

Meaningful leisure: Pursuing interests and exploring possibilities

Words spoken by Joel Satherley:

Hello everyone!

Hands up if you have been enjoying the conference so far.

Good! Well don't stop now, OK?

Mum said I had to keep you all awake and interested so I'll start by telling you a favourite old joke about my friends.

For my birthday my friends said they'd set me up with a smart blonde, I was very excited...but she turned out to be a golden retriever! Oh well! Maybe they'll get it right next year!

You will meet some of my friends in the video coming up in a minute. It starts when I began school in a special education class. This was a disaster for me.

Mum tried very hard to get me out of there but it wasn't easy. She had to go to dozens of meetings and give up her job but in the end she found a school where I was welcome.

After finishing high school I went to university for a bit and then to TAFE. I am still at TAFE two days a week doing a visual art course and preparing for a solo exhibition in a local art gallery.

I do lots of other things through the week that are fun and exciting, too. I go busking down the main street of town, do a radio show and belong to a Frisbee golf social club.

Sometimes I go to the gym, swimming, fishing, sailing, bowling or bush walking. Often I will have a dream about something really special I want to do and then I pester mum over and over again until she organises it.

Sometimes it costs a bit of time and money but I tell her that "sacrifice and serving others in the path to spiritual enlightenment". Ha Ha! It works every time!

So that's how I got to ride a helicopter, climb Mt Warning and to Euro Disney. Next I am going whale watching, swimming with dolphins and to a special theme park in England that I want to visit called Blackpool Pleasure Beach. I love going on rides and designing roller coasts more than anything else.

In my life I have found it is important to have dream, a clear picture of what you want to happen and a strong belief that it WILL DEFINITELY happen, no matter what anyone else says.

I want to say that when hopes and dreams are ignored, when no-one cares about your hopes and dreams, then all the good things in life you want to do will never happen. You will watch from the sidelines as your sisters and brothers, friends and relatives all follow their hopes and dreams. But for you, nothing will change, even if you wait forever. Day after day life will be boring and mundane. This will just make you feel sad and empty and sometimes even angry.

I know that not every dream I have will come true, but it doesn't stop me feeling happy dreaming and imagining what my life could be like and getting excited and looking forward to all sorts of possibilities.

People sometimes tell me "no you can't do that, it's just not possible, so forget it" – like climbing Mt Warning because I can't walk properly or having a radio show because people can't understand me. They try to protect me by putting limits on me and telling me what I want to do is "not realistic".

But if THEY wanted to do the same thing, they'd soon find a way to make it happen, wouldn't they? No barrier would be too great.

I find that people around me (even those paid to support me) often make excuses for not helping me to achieve things I want to do. Sometimes they say it costs too much, or it's dangerous, or we'd need to ask too many people to help, or I could hurt myself, or they decide it is too hard for me or not in my best interests, or it would take too much organising, or is it an occupational health and safety issue. The excuses are many and varied.

Sometimes they don't know how to start and won't ask anyone for help or advice, so they do nothing. But mostly they are just too busy living their own lives to be bothered with helping me live mine – and that sucks because without their help and support, I can't achieve anything on my own!

So I have learned to be persistent and not to take "no" for an answer. I am lucky because I can speak but some of you sons and daughters might not be able to speak and I wonder who is listening to their heart's desire – because they will have dreams just as I do.

Please listen to their silent voices. See in their eyes what makes them happy and help them find activities that bring more of that joy into their lives.

Families need to be open to new ideas, new options and new potentials. I am not saying you have to take big risks, but taking small, carefully planned risk can be OK.

Let your kids dream, but dream with them. Build a vision of what could be a more interesting, challenging and fun life for them – a life that could make them happier and more fulfilled. Life should not be boring and predictable every single day just because you have a disability!

Find out what ordinary young people their age are doing and see whether it is something they, too, might want to do, or see, or be...and THEN figure out the HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN part.

Don't assume something they want to do is "too unrealistic" because chances are that this is code for "I'm too scared of helping them try" and once you have helped them achieve it, you will see it was quite realistic all along anyway. It was only YOUR fear holding THEM back.

I believe you can create your own reality and manifest personal dreams and goals in life you JUST WAKE UP AND DO IT with passion, single mindedness and belief in yourself – and that is true for all of us.

Climbing the Mountain

The last set of pictures you saw were of me climbing the scared mountain Wollumbin, also known as Mount Warning, near Byron Bay.

Ever since I was a teenager, I have wanted to climb this mountain. For me, it was my Mount Everest. I dreamed about it, and talked about it, and pestered everyone who would listen about it – and never gave up dreaming that one day I would stand on its summit.

My family tried several times to make the climb with lots of helpers but we never got very far. Each time we failed they told me it was just not possible and that it was an unrealistic goal, that it was too hard and too dangerous.

But I had a dream in my heart and wouldn't let it go. One day mum agreed to give it one last shot. Thinking a climbing harness might help save me from breaking my neck she did a Google search and a climbing gear store in country Victoria a ring.

The owner, Steve, was a climbing instructor, who, to cut a remarkable story short, volunteered to fly up and help me get to the top of the mountain. So after seeking the blessing of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the mountain, we started making plans.

We all met Steve for the first time at dawn in the carpark at Mt warning when he and his wife and two children teamed up to meet our 30 other volunteers – some friends, some family, and some complete strangers who just turned up to help.

Steve brought mountains of ropes, shackles, belaying pins and stuff I'd never seen before, to help with the climb, which took 10 hours with teams of two people taking ten-minute shifts all the way up and down.

Half way up we could not see a thing as the mountain was enveloped in cloud and it was raining, making everything more dangerous, frightening and slippery. But mum said my gleeful cheers and constant encouragement kept everyone's spirits high.

It took weeks to recover but it was a day to treasure and remember forever for us all.

I learnt that day you can create your own reality and that your passion, single mindedness and belief in yourself can help you manifest your dreams and goals in life when you hold that vision clearly in your heart and believe in yourself, even when others doubt you and say it is not possible.

My family learned, too, that it is not only your friends and family who will come to your aid, but that there are wonderful people out there in the world who may be total strangers and yet they are prepared to give an enormous amount of time and support to help others less fortunate than themselves to achieve their dreams. Everything is possible when a community of people come together with a single purpose.

Thank you.