



A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

My name is Graham Hendley. In 1973 I was involved in a road accident that left me paralysed from the neck down. After leaving hospital, I spent the next 10 years living at home with my parents. I needed intense care, my Mum and Dad had to do so much. Too much.

Before my accident I worked hard and played hard. Suddenly there was nothing. There was nothing to get up for. I seemed to spend all my time watching pointless programmes on TV or people doing things that I used to enjoy. I was in a state of total despair, as if I had fallen down a massive black hole with no way out.

In 1985 we tried a two week respite care break at Greenacres, a Leonard Cheshire home which was a great success and I immediately applied for a residential place. During other stays I came to know one of the

colourful residents called John Bunce.

John had also broken his neck in an accident whilst serving in the army, 20 years before me. John was a mouth painter. He had a room at Greenacres, which he had made into an art studio where he created the most magnificent paintings. I soon found myself spending most of my time sitting talking and watching John, amazed at what he could do. Never for a moment did I think I could do the same.

A year later a residential place became available for me and I never looked back. John was gracious enough to let me share his studio and encouraged me to buy an easel and have a go.

John suggested I start by sketching a picture that appealed to me, in pencil. I found a picture of an old farm gate down a country lane and apprehensively started to draw. I must say I was pleasantly surprised. I had never bothered much in the art classes at school.

I spent most of the next year merrily painting away, enjoying my time in John's Company whilst he taught me perspective and how to mix colours.

John was a member of the Mouth And Foot Painting Artists Association. It's an amazing organisation that helps to support severely disabled artists worldwide who wish to paint. The association was established by Erich Stegmann in 1957, a highly accomplished German artist with severe disabilities.

John eventually thought it was time to introduce me to the MFPA. The association asked me to send

them six paintings. It took a year to finish them and a great deal of hard work and concentration. My jaw and neck muscles cried out with pain. But it was worth it! It was so good to have finally achieved something again.

Through the MFPA I've taken part in many art exhibitions across the country even at the Royal College of Art. It has enabled me to meet some of the most wonderfully talented artists and friends, like the incredible Tom Yendell.

I have great respect for our Armed Forces. They are the bravest of the brave. I know that with the nature of their profession they will all be of strong character.

I would like to encourage them by saying. I have been there. It takes time to come to terms with your situation, some take longer than others. You have to stop thinking about what you can't do and start thinking about what you can. With today's technology, so many things are possible.

Ten years ago I met Roger and his team from SMILE who helped me to find the right technology to achieve as much as my body would allow me. He thought out of the box and we need more people like him.

If possible, try to be positive and cheerful and try to find an interest, mine happened to be art.

I wish you all the very best, luck and good fortune. Life can go on.

Best wishes, Graham Hendley

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> ABOVE: Graham's friend and mentor John with some of his extraordinary work.