

McLaren still in the driving seat

With help from Melody and HAD

It's a story straight out of Hollywood, but how Los Angeles-born Melody McLaren met husband Ian is fact not fiction. And when Parkinson's disease threatened to stop Ian, 73, from driving, HAD also played a starring role.

When Melody was a teenager she discovered the hula-hoop, a 1960's phenomenon that led to success and, eventually, romance. Melody's dedication to the plastic hoop saw her become world champion in 1969 and 14 years' later, in 1983, she visited Europe on a promotional tour organised by manufacturer Bendy Toys.

This led to her meeting Ian, a former advertising executive for top London agency Saatchi and Saatchi. One of Ian's accounts was Bendy Toys and the couple married in 1988. They now live in Potters Bar, although they lived in California from 1996 to 2000.

"We both shared a love of music and with Ian playing double bass in a jazz band we visited many London jazz clubs and had a great time," Melody said. "In fact it has led to me taking up another hobby - jazz photography."

When Parkinson's disease entered Ian's life he underwent surgery at The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in Queen Square, London. The operation, in 2009, involved fitting a neuro stimulator, similar to a cardiac pacemaker, in his chest with cables running behind his left ear and connected to both sides of his brain.



Ian McLaren with fellow Parkinson's patient and friend Reg Boorer

The operation was a success but with resulting swelling of the brain causing cognitive problems, Ian was told that his passion for driving would be over. Ian wanted a second opinion and when he discovered HAD an assessment was booked with Driving Assessor Sean Lawrence which Ian passed. Unfortunately Ian was recently told by HAD Driving Assessor Mark Thackeray that he "needed to retire."

However, Ian bought some new wheels from HAD this April - a top of the range Activ X2 self-propelled wheelchair. "Ian's even considering having some go-faster racing stripes added," Melody added.

"Both of us have been really impressed by the friendly, professional and compassionate manner of all HAD's staff," Melody said.

- Read Ian's test drive of his new wheelchair on page 3



Melody practising in the 60's and (above, inset) today



The problems of plastic packaging

Many charities are struggling to survive at the moment and HAD is no different. We are constantly looking for new ways to finance and run our services which, we believe, will be increasingly important, especially as the present political and economic climate is so unstable and where social care is clearly not a priority.

We recently launched a campaign to try and improve the way some smaller mobility products are packaged. It certainly seems that product packaging is not a priority within the disability sector. The modern phenomenon of heat-sealed plastic packaging, also known as blister packs, shows little or no sign of abating.

In the mobility sector badly designed packaging can cause problems for many older and disabled people. It's not just difficult to open, it is potentially dangerous too. In our equipment centre many of our smaller mobility aids are packed so tight an able-bodied person would struggle to break into them unscathed. For a one arm amputee or someone with arthritis, MS or a skin condition like psoriasis or eczema, it can be almost impossible to open these products.

Jonathan Hill is one of HAD's Occupational Therapists: "Heat sealed packaging is an industry problem and not the fault of one manufacturer. However, it's ironic that in our sector all products need to be easily accessible, and at the moment they are not.

"Disabled people need help not hindrance when buying mobility products and they are not getting it from some mobility product suppliers."

However it is not all bad news. The Multi Grip by Able2, formerly Pro Medics, is an example of good, thoughtful packaging. The plastic cover has a wrap-around design that is simple to unclip from the back. Others like Culinaire's One Touch can opener and a kitchen paring knife by Zyliss are difficult to access.

Culinaire and Zyliss have acknowledged there are problems with their packaging and are currently addressing this. A spokesperson for their designers and manufacturers DKB said: "Whilst the Culinaire One Touch and Zyliss Paring Knife packs are great at point of purchase and are suitably robust to stand the rigours of being in store on a peg, we have already noted it can be difficult for those with limited hand mobility to open them.



"With this in mind, we have undertaken a packaging refresh. The new packaging for the One Touch is a blister front with card rear, held together with three simple to open adhesive pads. It will start to appear in stores during 2017. The Zyliss Paring Knife packaging is currently under review and the new design will be launched in late 2017."

We are always on the lookout for new initiatives, new volunteers and new partnerships to help us deliver our goal - increased independence for older and disabled people in Hertfordshire and beyond.

In this issue of Helping Hand you will read about some of the different ways we are helping older and disabled people and how we can really make a difference in their lives. For instance take a look at Ian McLaren's remarkable story and how HAD has helped him and his wife Melody.

You can also take part in some of our community fundraising events that are invariably inspiring and always fun. Our second summer wheelchair and learning disabilities cricket match at Harpenden cricket club is a good example. Last year's initial event saw cricketers of all abilities competing together and I'm sure this year will deliver more of the same. We are delighted to announce that the Jarvis Charitable Trust are supporting this event. Put Sunday 6 August in your diary.

If golf is your thing then our golf day at Stocks on Friday 22 September is a must. As well as playing at such a fantastic course and enjoying first-class facilities, golfers have the chance of winning a Mini Cooper in our hole-in-one challenge. Once again thanks to Ian Taylor at Specialist Cars, Stevenage.

In 2018 we will be celebrating our 60th anniversary and have already started working on some special community fundraising events.

There will be more on this in the next issue of Helping Hand in the autumn.

Thanks to all the companies for advertising in this issue and also Nick Cooper from Villa Plus for his continual support.

Have a great summer.

PAUL BISHOP
EDITOR

Frank plays the waiting game

In previous issues of this magazine we have looked at how airlines and hotel operators can mistreat or discriminate against disabled travellers. With many of us planning our summer vacations it is sad to report that the treatment of wheelchair users is not improving.

The following tale of woe concerns BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner.

Gardner was recently left stranded on an easyjet flight when it landed at Gatwick airport.

Gardner, whose legs were paralysed when he was shot six times by al-Qaida sympathisers in Saudi Arabia in 2004, said he was left on the plane after all other passengers had departed because special assistance staff failed to turn up.

Speaking on the BBC News channel, Gardner said: "It happens so often, that it's just really tedious. Time and time again if the plane lands at a British airport and it's not on an airbridge, disabled passengers like me have to wait for the high lift to come and get you off. "Sometimes it arrives on time, which is great. But often, it doesn't."

Gardner said it was not the first time this has happened: "Nothing's changed, it happens time and time again." I think it's perfectly reasonable to say disabled passengers shouldn't have to get off at the same time as everybody else, it would cause a congestion.

"But once everyone else is off, get them off the plane. Don't keep people waiting there so long that the cleaner's already on the plane for the next flight. It's not on. This is 2017. And it's the UK. And we can do better than this."

Gardner said he did not expect the experiences of disabled passengers would change unless "financial inducements or penalties" were introduced.

Keeping the customers satisfied



SATURDAY SHOPPERS: Muriel and Helen prepare for their regular supermarket trip

Long-time HAD customer Muriel Johnson likes to shop, especially at our Woodside Centre equipment centre.

Muriel, from Welwyn Garden City, has been a regular visitor since buying a wheelchair for her late husband John 11 years ago. More recently she has bought a fold-away rollator and, earlier this year, a tilt-in-space Rise and Recline chair.

Fold-away rollator helps Muriel shop

"I always get such first-class and friendly service from the staff," Muriel, 85, explained. "Before I bought the chair I was treated to a thorough assessment from HAD Occupational Therapist Jeanette McDermott and she was really kind and helpful. The chair is comfortable and the rollator is perfect for my Saturday morning shopping trips to the local supermarket with my daughter Helen."

"Arthritis means I need assistance walking and because I can easily fold the rollator away and pop it in the boot of Helen's car it is a God-send."

Muriel and Helen have also added another HAD product to their shopping list: a cover for Muriel's mobility scooter. "My next door neighbour saw the covers at HAD and told me about them so we will definitely be visiting the equipment centre again soon."

Meet Jane Baker the Driving Centre's new OT

Jane Baker, HAD's new Occupational Therapist, started working at the driving centre at the beginning of 2017 and is currently training to be a Driving Assessor. As well as driving assessments she will be reviewing individual's fitness to drive and assessing if hand control adaptations are an appropriate solution, as an alternative to conventional driving.

"I am also involved in assessing for other types of adaptations such as swivel seats,



re-positioned seat runners or hoists," Jane explained. "Cognitive testing is also carried out with many individuals who have a driving assessment."

Jane has been qualified as an OT for many years working in a variety of specialities including Burns and Plastics, Learning Disabilities and Rheumatology.

"Before moving to HAD, I spent 13 years working for Hertfordshire County Council

McLaren still in the driving seat

ACTIV X2 WHEELCHAIR ROAD TEST

Here are Ian McLaren's views on his new wheelchair:

It's self-propelled with larger wheels. This is very important for an agency man who loved his vehicles. In the past I have driven various BMW models and a Honda S2000, as well as our Volvo estate. I need to feel I'm in control of where I'm going. It's also tall enough to accommodate a near six foot tall man and the weight is a good compromise between being solid enough to provide a comfortable ride (with a seat cushion) and light enough (removing the wheels and footplates will take it down to 8 kg) and portable enough (seat collapses and hand rails and foot plates fold down quickly) that Melody can pick it up, pack it down and put it in the back of the Volvo without putting her back out!

with Health and Community Services and latterly with SERCO in the Housing Solutions Team. My main role was to assess adults with a physical disability for minor and major adaptations to their home environment."

Jane is married to Christopher and has a 20 year-old daughter. She lives in south Bedfordshire and is part of the local Baptist Church and heads up the Pastoral Care Team with the Pastor. "I also love walking, bird watching, going to the cinema and theatre, seeing my friends and holidays!"

Wheel appeal



We've HAD It cyclists ready for the ride and (inset) David Pitcher and his team and our younger riders

Pedal-power raises record amount

Meet the record-breaking 'We've HAD It' cycling team. The 22-strong team took part in this year's Rotary Clubs of St Albans Charity Cycle Ride. At the time Helping Hand went to press the money raised was still being counted but the event is expected to have raised in excess of £8,000!

HAD were one of the chosen charities for the annual ride after Rotarian John Oakey put us in the frame last year: "My late brother-in-law was a regular customer of HAD several years ago and we always remember the

helpful and friendly attitude of the staff at the Woodside Centre."

New riders this year included HAD Trustee David Pitcher, his son Edward, brother Martin and family friend Paul Jenkins plus various members of Harpenden Tennis Club recruited by long-time HAD supporter Giles Herman. A special mention to our younger riders: Sofia and Oscar Smith-Vasquez and Alex and Daniel Buckley who not only completed 30 miles but raised some money as well!

Thanks to all the riders and we'll be doing it again next year. Put 13 May, 2018 in your diary. If you want to join the ever-expanding team, call Paul Bishop on 07973 237162.



Pitcher (right)



Golfers aiming for perfect drive

Golfers will be looking forward to a good drive at HAD's annual charity golf day in September.

Seventy-two players will be aiming for that elusive hole-in-one at the par 3 ninth hole. If anyone manages it they will win a brand new Mini Cooper, supplied by Specialist Cars in Stevenage.

The day, on Friday 22 September, will feature golfers from all parts of the county playing at the private members' club, on the edge of Ashridge Forest, near Tring.

HAD's Fundraiser and event organiser Paul Bishop is hoping someone wins the car: "This is the third year in a row Specialist Cars has donated a Mini Cooper and so far no player has got close to that elusive ace. However, with

a bumper turnout and a bit of luck I've a feeling this could be the year."

Places are going fast but there is still time to enter a four-ball team for £200. Contact Paul on 07973 237162 for more details.



THE CAR'S THE STAR: HAD Fundraiser Paul Bishop (centre) with, from the left, Josh Simmons and Ian Taylor from Specialist Cars, Stevenage, HAD supporter and golfer Paul Burchett and Alan Draper, Stocks General Manager

All-inclusive cricket proves a big hit!

HAD was bowled over when it received a cheque for £500 to support a special cricket match.

Our second annual wheelchair/learning disabilities game at Harpenden CC on 6 August, is being supported this year by the Jarvis Charitable Trust.

The game will feature top disabled and learning disability cricketers from across the county, including Chris Foster from Bishop's Stortford and Andy Catherell from Letchworth. Many top players from Harpenden will also take part, meaning the game will be truly all-inclusive.

"The way the regular players from Harpenden played and reacted last year was first-class," HAD Fundraiser Paul Bishop explained. "They all mixed in and the game had a competitive edge. We also had a bit of the normal on-field cricket banter which was good to hear. I am sure this year will be no different"

Through-hip amputee Chris, 27, has no prosthetic limb and hops in to bowl at around 70 mph. Last year Chris took two wickets and also scored 30 not out with the bat. "Chris's performance was definitely one of the highlights of the day and all the spectators were asking who he was," Paul said.

Andy, 40, has a degenerative condition that has caused the vertebrae in his spine to crumble. He also has a genetic problem with his left knee. These have combined to put him in a wheelchair for the past six years.

The charity is hoping local people come along to watch the event. "For many of the players this will be the highlight of their season. For them to play in front of a big crowd would make it even better," Paul added.



BIG CHEQUE: HAD's Paul Bishop receives the sponsorship money from Lady Ann Parkinson from the Jarvis Charitable Trust

Pat spreads the word and raises the cash



Welwyn Hatfield Mayor Pat Mabbott (left) is joined by HAD's Operations Manager Christian Denman, Fundraiser Paul Bishop and Trustee Dave Cocks along with VW's Head of Business Paul Weedon and Director of Commercial Vehicles Carl Zu Dohna.

FAMILY MAN: HAD Finance Director Jon Banerjee with wife Kum Kum and daughter Tamara at the Mayor's banquet and ball (above right)



"I met so many fantastic people and did some amazing things during the year as well as telling as many people as possible about the fantastic work HAD do," Pat explained. "It was so much fun, the year just flew by!"

Our Fundraiser Paul Bishop said: "I have been involved in raising money for HAD in the community for more than 12 years and know how hard it can be. What Pat has achieved is first class."

A fundraising raffle in aid of HAD at the opening of Volkswagen's new Van Centre in Hatfield was just one of many events organised by Mayor of Welwyn Hatfield, Councillor Pat Mabbott.

Pat was kept busy during her year in office raising money and the profile of her chosen charity and in all raised an impressive £6,000 for us. It all began in July last year with a garden party at Mill Green Museum to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday and ended with a traditional pub games event at her local - the Sun Inn, Lemsford Village at the end of April. In between Pat held numerous events including a curry night, an awareness day at the Galleria and a banquet and ball at Hatfield House.

News in brief...

HAD spent four days raising awareness at Lister Hospital, Stevenage's Community Hub in May. Operations Manager Christian Denman, Finance Director Jon Banerjee, Trustees Andy Nazer and Dave Cocks, plus Fundraiser Paul Bishop manned the site and reported much interest from patients, carers, nurses and other hospital staff. We will be back there on 11 September for a week. Many thanks to David Brewer, Head of Engagement, East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust, for setting this up for us.

Generous shoppers at Waitrose shops in WGC and Harpenden raised almost £1,000 for us recently through the retailer's Community Matters scheme. WGC branch raised £516 and Harpenden £476.

Students have bags of ideas

Sixth form students at Monk's Walk school WGC raised over £500 for HAD in this year's Dragons' Apprentice Challenge. The event, organised by Welwyn Hatfield Council, saw several schools attempting to turn £100 into a much bigger amount. The students, under the guidance of their teacher Gary Moore, came up with a number of money making schemes including producing HAD Bags for Life. Some of the students are pictured with HAD Fundraiser Paul Bishop. A range of the bags are available for £5 at our Woodside Centre equipment centre.



Sweet surprise for Chris

HAD's annual charity Easter egg raffle was won by sweet-toothed Chris Addison.

Chris, from Harpenden, bought the winning ticket in her local pub The Old Bell, where the 1 kg Swiss chocolate egg was on display during the week leading up to Easter.

"It was a great surprise; the last thing I won was a large cake when I was at school in Highgate," Chris said. "I ended up taking it home on the bus."

This time the egg went in the boot of her car and was taken to the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust (BIRT) in Milton Keynes. "My partner Trevor Grou had a serious car accident a year ago and is having rehab there at the moment. I thought it would be nice to share the egg with customers and staff there," Chris explained.

The giant egg was donated by Woolmer Green chocolatier The Secret Truffletier and smaller raffle prize eggs were donated by Tesco in Harpenden and Hatfield. Thanks to them and also staff at the Old Bell, Harpenden.

Gary just keeps on running...

Gary O'Leary ran his first London Marathon in April and raised £1,454 for HAD.

Gary, from Birch Green, has been jogging to keep fit for many years but still found the famous 26-mile course tough: "The first half of the race was good but after 16 miles I really struggled for the next six miles. But I really wanted to finish in under four hours and somehow managed to speed up for the final few miles."

His gutsy attitude was rewarded; Gary ended up finishing in a very respectable time of three hours and 55 minutes and was greeted at the finish line by wife Jacky and son Ryan.

As Chairman of Hertingfordbury Council Gary is heavily involved in organising many community activities and running events. On the running front he is a regular in the Panshanger parkrun near his Hertford home. Gary founded the weekly run in

October 2014 and it now attracts 230 runners.

In 2016 he arranged two summer Smile races at Hatfield House and Panshanger Park raising money for HAD and the Isabel Hospice. Over 600 runners took part.

"Working with HAD made me realise how important their services are for the elderly, disabled and less mobile," Gary explained.

Gary is organising another Panshanger parkrun in aid of HAD on 19 July.



FINE FINISH: Gary with son Ryan

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More details on 01707 384260.

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