



Healthy ageing in action

Find out how Janice and Lionel are supporting each other to stay independent



Proud Palawa man Lionel and Gunditjmara woman Janice Bakes are a dream team. Married since 1996, they've been together through thick and thin and continue to support each other as they grow older. Their relationship is core to their wellbeing, now more than ever.

"We have a good life together. We have a lot of fun. Why not? You only have one crack at it," Lionel, known by loved ones as Spike, said.

To Lionel and Janice, ageing well means being able to keep up their normal routine. "As far as Spike and I, we enjoy our lives because we still have each other. We're still capable of doing things in our house," Janice said. "That's our independence."

A day in the Bakes' house looks something like this: Lionel wakes up early and goes out to check the mailbox and sweep the leaves. "Old knees are no good so I get up and go for a walk – I've got to," Lionel said. "Spike's always gotta do something. If he's up at six o'clock I'll get my coffee and I'm very happy," Janice said.

During the day, Janice might put some washing in the machine. When the cycle's finished, Spike will hang it out, as Janice can't reach the line anymore. Janice will sweep the floor, then Lionel will mop. They fill the gaps wherever the other needs. "You do things together that're normal, and life comes easy," Lionel said.

Janice still drives. Before jumping in the car to go anywhere, Janice will say: 'Don't forget your glasses. Have you got the card? You might need another jacket.' "And Spike'll say all that to me too," Janice said. "For our appointments, we're always together. If I forget what the doctor says, he remembers. If he forgets, I'll remember," Janice said.

Lionel and Janice are also there for each other during the hard times. "Sometimes I do my back. It could be as easy as getting out of the shower, and I'm gone. I'm pretty active, but simple things can happen," Janice said. "He'll get the walker for me, dry me. We both assist each other. Especially when he had a broken thumb, sprained wrist, all these kinds of things. If we go to hospital, we're never far behind each other."

Lionel believes that if he hadn't met Janice back in the '90s, life would have panned out very differently. "We've had our disappointments in life. It knocks you about. If I hadn't met Janice, I'd have ended up in jail. 'Cause I was drinking and that, you know," Lionel said. "Janice understands the way I feel, and I understand her as well."

"We want to keep it that way, that stability," Janice adds. "You know, as long as we've got that with each other, we're happy."

Ageing isn't always linear. "You have your good and your bad days," Janice said.

"A lot of other people that we know are struggling. And sometimes we struggle," Lionel adds. "But when we struggle, we got one another. And that's what matters."

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Walking Hand in Hand by Matty Atkinson
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