

The Recycled/Restored Man

*Coping with a severe brain injury
.... By **'Living in the Third Dimension'**
.... through a sustainable life*

Ken Aitken

Ken's world view

There are three kinds of people:

1. those who see and count only the physical trees in the forest
'Living in the First Dimension'
2. those who see, observe and work with the spaces in between the physical trees in the forest the spiritual and abstract things of life.
'Living in the Second Dimension'
3. those who count the physical trees in the forest but also see, observe and work with the spaces in between. **'Living in the Third Dimension'**



Context Of My Life:

- **Work** For twenty years, I ran my own Landscape Design and Construction business, doing very creative individual designer gardens for wealthy residential clients.
- **I was more an artist than businessman which caused STRESS**



Greenmount Tourist Resort

The Restored Man Ken Aitken

**Beyond a Severe Brain Injury
from December 1995**

- **Noosa Heads, a small Landscape job for a fellow construction contractor John**
- **Peregian Beach Boogie surfing after work**
- **Fell off the board in a metre of water**
- **Walked out with blood running out my nose**
- **Taken to Nambour Hospital**
- **Wife and daughter drove up to see me**
- **.... Big black eyes but able to communicate**
- **Flown by medical helicopter to PAH two days later**
- **Big bleed on the brain due to compression of cerebral artery**
- **4 week coma lost my ability to talk, walk and eat solid food 6 months in hospital**



The Restored Man Beyond a Severe Brain Injury



Ken in a comatose state December 1995

Statistics for brain injury in QLD

- **11,000 people a year in Queensland suffer a brain injury**
- **4000 of those who survive will be permanently disabled in some way with reduced brain function capabilities**
- **Less than two hundred of these can expect to receive the quality of care and further rehabilitation they need**
- **Up to fifty percent of marriages and relationships will fold up**
- **Is a big silent epidemic in our community the invisible changes unseen**

Summary of Progress:

Order out of Chaos

- 1995 Dec - 1996 Jan A Time of Intensive Hospitalisation - Princess Alexandra Hospital
- 1996 Jan-May A Time of Reawakening + Rehabilitation in the Brain Injury Unit
- 1996 - 2000 Went home and became re-orientated and found stability
- 2001 - 2008 Reassembling and rebuilding and reaping the results

Restoration from Brain Injury

. What a brain injury has meant to me:

Dramatic change of life

- Unplanned accident
- Had no control
- Very disorientated for a while very scrambled brain
- Dreams vs. reality in hospital
- Water problem leads to depression ‘
- My mind has slowed right down so it’s hard for me to take the initiative
- With books and films I don’t remember the content very well
- I have limited decision making skills
- I’m not the same man I was, I have lost the ability to sense things at a deep level I don’t sense ideas, people and the bush in the way I used to
- I initially become irritable when things don’t go my way
- I need to lead a very well regulated life
- I like to be surrounded by people but I have trouble engaging with concepts and ideas Tend to be good listener and reflector

Restoration from Brain Injury:

.... What a brain injury has meant to me:

...

Physical changes:

- I was in a wheel chair for a few months and I had to learn to walk again in rehab – I still feel a bit unstable
- I have difficulty in running as I am still uncoordinated
- My balance is poor and I have difficulty standing for long periods of time
- I negotiate our stairs at home by descending backwards, holding firmly onto the rail
- I have lost a great deal of physical endurance/stamina I need a few catnaps through the day but I do get up at 4.30 – 5.00 a.m. to start my day

Voice: My voice has changed to being fairly slow and slurred but very recognisable.

Strangers in the past have often asked what country I come from. I tell them that I have had an accident and have had to learn to talk again

. at least I am glad to be able to talk at all.

Restoration from Brain Injury:

.... What a brain injury has meant to me:

Work: I am no longer able to work in my chosen field due to:

- Limited concentration skills
- Inability to cope with a lot of things going on at once
- Losing the drive and passion for business
- Unable to pick up fine nuances
- I was fortunate as through my business connections I had an Income Protection Policy for life, so I don't have to ever work again
- I am in a new season of life

Restoration from Brain Injury:

.... What a brain injury has meant to me:

My family has had to undergo some major adjustments

- I am not the same man that Harriet married.
- I have had to cope with my two children in a new way and learn to be a new father.

I have had to discover a new practical way of coping with life.

I have learnt that who I am is NOT dependant on what I achieve.

Restoration from Brain Injury:

.... What a brain injury has meant to me:

- **Have learnt to travel on the Internet as I am unable to drive:**
- I do a lot of writing and photography now.. However I still require appropriate editing as I tend to repeat myself or lose track of the main points I am trying to make eg. editing of this presentation took a lot of effort by Harriet to make it flow.

I have started the following three e-mail broadcasts which go to over 1000 ++ people around the world:

- **Brain Injury Survivor Network (BISN)** Blog site See: <http://braininjurysurvivornetwork.blogspot.com/>
- **New Earth Community** To hundreds of people around the world <http://www.newearthcommunity.org> (This website is going through major reconstruction in July – October 2008 through the free hosting provided by Word Press. Hosting otherwise would cost several hundred \$\$\$ / year from a hosting company. Only a few pages are now working).
- **Ken and Harriet's Place:** <http://kenandharrietsplace.blogspot.com/>

Transformation of Life

1. Physical Gardener (Outer Sustainability) for twenty years

..... >>>>>>

..... **Brain Injury in 1995**

2. Internal Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability)

Internal Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability)

Certain Identity

... based on an understanding of who
you are as a person

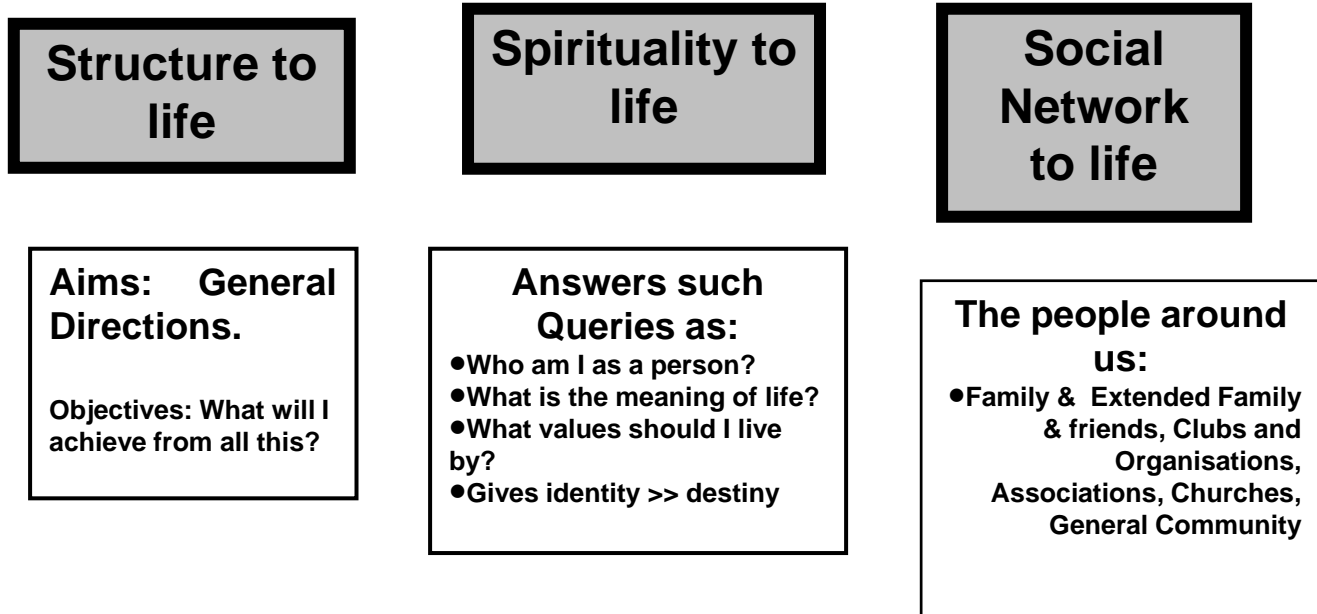


Certain Destiny with:

a deep Passion for life
a Meaning for life
a Purpose in Life

The Sustainable Life

- **Diagram of a Sustainable Life:
Wholistic Health: beyond a brain injury ...
The Whole Person**



Inner Sustainability

..... The Sustainable Life

Certain Identity

*... based on an understanding
of who you are as a person*

- **Positive Personal Relationships**
- **Sustainable Relationships ... leads to large social network**
- **Stability in Life:**
 - **Stable job or business**
 - **Financial Independence**
- **Problems treated as stepping-stones to new dimensions of life**

The Unsustainable Life

Uncertain Identity

... based on a lack of understanding of who you are as a person

Unstable:

- Not in control of circumstances
- Circumstances in charge of you

Hopeless Patterns of life: which do not work in the end

Problems Treated: as tombstones rather than steppingstones to new dimensions of life

Uncertain Destiny leading to:

- **No Passion for life**
- **No Meaning for life**
- **No Purpose in Life**

Leads to:

- Loss of financial independence
- Low self esteem
- Feels a victim rather than a victor
- Hopelessness and negativity
- Frustration
- Anger and resentment
- Gives up ... stays in survival mode
- Thinks about suicide or may even attempt
- Uncertain or negative relationships with people
- Lets life happen vs. making it happen
- Uses a job as a structure to escape from life can even be a workaholic
- Can lead to substance abuse with alcohol or drugs
- May lead to risk taking behaviours that can lead to accidents and result in injuries such as an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

The End or just the Beginning ...

Questions?