



# Model patient



Parkinson's sufferer Tim Andrews talks to **Kirstie Brewer** about how he became the subject of a new exhibition and the catharsis it has brought him

**T**im Andrews' story is proof that one should never underestimate the power of positive thinking. Always a 'glass half-full' kind of person with a tendency to look on the bright side of life, his natural optimism was put to the ultimate test in 2005, when at 54, he was diagnosed with *Parkinson's Disease*.

Ironically, Andrews "*has never felt happier*" and being afflicted with this degenerative, neurological condition has become the lifeblood behind a compelling new digital installation at the *Lightbox Gallery*, Woking.

*Over the Hill: A Photographic Journey* brings together powerful portraits of the Milford resident, taken by more than 100 photographers since the onset of his illness. The photographers range from degree students to celebrated luminaries, such as Rankin, Harry Borden and Jillian Edelstein. Each has played their part in constructing a humble, yet profound narrative about one man's confrontation with life, death and mortality.

Less than two years after his diagnosis, Andrews responded to an advertisement in *Time Out Magazine* by photographer

Graeme Montgomery, who was seeking participants for his book of real nudes. During the weeks that followed, Andrews replied to further advertisements from photographers requesting people to sit for portrait photography.

Then in 2008, Andrews responded to a local ad by student photographer Daisy Lang who was looking for people with illnesses willing to be photographed for her final year's exhibition. Andrews realised she was one of many more photographers looking for models and decided to be captured by as many people as possible during the course of his illness. It became a life-enhancing project.

There is something very warm and unassuming in Andrews' voice, which assures me that he is looking for neither sympathy nor recognition. He doesn't wish to be defined by *Parkinson's Disease* – although inevitably it now shapes him to some degree. He is simply enjoying his new found freedom and indulging in the things he never had time to do before. It's clear that *Over the Hill* is a very personal project fuelled by, "*the excitement of meeting and working with*

interesting and creative people”.

“I am an incredibly happy man – ironically, Parkinson’s has given me a new lease of life. I feel very blessed,” he says.

This new lease of life was sparked when Andrews was forced to retire in 2006, having worked as a solicitor in Grayshott for 29 years.

“I was never really cut out to be a solicitor,” he admits. “I was good at my job because I worked hard and I was good with clients, but academically it was never really my thing – I wanted to be an actor in fact.”

When the realisation hit that his working life would be over, he turned to his wife and burst into tears.

“The enormity of it all was just incredible. I cried out of utter relief and because of the realisation that I could give it all up without feeling guilty – I was suddenly free with everyone’s blessing and goodwill.

“My children were very worried when I first got diagnosed, but when they saw how I dealt with the illness I think they took great heart from it. They saw it wasn’t the end of me – in a funny way it was a new beginning.”

Until he was diagnosed, Andrews knew very little about Parkinson’s Disease and is now keen to raise its profile with the exhibition and his own fundraising.

“One of my son’s favourite actors is Michael J Fox so we were all aware of it but to me Parkinson’s just equalled shaking and something being wrong with your brain,” he admits.

He made the national papers and raised £5,000 for Parkinson’s UK by taking part in Antony Gormley’s *Fourth Plinth Project, One & Other* in 2009. Clad in a

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mini top hat, Victorian coat frock and wielding a cane, Andrews, danced on the plinth to *Madness* for a full hour.

“I was shaking partly due to my fear of heights and partly due to the Parkinson’s!” he says, laughing.

It was Andrews’ wife Jane; a successful artist with a good eye for photography,



Works by photographers, clockwise from top right: *Invisible* by Harry Borden; *Box* by Liz Orton; *Heavy is the head* by Louis Connelly; *Every day is a holiday* by Miss Aniela (Natalie Dybisz) and *Over the hill* by Roberto Foddal



who encouraged him to approach *The Lightbox* with his photographers project.

“She recognised pretty quickly that the photographs were worthy of a show. Without her drive and support, it probably would never have happened,” he explains.

“I wanted to present a show locally and *The Lightbox* is a fantastic gallery, which always has interesting things going on.

“My family and friends were intrigued and were all very supportive although my kids are not that keen on the images of daddy in the nude!” he laughs.

Admittedly, the exhibition’s title – *Over the Hill* – doesn’t appear to reflect Andrews’ relentless brightness in the face of adversity; so why did he choose to such a dreary phrase? He explains that the idea

stemmed from John Lennon’s song *Bring on the Lucie* (Freeda Peeple). Before launching into a rousing recording of the track, Lennon announces to his band; “Alright boys, this is it, over the hill”. Like the earlier *Give Peace a Chance*, strident spirit pulses through the percussion laden track. It was released in 1973 when embers of the hippie culture were still burning brightly, fuelled by a longing for world peace and political change. Such an energetic and passionate song appears to perfectly complement the exhibition which, after all, is essentially about resilience.

“Although the phrase ‘over the hill’ has negative connotations, the song is sung by

Lennon in a very positive way. He goes on to sing, ‘Free the people/Do it, do it, do it, do it now’. So, for me, the title of the exhibition is optimistic despite the double meaning,” he says.

“It might initially sound like I’ve had it and I am on the refuse heap, but in reality it’s completely the opposite.”

Andrews’ evident good humour and incurable optimism shines through many of the photographs he appears in whilst other images bravely reveal a darker, more vulnerable facet to Andrews’ persona. Ultimately, it is his determination to face life’s challenges head on that permeates each image and this is sure to humble anyone who visits the exhibition. I’m left feeling deeply moved by his philosophical outlook and feel sure that the photographs will serve as a poignant testament to how precious, fragile and fleeting life really is.

“When I used to hear the phrase, ‘live every day as if it were your last’, I thought it had a laudable sentiment, but I didn’t really give it much more thought than that,” Andrews muses.

“But when you have Parkinson’s Disease you realise that you really have to take advantage and make each day count” he says with an air of quiet dignity.

“I think I’m less afraid of death now than I used to be because I feel like if I fill my life with the right things I won’t have wasted my time. If you start doing things life moves much more slowly and you fit more in.”

■ *Over the Hill: A Photographic Journey* is at The Lightbox from Feb 1–27. [www.thelightbox.org.uk](http://www.thelightbox.org.uk)

■ To make a donation to the charity, Parkinson’s UK, or support Tim Andrews’ ongoing fundraising, visit: [www.justgiving.com/tim-andrews2-overthehill](http://www.justgiving.com/tim-andrews2-overthehill)