



### PERSONAL STORY

#### **Andy Kent FIMI, Retired Motor Mechanic and Garage Owner**

I am Andrew Kent and I live with my wife Janet. I am a 65 retired motor mechanic and ex garage owner (sold in Jan 2020).

I was given two years to live and told I would not be able to father children in February 1975.

I got engaged in March 1975 and married in November 1975.

I am now the father of two children, and grandfather to two grandchildren.

I have a condition that means I bleed inside my main organs. Bleeding regularly from my kidneys and in my joints since the age of 13. I've had four cerebral haemorrhages, the first in 1984. This has meant many hospital stays and operations. I had both knees replaced by the age of 50 and my left shoulder rebuilt twice. As a result of the haemorrhages, I am now in a wheelchair because I have little feeling in my right side and progressively losing the use in my left side.

I have spent my working life proving to others that it does not matter how you achieve your goals in life as long as you try, nine times out of ten you will achieve it, however, in a different way.

#### **Workplace adjustments**

I joined the Motor industry in August 1972 as a garage hand. At the time no one knew about dyslexia, because of this I was labelled a troublesome boy at school, and as a result I hated school. I quickly made an impression on the Service Manager, because I was good with my hands and had the ability to remember routines such as adjusting tappets, service routines, (and in those day they were a service). This was the first time anyone had taken an interest in me or gave me any direct help. His son had just been tested for dyslexia and he felt it would help me to be tested.

It made a huge difference to me, I started to understand why I could not read or write anything that others could read. I was very fortunate to start in the motor industry in a time when there was not so much pressure on the amount of work you got done and was more about quality. It was a time that mechanics would assist each other. This helped me no end as I managed to get help from people in the office to read the job cards to me before I started and then get one of the mechanics to write up what I had done.

As time went on, I found a reason to read and write and the help the team gave me was very important to the way my life in the motor industry developed.

I have also been lucky that my career has developed along with technology. Some of the devices and tools that have helped me are:

- Computers helping spell checkers and grammar checkers
- Dictaphones to support memory
- Personal phones as they have taken over the above and over the years the tools have got lighter, taking the stress off my joints.
- iPads and tablets have allowed the information to the job, with reminders of actions throughout the job.
- Ramps that leave the floor flush so that I can still have access in my wheelchair.
- A desk that would rise and fall to the right high for me to work at it without having to transfer from my wheelchair.

### Goals and wishes

My goals in life changed as life went on.

When I left school, in 1972, it was to have a year without having to go into hospital and to be able to ride my motor scooter that I had rebuilt. I was still too young to do the latter.

In early 1975 it was to experience life to the full, so I got engaged, moved away from home, and then got married. Getting married changed my outlook on life as it did at work. I wanted to pass my C&G level 2 exams, which I did too everyone's surprise as was still struggling with reading. I had worked out that there were a finite number of question and I only had to get 60% to pass, we were told that monkeys could pass, and I believed this so nothing was going to stand in my way. They were multi choice questions, so it was only a matter of working on the law of averages to pass.

When my deadline date came and went. I started to live again but on my terms. Living each day as if it was my last. I chased jobs for better money and to learn the different position in the industry.

I took a job at a Dealership in a parts department. I had not realised how easy it was working with numbers rather than words, this was when I said to myself "I will have my own business one day".

Then in June 1984 I had a life changing experience, it would have been for most people. I could have just sat back and watched the world go by at that point. However, after hearing a doctor tell another doctor that there was no more, they could do for me, and my wife was told to come and say her goodbyes. I made the decision to prove them wrong. I had two young children to think about. I fought back to being able to go back to work, to get my driving licence back, and work on my end goal. Now everyday could be my last, it was not just a doctor saying so, it was a reality.

It was not easy during the 90's, I was made redundant six times, being told that as I was disabled, I could get support easier than an able-bodied person. I turned my hand to whatever I could to pay the mortgage. We bought and sold three homes giving us the funds by 2002 to open a business that allowed us to do things the right way.

The right way to me was to offer jobs to people that otherwise struggled for whatever the reason. We opened the doors to our garage 2nd November 2002 Andy's Kars. From day one it was a business to support and employ people with different abilities, people of different cultures and back grounds. The business went from strength to strength because we treated all equally and with respect.

My ultimate goal/wish would be to see everyone given the same respect and opportunities both in life and at work. If someone says they can do something give them the opportunity to prove it.

### **Frustrations**

The most frustrating thing for me was my body and people not understanding that some days were harder than others. Just because I pushed on and did not give in, does not mean it was not hard to get out of bed each morning knowing that I had to do it all over again or the staff would not get paid.

Banks not taking us seriously, but willing to use our information to get another business what they needed.

People talking to the person that was there to support me, and otherwise did not know why they were there.

### **What works for me**

Treat me as you would treat any other employee.

Stop looking at us as if we are aliens, and respect us for who we are, human beings.

I might not still be here if I had not had other people to think about and depended on me to make sure their families had food on the table. I cared for my staff and my customers it was about the experience they had not so much the money.



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