

Joel's Journey – 24 June, 2017

SETBACK

In what seemed like potentially the end of Project walk 2017, it was over as soon as it began.

Two days ago, I began feeling weird sensations in my right foot, it was spasming uncontrollably and creating quite a bit of discomfort. The trainers at Project walk couldn't quite put their finger on what the issue could be, due to my inability to feel pain we could not find the aggravated area. Even Elisa could not find or identify any swelling or bruising. When I went to bed that night we could both see the beginnings of bruising around my foot and toes, straightaway, I started going through potential situations I'll be put under if I had a broken foot. This led me to backtracking the last 24 hours, to try and identify the protagonist for my current dilemma. I am not certain but I think I did the damage when I pushed into a wall and squashed my foot between my foot plate, and the wall. I Then began contemplating what I would do if I was to have a broken foot, in my mind, it would definitely mean no more rehabilitation, no more standing and ultimately, the end of achieving my goal of standing un-aided. To put an end to all the speculation and to get a decent answer, I went to get x-rays the next morning, confirming only some of my fears. I had two breaks in my right big toe. Having played a lot of football, basketball and other sports in my life, injuries come with it, and receiving news of these injuries never gets any easier. For some reason, this time it was harder to except, I'm over here for only one reason and that one reason and it's future was going to depend on the doctors advice. Having had a broken toe prior to my accident I recall how painful it was and how hard it made things, especially walking! Fortunately for me, I was told that I could resume rehabilitation first thing Monday morning, I just had to monitor and be wary that I did not hit or damage my foot any more which could potentially create more breaks. It was here that I realised that as shit as quadriplegia is, it has many silver linings, one being I cannot feel the pain from the broken bone in my foot which would otherwise be extremely painful! For every positive there is a negative, at night it Kept me up because it kept spasming and creating more spasm through my

legs and moving my body, making it extremely hard to fall asleep or remain asleep.

Two weeks ago I was nearing the end of a 10 week straight stint of rehabilitation, so I took my first break. This was something I was uncomfortable with, felt guilty because of it, as if I was being slack and lazy. I felt I was letting those back home down, but the truth is, I was cooked. On my last day before my break whether it be because I knew I was about to take some time off, or I was legitimately spent, I was unable to balance, to push my body weight around the tables and couldn't complete basic movements which were otherwise simple in the weeks prior. It had nothing to do with diet or lifestyle, nothing had changed in that regard. Realistically I had never participated in or completed 13 hours of physical activity at the standard I was currently doing at any stage in my life. That is without taking even taking into consideration the toll that quadriplegia takes on my body. Not only do I feel physically fatigued by the end of the week, but there is something called 'Neuro-fatigue' that takes an even bigger toll on me. I would get home from the gym and struggle to concentrate and complete tasks which required application, reading books was definitely out of the question, the ability to concentrate was somewhat inhibited because of this. Although this may be a bit of déjà vu from my school days, this time I had a legitimate reason.

On 2 June, a great friend of mine from Australia came to visit and this was to be the beginning of my 'Break'. We took a short road trip to Las Vegas and it was here I started to see the benefits of taking a break. For the last 10 weeks all I thought about was getting ready for the gym, after the gym, going to sleep so I was prepared for the next day, and repeat. So for five days although I did think of it (the gym) quite often, I was occupied enjoying myself and soaking up everything Vegas had to offer! It was so refreshing! It was here that something struck me, and has stuck with me ever since. Four years ago, I never would have envisioned spending five days in Las Vegas with Elisa and one of my best mates, but here I was, albeit in a wheelchair and under very unforeseen circumstances, there we were. I couldn't have been any happier. This put the negative moments I had in 2016 and curveballs I was thrown into perspective, I was really able to appreciate what life is currently for me. It is what I make it. There are certain terms I cannot stand, terms such as, "Everything happens for a reason" or, "Things could always be worse" and "If anyone could do it, it's you" although these may be said with complimentary intentions, they mean nothing and hold no bearing with me. I do believe out of a negative situation,

there are plenty of positives to take from it. Shedding light on the term, one which I heard being mentioned recently “Behind every cloud, there is a silver lining” and here’s mine, I’m living it.

After I had my weeks break, I returned to project walk, my body feeling refreshed and mind too. Other than having some tightness in my hamstrings from not stretching each day, I felt absolutely amazing! In my mind I imagined returning and having lost strength and endurance on my break, surprisingly it was quite the contrary, I was stronger and fitter than when I left. Now, at the end of my second week back, after feeling guilty for taking a break, my mind and body is thanking me and that guilt seems as if a wasted emotion.

My own progress has not been noticeable for me in the past, but in the last week I have felt and seen noticeable differences in my ability to balance and my body’s mobility whilst on the matts. For the first time last week I was able to roll from my back onto my stomach and back again on my left and right side without any assistance. This is has been something that seems so simple, yet frustratingly has been ‘a bridge too far’ up until now. Although this may not be a functional movement and help me with day-to-day activities, this is hopefully a sign of things to come so that at night time I can roll myself, and not wake Elisa or mum up to come and roll me. (the reason I need to be rolled at night from side to side or side to my back is to prevent pressure sores). I am also noticing increased ability and control whilst doing sit-ups, thanks to the work the trainers and I have put in to build up my core strength. As a part of my own workouts, I have been using a stand-up frame with a hand cycle attached, generally doing 20-25 minutes after each session with interval-based training. Here, I would cycle for 30 seconds at 100% and recover for 90 seconds, since my break I’m now able to work at a ratio of 1:1, (one minute on and one minute off). Yet again proving how beneficial my break actually was.

Joel