

JOEL'S JOURNEY – 16 APRIL, 2017

Familiar Ground

I would like to dedicate this journal entry in memory of Steve Morritt.

After what was many months of preparing and rehearsing, here we are, Carlsbad, California, about to start my 9 month stint at project walk. My first day in America saw me experience emotions I've never really felt since day 1, 2 and 3 of joining the Army. Homesick, self-doubt and questioning what I set out to do. The day I departed was the day of my good mates fathers funeral, obviously I couldn't attend. This did not sit well with me, I wanted to be there for my mate, and as you do on a long flight, you ponder over things, you think, A LOT, and On a 14 hour flight, that is a lot of thinking. Two months prior, my Aunty passed away, I had not seen my Brother in 4 months, he was in Mexico studying, or so he says. For those of you who don't know, Family is paramount to me, they have always been there for me and always will be. I turn to them at the hardest of times, I turn to them for advice and I turn to them because I want to. So naturally, I got sentimental and started to think of my loved ones back home. Would I miss out on an important family occasion? Would I miss out on saying goodbye to people? The fear of the unknown had crept in.

To get a taste of home, literally, I brought some teabags you could only buy at supermarkets in Melbourne. The day after landing, and after a good night sleep I sat out the back of our accomodation listening to the Californian birds, enjoying the sun drinking my tea and listening to Paul Kelly. Elisa gave me a few words of encouragement, positivity and reminded me of what we were here to do, and I was back on track. Thanks to Elisa and Paul, my mind was back in the game! Our accommodation is set up in a little community where many other clients from around the world who are attending project walk also stay. Due to the fact we're staying for nine months, Not seven weeks like last time, we have had to go and purchase to set up. Food, cleaning products, linen, towels, connecting our phone and Internet, printing off photos from back home and putting it up on our wall. Establishing a budget, Unlike last year day one, week one, I was physically prepared (although 10kg's heavier from my stint in Italy

last year) I was ready. Fortunately, I was able to source out some local exercise physiologists who gave me one-on-one time at the gym and at home. We focused on strengthening my shoulder muscles and readying my body for what I was about to begin over here. To Slav and Cormack, thank you for your time and well done on an excellent job in preparing me. I was able to hit the ground running, not literally of course, but you know what I mean. There is a certain feeling created at the facility over here that I've never experienced elsewhere, Nobody has been able to replicate, They have tried, but failed dismally. No feat is too high, nothing is unachievable. For those of you who are fortunate enough to witness it firsthand, the trainers here are passionate about the job, so professional, they do not HAVE to come to work, they WANT to come to work.

My first session started on Thursday, I did some basic assessments to see where I was at compared to last year and I was way ahead thanks to my preparations before departing. I set my goal of being able to stand unaided, expecting the trainer to have a surprised response or somewhat unsure whether I could achieve this. To my surprise and pleasure, his response was simple "Awesome, lets get it!". Another one of my goals although not relative to my progress here, was to drop at least 8kg. Although physically I'd done a lot of preparation and was in front of where I was last year, my central nervous system needed to be awoken and re-stimulated. This is done by stretching and moving my legs and me imagining actually physically moving them in the direction the trainer was manoeuvring them. This is something that is not achieved overnight nor the results witnessed in the short-term. Last year it was about week four or five when I noticed my nervous system beginning to awaken. It is something I eagerly yet also anxiously await, some of the symptoms I experienced were insomnia, extremely bad spasms whilst sleeping, pins and needles much like I experienced when I first fell and broke my neck. There is a silver lining in there somewhere, but when I'm kicking a sleeping Elisa under the sheets and not sleeping myself, it is hard to see. In the short time that I have been gone from here, there has been new trainers come along, this brings in new ideas, new knowledge and new friendships. Something that I thoroughly enjoy and can benefit from. These new ideas, awakening of the central nervous system, working towards standing unaided, losing weight and general progress things are not seen in one week' I'll have more to talk about in the next fortnight than I will today unfortunately. A Person I hold in very high regard and respect

even more told me during the week that “if you train hard, not only will you play hard, but you will be hard to beat”. This, along with some individuals I keep in my mind from back home, some still with us and some are not, is what pushes me forward when my body is telling me to stop.

Once again, Elisa and I are over here thanks to the generosity and hard work of those who were able to run and execute fundraisers for us. From lemonade stands to car rallies, afternoon tea’s to individual contributors and large private donations. The amazing networking ability of my subbranch at the Greensborough RSL. A massive last minute donation from the Monty-Eltham RSL. This is only possible thanks to you people, words cannot describe how fortunate and grateful myself, Elisa and our respective families are.

Joel