

## **“Prisoner in my own Body”**

### **An Interview with Josh**

by TJWM on November 14, 2010

#### ***What were you feeling just before the accident?***

I was on top of the world, I'd finished my VCE (somehow), moved to Mt Buller to be with my friends and snowboard everyday..... I'd been saving for a few months so I had money to be able to enjoy myself

#### ***Did you have any question in your mind that you would not make the jump?***

No not at all, I always believed I would make it across the road, but at the worst I thought I'd come short a little bit, but on my feet, never upside down, that has never happened to me ... I've hit hundreds of different jumps over the years

#### ***What were you thinking when you were flying through the air upside down?***

I was trying to figure out the best way to get out of it, even though I was in the air for only a few seconds, it felt like I was there for ages, so I was trying to get my feet back underneath me so at least if I landed on my legs at the worst, I'd break a leg which in my case was looking like the best option when I was upside down...

#### ***Just after the accident***

#### ***What happened as you hit the road?***

As soon as I realised I was going to land on my head at the last minute, I tucked my chin into my chest, I thought that it might help me roll, but, I pretty much just stopped dead... straight on the base of my neck at the top part of the shoulders.

I landed on the bone that you can feel when you pull your chin in...

What were you feeling lying on the road?

I knew straight away I broken my neck, because I heard the bones shatter, so I told my mates not to move me.

I was never knocked out, which in one way probably saved my life, I knew I shouldn't be moved or touched

#### ***Can you describe what was happening to your body when you were lying on the road?***

At first I was in shock, I thought there was a huge rock stabbing me in my back, then I thought my back had snapped up into my chest so I made my friend Luke (dingo) Trembath) to see if that was the case...

Luke carefully checked me out, we realised that stabbing into my back or chest.

My body started going through different stages of shutting down, first I was joking, then I started stiffening up and convulsing a bit...

My neck was shaking, so Luke and Daniel held onto my head to try and stabilize it...

Then my body went all relaxed and started winding down and fading out, that's when I started swallowing my tongue...



Daniel realized and pulled my tongue back out which saved me...

Soon after that the medics arrived...

I knew I was in major trouble, when they moved me onto the stretcher, all my gear was black and my boots were bright green so I could just see them...

They grabbed my feet to put them on the stretcher I had had "zero" feeling, I thought I was cut in half, that was one of the scariest feelings I had ever experienced.

When they brought you in off the helicopter and you saw your father & I what were you thinking (you mentioned the girls then)...

I was out of it but I said to them that I was seeing 3 different girls at the same time and I thought it would be best that my parents made sure they didn't come in at the same time.....

### **After being told prognosis**

#### ***How did you feel when the Doctor gave you the news that you were a quadriplegic?***

I was confused, devastated, it had only been 3 days before that I felt like I had the world at my feet, I was 100% fit, graduated high school, partying and enjoying life with my mates, my new exciting life had just started and it was cut short in a matter of seconds, just took one mistake.....

#### ***What sort of things went thru your head?***

I'll never be able to snowboard, ride motor cross again, what girl would want to date me now, can't travel and have fun with my mates, life didn't feel like it was worth living at that point

#### ***Were you frightened?***

I was frightened because I didn't see a very good future ahead of me and reality hit, that I was paralysed, this was the most scariest moment by far

#### ***Did you feel like you were helpless out of control?***

Yes definitely, my legs felt like they were twisted and bent up and my arms felt like they were the same, my skin was on fire and I felt like a prisoner in my own body, I just wanted to escape from the pain or even just move, but I couldn't, I was stuck there frozen from being paralysed

#### ***At what stage did you think enough is enough?***

When the doctor told me I was never going to walk again, I wanted to end my life, I didn't want to be a burden on myself or my friends and family, life didn't seem worth living.....

I wanted people to remember me how I was, not how I was going to be

#### ***Did you at that stage believe that you would walk?***

No, not straight away.....

#### ***At that early stage, when I said I was positive you would walk again did you believe me?***

At the time I didn't know what to think, but I only had 2 options, be a victim and live in a bed or use a wheel chair or try and get a little bit better each day, after all, what's the worse thing that could happen, I was all ready at rock bottom!!!

***What was it like to not be able to move even when you just needed to turn over, how frustrating was it waiting for nurses to turn you over and help you with all the other tasks you couldn't do***

You don't realize how much you don't think about what you physically do everyday and how easy you do it, until you are completely paralysed...

I had to learn how to roll, over, learn how to lift my legs close enough to me so I could put socks on, learn how to scratch my nose, learn how to hold a knife and fork, all these things I had to re learn and it was hard and sad, but, at the same time it was just another stepping stone to my mission to get my life back and it was so rewarding...

I remember when I first scratched my nose without smacking myself in the face; it was a great feeling...

All things we take for granted, not even a week before that I was running a muck with my friends up at the snow, riding motor cross, being an 18 yr old kid, one week later I can't even hold a pen.....

***After you asked me to help you kill yourself and I said I couldn't how did you feel?***

I was frustrated because I didn't want to live my life like that, stuck in a bed, watching the world go by, never to be able to snowboard, ride motor cross, run, jump things, drive, walk, party, live life and what chick was going to want to be with some kid stuck in a bed.....

all these things and more seemed out of my life now, but when I had no other option, but to live, I realized pretty quickly that the sooner I tried getting the things that I loved back, the better chance I had of getting my old life back as much as possible...

***What were the 6 goals you set with me and do you remember the time frames you set yourself ?***

First was to get out of bed

Second was to STAND,

Third was to WALK again and prove the doctors wrong...

Fourth to get back on my Dirt Bike, &

Fifth was to SNOWBOARD again...

Sixth was to get "my old Life back"

Finally I wanted to reward myself with one day to getting a Harley Davidson, so I could take off and ride again and feel like I felt before the accident...( this was a recurring dream I had for the first 2 weeks in hospital)

I wanted to be walking before my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday; (13/11/2000) which I think was just over 4 months away.

I stood on my own, in just under 3 months.

I walked out of Royal Talbot on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2000 with the aid of 2 elbow walking sticks, after that I didn't care how long things took.

I was back on the trail bike within 6 months, just "gassing" around my mates property. But I was riding and I felt free...

I started walking around the house within the same time frame...

I was back snowboarding within 3 yrs (it wasn't like I used to but I was doing the long runs, but no jumps ha ha ha ha)

It took me longer to ride a Harley again, because of the weight and balance required.

It was a struggle, but now I have mastered it, there is no way you can ever talk me out of getting my own Harley one day... ha ha... I have good friends who own Harley's and they let me borrow them, I feel free when I ride them, I feel like the old Josh!!!

I continue to work on my final goal to "get my old life back" I am enjoying the journey

### **Hospital & Rehab**

*How frustrating scary was it for you when the nurses forgot about you and left you in the bath just after you had been moved out of ICU*

I felt so helpless, I couldn't call out because I couldn't yell due to the damage from the tubes that had been in my throat, I couldn't move because I was paralysed so I had to lay there and wait for help to come,

***Did you feel at anytime you had any control in your situation?***

Not at all..... until I finally moved my big right toe, then I knew I could get the power back to my life...

***Did you feel vulnerable while you were in the acute spinal unit? As far as your safety, well being, comfort was concerned???***

Yes in a way I did because, I was like a baby pretty much, I had to rely on other people to do the most smallest things, and I'd have to get turned from one side to the other every 2 hours...

After been turned I was comfy for about 10 minutes, but after that, I was stuck there waiting for "the nurses" to come turn me again.

The waiting drove me insane, because no one else was allowed to touch me and I'd be in the most intense pain I had ever experienced and all I could do was bear it and wait my to be turned again...

*How did you feel the first time you went in the pool?*

I was so excited to get into the pool at Rehab, because, I was brought up in water... My parents had me learning to swim from 6 months old...

Whether it was the beach, the lake, the local swimming pool or one of 3 dams we had on our farm, I loved swimming, so I was excited by the chance of getting back into the pool at rehab.

Mum and I had really pushed the rehab team as we both felt it would be the first steps in me getting my life back...

They wheeled me to the pool and I thought agh sweet, I'll be right with this... I can do this.

I told the physio's to leave me so I could float and be free and weight less...

I sunk, straight to the bottom of the pool, I couldn't move, I had no clue how to drag my heavy dead weight legs, let alone my body, so the physios had to drag me from the bottom of the pool, that was another one of those moments that really bought me down.... Mum was truly devastated seeing me like that!!

Pretty soon, I got over myself and learnt how to deal with it and figure out how to float and stand in the pool, that took a long time but with patience it all started clicking in .....

***We had the teams massaging your hand and feet how did you feel about this?***

At first I hated it because my mates would get in there and start massaging my feet and that was "just way to weird"...

I'd get really angry and tell them not to touch me and they'd say, well stop being lazy and learn how to do it yourself, until then we are stuck here doing it for you!!

***Was there anything you looked forward too as far as the hospital rehab was concerned?***

Yes, I couldn't wait till it was over, I hated rehab, hated the place, this gave me the motivation to get better so I could get the hell out of there.....

There wasn't a single thing I liked or looked forward to when I was in there, but I had to go through it, actually the only thing was seeing my mates and family and playing pranks on the nurses and other patients.....

***Was there anything about Hospital / rehab you enjoyed***

I loved having my friends and family come in, because it picked me up...

After a few weeks of it though, I started feeling like a burden, so that gave me motivation to not get slack with my rehab work and get as well as I could so I could escape and go home.

Other than that, there is not a single thing I enjoyed about hospital, my life before that was all about being outdoors being active, being stuck inside a hospital rehab unit, confined to a bedroom was as bad as the injury.....

**The Hospital food**

***The dietician came in to advise us on what food you should be eating, what did you think about the food in the hospital?***

Was there food in rehab...? I understand that there was a lot of people to look after and feed in rehab, but the food was terrible, my family would bring cooked meals every day for lunch and dinner...

Breakfast was the only meal I ate (that was prepared in the hospital), while I was stuck in jail (rehab)...

**Drugs & Medication**

***You were given drugs for pain, sleep etc, how did that make you feel?***

The sleeping tablets only gave me 2 hours sleep, the pain killers didn't work at all and they messed with my mind, so I knew I had to get off them, because they were giving me nightmares and making my skin crawl plus many other side effects...

**Emotions**

*In those early days living in your broken body, how did you feel, what was it like?*

It was frustrating because you lose all body functions, you are like a little baby again, except for one thing, my mind ..

It was still functioning as an 18 yr old that only recently experienced an amazing fun and healthy life...