knows.

When meeting Ed and talking to some of his friends it soon became obvious to me just how vital it is that we all have friends. Sometimes in the "busyness" of life it is easy to forget that encouraging and nurturing friendships for a person who has a disability is just as important as following their formal programs - and in Ed's case it actually saved his life!

