

Joel's Journey – 19/7/17

7.7 DOWN

When I first arrived in Los Angeles, on the 4th of April this year I thought I was in pretty good shape physically. Last year and this year I had been telling myself this same lie every time I decided to drink beer, devour some pizza or order the greatest Parma Melbourne has to offer from the Greensborough RSL. The reality was, I was ballooning, clothes were starting to get very tight, everywhere, it was getting harder to push my wheelchair, people were struggling to lift me and I took ownership of a second chin. At one stage my arse was that big my legs were that squashed they would rub on my wheels. I weighed 92.7 kg. Although this may be a complement to Mums amazing cooking and the RSL's ability to turn out quality parma's every Thursday, my physical health was hating it. (A month in Tuscany last year eating and drinking whatever was in sight definitely didn't help either)

Upon beginning my journey this year at Project Walk I was given a harsh reality. I was told "You are too heavy, for you to achieve the goals you set you need to drop some weight".

As soon as I heard that, I was kickstarted into gear, physical appearance and health had always been a priority for me, for some reason I used my injury as an excuse, I was being lazy and ill disciplined. I would tell myself that "it was okay" to drink one or two beers a day with mates after work, dumplings were acceptable, going to my favourite Indian restaurant was ok instead of having some of Tracy's cooking. Because I couldn't walk or get the cardio output like I used to, I wouldn't exercise at all, it was an all or nothing mindset. I was attending various gyms, but with my inability to raise my heart rate for long enough, this diet was not sustainable. I hadn't changed my mindset and diet choices to suit my lifestyle post-accident. In the army we would have PT every morning, civilian football training twice a week and a game on the weekend. That plus just walking around, lifting and carrying things I would burn calories without realising. In a wheelchair, with two 'functioning' limbs, none of that happens naturally, it must be a deliberate process. I sought advice from some very knowledgeable people regarding nutrition, educated myself on the types of foods I should eat at certain times of the day and days of the week. Fortunately Elisa is an amazing cook, so we

had the knowledge and the tools, all I needed was the discipline. I set a goal weight of 85 kg. I had been told in the past it is “extremely difficult” for quadriplegics to lose weight, so I thought this was a realistic target to hit over the nine months I was here. Ironically, these were the same people who doubted Project Walk and told me I would “waste my money” coming over here. I currently now weigh just over 85 kg, with a total weight loss of 7.7kg in 3 months. I achieved this through cutting out processed foods, sugar, milk, bread, alcohol and replacing it with whole foods, almond milk and only chicken and salmon. It's become an obsession for me, I now only have organic fruits and vegetables, organic chicken and wild caught salmon, Im having less than 1000 calories a day. The difference is amazing, my mobility, my strength, endurance, my clothes now comfortably fit me and I only have one chin. My morning routine is now made faster, in the past it could have taken anywhere between 30 minutes to two hours, now, 30-45 minutes. I have now adjusted my target to 78kg.

My nervous system seems to have been on a bit of a rollercoaster, with one week being extremely active and my leg spasm almost unbearable and not allowing me a good night sleep, to being almost completely non-existent. Two weeks ago when they were extremely active, I was able to use them to assist me in standing with an aid a lot better than when I first attempted it. I was able to lock my hips out, briefly, but was still unable to turn my glute spasms on. I feel as if this will be an ongoing issue for me, or a challenge, it depends how I look at it.

Last week Elisa and I tried something different, in an attempt to show people the daily struggles of completing simple tasks with quadriplegia we filmed myself attempting to make a cup of tea. The whole process took about 15 minutes, it wasn't until I stopped to explain to the camera every detail of what I was doing did people back home and around the world actually experience and learn something new. It was a massive success, I received a lot of positive feedback and encouragement from people of all abilities. Now, for whoever reads this, I can put the question to you, what would you like to see next?

Joel