

The view from the Museum Hotel

Joseph Romanos talks with Museum Hotel owner Chris Parkin about motorcycling along the Afghan border, his communist past and whether he wants to be mayor.

Wellingtonian: You must be proud of moving the Museum Hotel across the road back in 1993.

Parkin: I guess it's my claim to fame, but it was a real team effort.

Wellingtonian: That move seemed to go very well.

Parkin: It did. Nothing broke on the move. We were proud that we left everything in the rooms, even bottles of spirits in the cabinets.

Wellingtonian: Are you still enjoying running a hotel?

Parkin: Well, it's always for sale if someone wants to make an attractive enough offer. But I enjoy being involved with the hotel. It's my part of Wellington.

Wellingtonian: Weren't you there when the ACT Party was founded?

Parkin: Yes. I'm still a fan. What the ACT Party stands for is far more socialist than the Greens. It's about building a bigger cake, rather than dividing an ever-decreasing cake.

Wellingtonian: What did you think about Rodney Hide's antics, taking his girlfriend around the world on the taxpayer?

Parkin: I was pissed off, like everyone was. It was a dumb thing to do, but the guy is human. If you go to Parliament and announce you are a perk-buster, it's like putting a big target on your back.

Wellingtonian: Have you always been on the right, politically?

Parkin: No, at Victoria University I was in the Communist Party. I was almost a Trotskyite! Later I campaigned for Fran Wilde for Labour. My political views have evolved.

Wellingtonian: You've received publicity for your motorbike adventures through Asia and South America. Is this a mid-life crisis, or have you always



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Parkin: I was 12 when I got my first motor scooter. I had a break in the 1990s, and began again in 2000, so it's always been an interest.

Wellingtonian: You obviously enjoy travel. Is that more work or holiday?

Parkin: Both really. Wherever I stay overseas, I'm forever checking out the service, the bed linen – the threat count – restaurants, decor ... You only have to pick up one idea to make a trip worthwhile.

Wellingtonian: What are some of the things you've learnt overseas about the hotel industry?

Parkin: I've noted the use of mirrors. I've seen – and now incorporated – pillow menus.

Wellingtonian: You've spent time riding through northern Pakistan. Wasn't that rather dangerous?

Parkin: We were there in 2007 and never felt in any danger. We went up past Peshawar, to the Afghan border. These are huge tribal areas. They aren't lawless,

Wellingtonian: What about the Taliban and al-Qaeda?

Parkin: They were around, saying the same things as now. But we found the locals very happy. They were interested in us

because of our bikes. When they learnt we were Kiwis, they related to us through cricket, squash and hockey, so that was another link.

Wellingtonian: Didn't you stay in a hotel with cardboard walls?

Parkin: That was on the China/Tibet border, at Mazar. The town was just a truckstop. The rooms in the hotel – if that's what you'd call it – were hardly larger than a single bed. And yes, there were cardboard walls. You wonder why they bothered!

Wellingtonian: You had nine years on the Wellington City Council? How was that?

and white and came out grey. Being a councillor is about intelligent gut feeling. For example, at the start I was against the redevelopment of Oriental Bay,

but by the end I was a prime mover behind it. The Oriental Bay decision didn't make sense if looked at through hard-right economics, but was the right thing for the community. I

enjoyed being a councillor for a start, but grew to resent it. A lot of people there had nothing much else to do with their time.

Wellingtonian: What do you think of our councillors now?

Parkin: I'm not a fan of the ward system. It allows people with a bit of a name in their local suburb to become councillors. That's not necessarily for the good of Wellington. Our councillors seem to think they run the city.

governors. Some are bringing in \$90,000 or more and wouldn't be able to do that if they weren't on the council.

Wellingtonian: Any thoughts about running for mayor?

Parkin: Only in moments of extreme drunkenness or madness.

Wellingtonian: You chair the St James Trust. It's been a tough time for the St James, hasn't it?

Parkin: It has been for 10 years. The theatre business is fairly hand-to-mouth. We don't receive operating money from council, so need to be very careful about our risk-taking. The situation with arts venues in Wellington needs reviewing. There are five venues, run by two organisations. It would be better if they were run as a business by one body.

Wellingtonian: What's the appeal of Wellington to you?

Parkin: It's a village with all the attractions of a capital city. There are very few places where you get the opportunity to mix with a small number of people

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