

## **The Recycled Man .... .... who had two lives.**

By Ken Aitken ... When he was in hospital in February 1996

.... As at December 2019

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### **Summary Page:**

In December 1995 I had a severe brain injury after I fell off a boogie-board in the surf at Peregrine Beach on the Sunshine Coast off Queensland, Australia. As a result:

- In a coma for four weeks from early December 1995 to early January 1996.
- Felt like a three year old child in the first week after I woke up from the coma with no control over my actions
- In hospital for six months
- Had to learn everything all over again including walking, talking and eating solid food again
- Get my brain back together from a very scrambled state
- Lost some ability to empathise what other people are saying
- I am not the same man as before my accident. However I have learnt to work from what I have and not from what I have lost. It is new season in life.

These are my continuing problems:

- I cannot drive twenty one years out from my accident .... but I have learnt to drive on the Internet .... to go around the world in few minutes and see hundreds of people at the same time.
- My balance is not good
- I have to be careful walking up narrow spaces
- I have to come down backwards on steep steps at home whilst holding onto the banister
- My mind has slowed right down .... It is hard to take initiative for one's life and make clear decisions so I am dependent on my wife Harriet.

### **The Context Of My Brain-injury:**

For twenty years, I ran a small Landscape Design and Construction Company undertaking very creative, individual designer gardens for wealthy residential clients around Brisbane. As an artistic person, a lateral thinker, than businessman, I thought of landscape as a three-dimensional piece of space that people walked through. This space changed with time as it grew and changed with the time of day. Using earthforms, boulders, plants and trees of different colours, solid structures and water to create different gardens, I was unknowingly, a landscape sculptor and from intangible product I built a structure for my life. It was a difficult business in which to make a profit as it was dependant on careful costings.

Harriet and I are into simplicity and recycling. We live in this amazing house built out of

rejected materials for minimal money in 1981 (37 years ago to 2018). See the house and garden on my personal experiences website at <http://www.kenaitken.net/>

See the following posts as an overview of the house and garden:

- **OUR HOUSE ....[An Overview](#)**
- **OUR HOUSE .... [The Actual Garden](#)**
- **[OUR LAND OVERALL](#)**

That all changed overnight when I had a simple accident which resulted in complete transformation of my life.

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**TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE DIRECTION:** I went from being:

1. Physical Gardener (Outer Sustainability) >>>>

2. Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability)

**1. Outer Sustainability:** ..... A focus on the external structures and what has been achieved. Each project was very non-standard and there was a seasonal nature of the work. Every project was a "one off".

Since my accident, I have come to value people and I have developed a passion to build inner community with local and many people around the world. I spend a great deal of time on the computer affirming and validating who people are.

**2. Inner Sustainability:** flows from having a wholistic view of life where problems are dealt with by personal accountability and solutions are found. This builds a solid foundation of quiet achievements.

Everyone of us has a private space in our lives that we carefully guard. I call it '**The Garden of Life**'. A garden is a personal space that you can go out into and to enjoy the peace, the cool air, the shadows of trees, the sun shining with translucent light through tree leaves and palm fronds, the perfume of beautiful blossoms. No one else comes there except yourself, your family and close friends. They are invited out there with you after you have let them into your house. Strangers who come are intruders and will be dwelt with by the police.

To enter someone's inner life, you need their consent. By understanding the persons inherent value and by listening intently to what they say, you are gently knocking on the door of their inner house. If that person trusts you, they will then invite you into the inner garden of their life demonstrating that they accept the value you offer them and you get to know them. To keep that process going is a Sustainable Relationship. If I act suspiciously or try and crash the door with a sledge hammer, I will not be let in. That is what I call an Unsustainable Relationship.

Some Inner Life Gardens are very ordered whereas others are very weedy as people do

not understand their value so anything goes. There are definite values and principles of life which really work. I say 'Go through open doors, not closed doors .... Otherwise you will get a very sore forehead. .... Look not at closed doors of the past but look to find new doors of opportunity. That is why I have become an Inner Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability) to hundreds of people around the world to encourage them.

**'The Rose Water Story'** is my story from where I have come from and where I am going to.

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## **The Rose Water Story**

By Ken Aitken ...

... When he was in hospital in February 1996

I was up working on a landscape construction site at Noosa Heads on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland in Australia for a friend of mine called John. This was early December 1995. We were staying down the coast further at Peregian Beach with one of John's relatives. We had only been there two days and several of us went boogie-boarding in the surf after work. I came off my board in the shallow surf, hitting the sand with my forehead and apparently John had to virtually carrying me out of the water with blood running from my nose.

An ambulance took me to Nambour Hospital about half an hour away. I stayed in Nambour for several days when I was flown by the medical helicopter to the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane. Unbeknown to the doctors, I had multiple skull fractures which could not be seen on the x-rays because of air running around in my brain. This resulted in the main cerebral artery being pinched off to the frontal part of my brain (This is the executive section of the brain).



Peregian Beach where I had my accident on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1995 ..... a quiet long beach of sand and small waves.

On 8th Dec as a consequence of this clipping off of the blood vessel, I had a big bleed on the brain and I had to have an urgent brain operation. Because of the bleed, I completely lost my ability to walk, talk and eat solid food. I had severe ABI (Acquired Brain Injury). After coming out of Intensive Care Unit (ICU), I was placed in the Critical Care Section of M7, the ward for brain injured people.

While I was in Ward M7, the doctors believed I had damaged my thirst mechanism because I apparently did not know when to stop drinking. The doctors called this disease, Polydipsia. It was as if I had been in the Sahara Desert for two weeks with insufficient to drink. I had such an insatiable thirst that I dreamed of drinking all the water from the end of a running garden hose. I believed at the time the nurses were just being difficult when they forcibly limited my water intake to three litres of water a day. I have since found out from a nursing relative that in such a case as mine, if you drink too much water, your kidneys can fail.

The doctors had to ascertain whether my problem was physical or psychological so everything I drank was recorded on a chart at the foot of my bed. How to get a 230ml - hospital cup of water became the whole goal of my day. When the nurses came on ward rounds with torches at about four in the morning, I would be awake for the morning round, I would be awake for that welcome light. 'Could I have some water, please?'

Polydipsia was such an acute problem that I felt on the edge of insanity. In M7, I desperately wanted the doctors to change their minds on the quantity of water I could

have. In protest I began throwing anything from cutlery to boxes of tissues out the window. Fortunately, there was a metre wide shelf outside the window, which prevented things from hurtling down from the 7th floor to the pavement below.

One day two of my friends, Colin and Julianne had come to see me with their little baby. Even though I was in a coma, I heard them talking. When you are in coma you can hear people but cannot respond. Colin said to his wife 'Ken will not be doing this in hurry'. Colin put the baby in my arms and I felt it lying there. The photograph which a nurse took is of that occasion.

Ken in a comatose state December 1995

Colin my friend



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Eventually in February 1996, I was transferred to the Head Injuries Unit (HIU for short) in the same hospital. I still had this major thirst problem. I was so discouraged with this problem of how to get

enough water to drink; I almost quit on rehabilitation. It was here that I had a very funny experience.

They still had me on water restrictions. I

guess they were trying to get to the bottom of the problem. The nurses suddenly announced to me one night that I was to have a test. I had to fast from 9.00 o'clock that night to 7.00am in the morning. It was never explained to me the reasons for this test and as a result I saw it as the doctor's test, not mine.

I was awake at 11.00 p.m. at night and absolutely dying of thirst. What could I do? I could get into my wheelchair or walk around by hanging onto the walls. I then saw the vase of roses in fresh water, which Harriet my wife, had brought in for St. Valentines Day, the previous day.

Grabbing onto the cupboard doors, I got out of bed. I took the roses and threw them into my wardrobe. I drank the vase of fresh water and said to myself 'That is the best St. Valentines Day present Harriet could have given me!!'.

In the morning, at about 6.30 a.m. I was concerned for the wilted roses. I took the empty vase to the bathroom in my wheelchair. I was busily rinsing out the vase when Sister Clare who ran the ward came upon me and asked me 'Did you drink the water from the vase?' 'Oh no', I lied. 'I'm just getting new water for my roses'. I don't remember whether they did the test or not.

A week later, my conscience was really nagging me about lying when she was showering me. I said to Sister Clare, 'I have something to say to you. I **DID** drink the water from the vase. I am sorry I lied to you the other week'. Out of that confession came a lot of trust. I began to obtain water for myself and the problem of my thirst quickly went away.

If it was Polydipsia as I now believe it was, I don't know how this event corresponded with my physical thirst. Somehow, the water restrictions were lifted, as the doctors never came back to check on my final outcome. I just know that period of my hospitalisation

was extremely difficult. I only came to this understanding it was Polydipsia in late 1997. I believed the nursing staff were just being until then negligent. I have perused the details of all this through my Medical File as I had permission from the Freedom of Information Officer at the PAH but I am none the wiser. (I can drink only two litres / day and not feel thirsty as I did in Hospital).

In HIU, therapists taught me to walk again and talk properly. My speech was very slurred and slow from what was called dysarthria, which comes from the muscles in your throat being affected following my tracheostomy. My level of comprehension was such that my speech pathologist had me doing simple definitions of words. My writing was so bad, she had me begin to type them on the computer so she could read it.

From there she had me begin to write a speech in preparation for my homecoming party when I came out of hospital in May. About 100 ++ people had come to see me in hospital over six months. From having to learn to write again I progressed: It began as 'symbolic pictograms' (almost childlike drawings), in M7, to very scratchy writing in HIU, to readable hand writing and to the use of my computer all over again when I got out of hospital.

Eventually I was able to leave hospital. I had been in hospital six long months. The day I was able to leave HIU was a day of intense elation. As Harriet, my wife, drove me down the driveway of HIU, I well remember the sense of accomplishment. I had made it! I had been in hospital for six long months from 4th December 1995 to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1996.

Before my accident, another significant incident occurred. Through my business connections, I had held an insurance Income Protection Policy for several years. One night in July 1995, (four months before

my accident, a man phoned me out of the Yellow Pages and said he wanted to talk to me about an Income and Protection Policy he was promoting.

I said, 'I've already got one of those. I don't need to talk to you however'. We talked about rates and benefits for a while. As they were far better than the policy I had, I went ahead with this small company at the time. If it had been my wife, she would have said 'No' as she would never talk to someone like that on the phone but fortunately it was me. This policy was for life and was CPI indexed. Four months later, I had my accident.

In many ways this accident and its consequences, has been the best thing that has happened to myself and the family and even though it has been a difficult experience. I have now been provided with an income much better than a Government Pension. I think there is irony and humour in this. I had worked hard all my life for very little, whereas now I don't have to work at all. I am now on a permanent holiday for life and yet I still get paid for it.

As I have a 'Christian Spirituality', God as my Heavenly Father supplied freely and worked things out for good for us long before I could even think it out. As I am on a permanently paid holiday through my life-long Income Protection, I have time to spend with people in a way I never could do in my busy business.

Through this 'Christian Spirituality', there has been an ongoing connection with a Personal Higher Power (God), and has brought healing, restoration and transformation of life purpose. It is about a dynamic and ongoing relationship with God that has very practical consequences.

## Ken Home, Seven Months after the Accident .... June 1996

Ken with his wife Harriet at their house at Chambers Flat



In 1981, we built a unique natural house out of recycled timber for a fraction of the price of a new house. People often come out to see this house. I had run an environmental landscape design and construction business for twenty years so I had the skills to put things together like this. This is on our five acres of light open eucalypt bush at Chambers Flat, Brisbane. The house is largely of glass set into a post and lintel construction of 100 ++ year old broad axed timbers and sandstone walls. The total concept of indoor-outdoor flow, has a nice ambiance to it and the design is unique and is great place to live and have a sense of belonging. See the house and garden on my new personal experiences website: [www.kenaitken.net](http://www.kenaitken.net) See the actual links to our house and garden as given at introduction to this story.

Read about our Travels around the world at:

**[An International Perspective ..... Ken and Harriet's Travel post from 2003 to 2018.](#)**

The End

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