

A Quad Bike Accident Broke His Back.

But Bob – Franklin’s ‘Poet on Wheels’ – Bounced Back!

Robert (Bob) Shaw (73) calls himself a simple man, a ‘Poetaster’- someone he defines as a ‘bad poet’ and a writer of prose. But he would like to be called a poet. We at eLocal think he IS a poet and are proud to share his inspiring story and a small sample of his writings. Enter Bob’s world of whimsy and wisdom – and enjoy!

Bob was just 58 when he suffered a debilitating stroke. A building caretaker in Auckland, Bob and his wife Irene were at their beach house at Port Waikato at the time, where Bob was recovering from a broken back after a quad bike accident on the beach. The Shaws had been enjoying a ‘lovely life’ at the Port, routinely taking a van load of grandchildren to the beach for weekends and holidays. When Bob was injured that carefree life was over. After initial treatment he tried to keep working, but the pain eventually forced him to retire and move out to the Port.

Sixteen months after the accident, Bob suffered the stroke. This time the former nurseryman and ambulance driver almost didn’t make it. He was readmitted to the Otara Spinal Unit, where he spent six months in intensive care. He was totally blind for three weeks, unable to talk, move or swallow. He recalls the terrible thirst as he was fed intravenously. Slowly, painfully, he learnt to talk again and to hold a spoon. His first real food was green jelly. “It was lovely!” he says.

Bob was paralysed down his right side. He couldn’t hold a pen, but when a friend gave him a typewriter, he started to write – recollections, his early days in Auckland “for the children and grandchildren” – and perceptions of the world around. Poems and amusing ditties poured from his typewriter, which was eventually upgraded to a computer. For three years, Bob wrote every day. Then three years ago, the Shaws made the reluctant decision to leave the Port behind and move to Pukekohe. Suddenly, a whole new life of electrified mobility opened up for Bob. He says the state of the town’s footpaths can be very difficult for someone in a wheel-

Bob Shaw, wheelchair poet



chair, but that hasn’t stopped him from covering around five kilometres a day. “I can get as far as Mitre 10 and Paerata Road, but my battery will only last for 7km,” he explains. Once he had to call into Pukekohe Volunteer Fire Brigade station for a battery recharge to complete the journey home. “They were very good, and so are the many drivers who stop for me to cross the road. The main difficulty is having to travel across carparks to reach shops. Drivers backing can’t see me.”

So the next time you spot Bob beating along around town in his wheelchair, give him a wave or stop for a chat. And double check each time you back out of that carpark. ■

Garden Gossips

What do you think would happen
If all the plants could talk?

I think the grasses would whisper, flowers
would smile and talk softly,
Shrubs would be the garden gossips.

The hedges to be heard all around,
The fruit trees, stone-pips and squeaks
And the trees yell out from high up.
But the ones that yell out loudest
Are the lawns and the pastures.

Cut with a blunt bladed lawnmower
Or crushed by boots and hooves
And chewed by animals’ teeth.
Listen!! Are they speaking to you?

R.N. Shaw