

Living With Chronic Illness

"I would like to define my identity in terms of my relationships, my work and my passions.

My family mean everything to me. I think it fair to say that when I did not feel life was worth living it was their love for me and my love for them that kept me going. I remember particularly being helped to survive bleak periods by the joy of playing with a child, once a child of our own and many years later a grandchild. The greatest help has come from my lovely wife Sandra, my companion, my soul mate. She is part of me and helps define who I am because without her I could not be the person I am.

In the film 'Chariots of Fire' Eric Liddell says "God made me fast and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

God made me creative and when I am helping people or plants to flourish, I feel his pleasure!

During my lifetime of living with renal failure I have always been able to enjoy my work. I love sitting down with people and talking with them about what is going on in our lives, engaging with them in a meaningful way and somehow enabling them to flourish in spite of life's many obstacles.

The same is true about working in my garden or allotment. I derive great pleasure from seeing plants grow, blossom and bear fruit. There is nothing quite like picking fresh strawberries or bringing beautiful cut flowers into the house. I have many passions. As a young man I grew up in an environment where good thinking was highly valued but I was deemed as someone who was emotionally labile. A great liberation for me came when someone said "to think well is a great gift but also to feel deeply."

I'm interested in so many things and my wife says, I'm a great source of useless information. I love art, music and nature. Taking time to enjoy Rachmaninov's piano concerto or viewing a grand landscape of the Lake District have all had their part in helping to live with chronic illness. I found that music gave release to deep unexpressed emotion and being outdoors energised the soul in a mysterious way.

My greatest passion - God, is perhaps the hardest to describe because he is so much greater than I can imagine and yet is closer than a family member. I see him as the source of who I am, indeed as my creator who has created me in his image, sharing with me some of his creative gifts and giving me the relationships that define my life."

Dirk van Zuylen