

Two years ago, I bit the bullet and sent an SOS to Andrea at APT to ask her if she knew someone who could work with a very overweight 52 year old who's knees hurt so much she could no longer stand for her singing lessons and had to give them up. I had known Andrea for about 15 years. I knew she was a personal trainer and I didn't expect her to take me on as she was always so fit. I just wanted advice from a person who was in the business.

When Andrea agreed to take me on I was embarrassed that she would be appalled at how unfit I was. I held her in such regard. However, I walked into an atmosphere of no judgement expect well done for taking the first and most difficult step. We talked about what I wanted to be able to do - things like get on and off a tram, being able to stand on a tram, walk for more than five minutes. Andrea worked with the skills I had to increase my mobility and flexibility. She went back to the very start, almost teaching me to walk again - actually teaching me to walk again by improving my posture. We started by me learning how to stand up off a chair. Simple I know, but not for someone who had become reliant on holding on to something to help me balance. This simple task, done properly, is a squat. I had learned to do squats.

Within six months I was off to Queensland for a holiday to visit my sister. I would usually just spend my time at her place with very few outings other than those that were by car. This time, I hopped on and off boats, went snorkelling and swimming. It was the best holiday I'd had for a long time. I did my exercises while I was away. During the summer holidays I stopped my daily routine and went backwards a bit but not the whole way and came back needing to almost start again. Andrea put together a shorter routine. I didn't have an excuse not to do this one before work (although I can find one every now and then). This routine is now my non-negotiable. It starts my day. I feel centred and calm. It doesn't take too long - having built to about thirteen minutes because I have added bits in, not Andrea. These are my choices.

In April 2018 I went to a number of events at the Commonwealth Games. I stood in queues, walked up and down stairs and wore myself out. Luckily I still get very very red when I exercise so we may have been allowed to shortcut queues or take a seat for a minute because people are worried I'll collapse. Nobody believes me when I say I'm fine when my face is fluoro red. ;) 12 months after starting with Andrea I was back singing in a choir. The first season was hard - there's lots of standing. The second season easier because Andrea looked at how she could help me build my stamina for standing.

Everything I have done with Andrea has been about letting me live a more comfortable life. We still have a way to go especially to get me eating properly - I am not fond of vegetables. I am fond of fried, salty foods. Andrea is trying to inspire me to eat the rainbow. I am eating more, and a greater variety of, vegetables.

I have been so lucky to find a personal trainer who isn't tied to her routine, who has found a way to work with me and my limitations and who does the same for each of her clients. The research she does, the care she takes makes each step of my journey easier and more enjoyable. I have come a long way in the last two years. I have a lifetime to go, I cannot stop. I have a great foundation that Andrea has helped me to build. We both still have goals for my mobility - I will one day get on the floor and do some exercise there and get back up again. For someone who did no exercise and was always in pain, I've changed completely. We haven't fixed my knees, I'm not thin and I never will be. That's not what this has been about. This has been about being able to enjoy my everyday life more fully, to continue to move when pain is present and work to have a mobile, active life because I plan to be here for a long time to come.

Janet