

Bryan's story

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*Bryan wrote his own story.*

### **Background**

I use to be an art teacher. My first job was at Christ Church Grammar School in Perth. I then moved to Adelaide to be with my wife and children where I got a job at Marbury School in Aldgate. It was while teaching at Marbury that I noticed I was slurring some of my words.

### **Identifying Disability**

I went to the Doctor, who couldn't give me an answer, so I went to a Hypnotherapist and a speech Pathologist but neither could help me. I was made redundant after one year at Marbury and a reason was never given or sought. I kept searching and was eventually diagnosed with Spastic Ataxia by a neurologist, who told me that as I aged my symptoms would worsen.

### **Employment and Raising Children**

After leaving Marbury I was employed by the Education Department as a Temporary Relieving Teacher (TRT) for four years, culminating with me teaching a few terms at Mobilong Prison. I was looking after my small children at the time as my marriage had broken up.

### **A Change of Direction**

I went to England to visit my uncle and suss out employment and living conditions in Europe. When I returned to Adelaide I used all the leverage I could employ to get a Housing Trust home in a neighbourhood that made the city easily accessible. I also turned my interest and ability in drawing and painting into a full-time pursuit.

I was happy as I used my training in visual art, which I saw as a philosophy, to further enhance my life. I could explore avenues such as verbal communication and disability more, and comment on them visually. It became my raison d'être. As I progressed into my art career, I expanded my network of friends by going to exhibition openings and getting to know everyone I could in the disability sector who wanted artistic input and collaboration. I also did volunteer work with The Royal South Australian Deaf Society (now called Deaf Can:Do) which introduced me to a group of people with multiple disabilities and enabled me to get my disability in perspective.

Expanding my artistic network directed me towards university and doing a Masters of Fine Art. I did my Masters as a way of qualifying for entry to a scholarship to study overseas. The experience allowed me to have a huge studio, access a great library and the opportunity to experience an academic atmosphere. For someone like me who has a thirst for knowledge it was simply sublime. Upon leaving University I

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rented a studio for myself and embraced the Bohemian lifestyle. I now live by the sea in the quiet atmosphere of Semaphore.

### **The importance of Positive Wellbeing**

For me, my disability allowed me to leave teaching and explore and enhance my other skills. It also introduced me to a large range of people living with disability which opened my eyes to their unique predicaments. While my disability is unique I've always believed in the immense power of the brain, and creating an environment where mental work is constantly used and is essential for positive mental health.

### **The Person I Am**

Since I was eight years old I've always been involved in competitive sport. I was fortunate that my father was a good sportsman and his genes carried through. In summer I would sail and in winter I played soccer. This continued until I was 20 years of age when I devoted all my spare time to the individual sport of surfing.

I'm positive that team sport and a love of the environment fashioned my mindset into competition and loving the world I inhabited. The pleasure of copious sunsets over the sea, witnessing things happening in my environment and competing with others made me the person I am.

### **My Suggestions for Others**

I would suggest to other people in a similar situation to never think negatively. It's so easy to find people worse off than you - they're everywhere. Always play to your strengths because everyone has a skill, no matter what it is or how minor you think it is - make use of it!

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