

DAVID HARTNELL: ONE MINUTE INTERVIEW WITH JANICE WILLIS FROM ELDERLY ASSIST

We have all heard the lovely dulcet tones on the radio adverts – Newstalk ZB, Coast, Breeze Classic and The Sound – “Hi, I’m Janice from Elderly Assist.” I asked Janice when and how did she come up with the idea?

I first started my business in 2012 after assisting an older friend help her 92-year-old neighbour sell her home and move to Australia to be nearer family. I wondered at the time how people coped who did not have family nearby. It all started with that one experience.

Does any one move stand out?

We once moved a 96-year-old man and his wife from a home and five garages. He wasn’t a hoarder, he just had so many interests and a number of careers in his life. He once was a sign writer back in the 1960s and had a number of signs we needed to sell. A lot of them were Merry Christmas signs and they were all rather retro so they did quite well.

Have you ever had to declutter something that was rather strange and bizarre?

We recently cleared a basement with so much World War 1 and World War 2 military radio equipment. I found someone who knew what some of it was and out of the woodwork came many men who bid on it on TradeMe. The son of my client would visit his Dad at the rest home and show him the auctions on TradeMe. His father would recognise who was bidding because they used their CB radio sign-ons. My client was just thrilled it didn’t go to metal recycling.

People must appreciate your calmness when decluttering for them?

Many of my clients have lived in their own home for a very long time, over 30 years. They often raised a family in the home and, as the children left, they spread out to bedrooms turning them into offices and craft rooms. They had no need to declutter and downsize until they thought about moving and then the task became huge for them. My team are recruited for their gentle negotiating skills, their kindness and patience. We work at our clients’ pace and sometimes we work for a few weeks with clients if it is a big job.

You say on your radio adverts ‘ring me’, and that is just what happened when I rang you on your 0800 839 874 number. There you were. No pressing numbers, no recording. People must appreciate getting you on the phone.

Some are shocked and say, “Oh, there really is a Janice.” I have always answered the phone because I often invite my prospective clients to have a chat about their situation. Many of my clients don’t have family nearby. One of the first things I learned when I started the business was how many families had children that left for a short OE (overseas experience) and never came back permanently.

Often, children call me from overseas and we FaceTime and I visit the client and FaceTime with the child as well. I advertise on the radio overnight and invite people to call me in the morning. I initially didn’t say call me in the morning and people would call me during the night because they were awake and lonely and fretting about what do about moving.



What do you like about Ponsonby?

I like the village, the shops, the cafes and Milly’s. There is always something happening in Ponsonby.

How did you survive the pandemic?

Because of Retire at Home, we were essential service providers. I learned how caring and compassionate my team were and how far they would go to assist our clients. It birthed the Retire at Home service which continues to grow because so many people wish to stay in their own homes during retirement. Making their homes safe and decluttered is rewarding to assist them to achieve their goals.

What was your childhood like?

I was born in England, my parents emigrated to NZ when I was three. My father went into business as an engineer. I had a happy childhood and teenage years when I was involved in a big youth group. I returned to the UK in my early 20s for a few years but family and lifestyle drew me back to NZ.

What’s on your bucket list?

Exploring the villages of England during spring – the castles, the meadows.

Most Kiwi thing about you?

That I make a great pavlova.

What is your comfort food?

Chocolate.

What is something that you dislike about your appearance?

My bunions!

www.elderlyassist.co.nz
(DAVID HARTNELL, MNZM) 