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My Story

:: Prue Ward

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:: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ::

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Thank you to all the team at Blackburn Animal Hospital - Bill, Nat, Suze, Kate, Hannah, Bec, Brooke, Maurs, Ida, Rose, Catherine and Cherise - I love you guys!

To my family - Mum, Dad, Justin, Amanda and Genevieve. Thanks for supporting me and putting up with my 'challenging' behaviour at times! My doggies, Sage and Jack (woof!) - you guys are always so happy to see me and I love nothing more than going for walkies on the beach with you.

My heartfelt love and thanks to all my wonderful friends for your constant love and support, particularly 'my girls' - Kate 'Brownie', Lozzy, Mon, Kez, Ange, Kate 'Bergs', Sophie, Kath and Hannah.

Last, but by no means least, to my 'soul sister' Kerryn - without you, this book would not have happened. You're such a talented and beautiful person. I'm so proud of you and your business Klaro Design (www.klarodesign.com.au). Your design for my cards and compilation of my book are beautiful and I can't thank you enough. I can't believe you made this happen in less than a week! Crazy! But so, so cool. I love you honey and I truly appreciate all your love and support.

All my love, Prue xxx

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"As you begin to pay attention
to your own stories and what
they say about you, you will enter into the
exciting process of becoming,
as you should be,
the author of your own life,
the creator of your own possibilities."

:: *Mandy Aftel* ::

My Story

:: Prue Ward

My name is Prue Ward.

Growing up, I was always involved in sport and social activities. I competed for Victoria in the Victorian Catholic Lawn Tennis Association, danced in my high school's Rock Eisteddfod, attended numerous Spring Racing Carnivals, spent many nights dancing the night away in bars and nightclubs and used to love going out with friends.

I have always been academically and socially driven, having completed a degree in Environmental Science, spent a year working and travelling around Europe and upon returning from Europe, found the career I wanted and was on my way to becoming a Qualified Vet Nurse.

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I was 27 years of age when my life as I knew it came to an abrupt end. At 7.45am on the 15th December 2005, I was on my way to work at Blackburn Animal Hospital when my car was hit by another vehicle running a red light.

I have no recollection of that day or the next 15 or so days to follow. I was extremely lucky in that my car ended up in front of a hospital. The anaesthetist, who's only there twice a week, was just turning into the driveway when it happened. He resuscitated me and stabilised me until the ambulance arrived.

I sustained multiple fractures and acquired a brain injury. Due to swelling and bruising of my brain, I was placed into an induced coma for about a week and transferred shortly after to a rehab hospital.

My parents were told initially that depending on the severity of my brain injury, I may end up in a nursing home.

Initially in rehab, I needed assistance to shower and go to the toilet - it was humiliating, but I had to 'suck it up' and try my hardest to perform the simplest of tasks - things I took for granted like brushing my teeth and washing my face.

I was determined to walk again - without assistance. If my physio said do 10 repetitions of an exercise, I'd do 20.

At the time of the accident, I was in a 3 year relationship with a guy I loved. On my release from hospital, he found it hard to adjust to the new me. I think he thought I was back to normal as I was out of hospital and looked OK.

That's the problem with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) - I found out the most heartbreaking and frustrating way that it really is an invisible disability.

I could no longer keep up with our hectic social lives of the past. I'm the one that finally ended the relationship, as we were two different people - I was just totally exhausted and couldn't keep up.

After 2 months in rehab and a sudden appreciation of the acronym ABI standing for 'Acquired Brain Injury', I found myself back at home, strongly wanting to find out more information. Living around the corner from BrainLink, I thought they would be the right place to start.

They gave me an information pack that was of great assistance and it helped put me on the path to understand my condition better.

It helped me realise that many of the symptoms I was experiencing, such as fatigue, irritability, moodiness, lack of concentration, dizziness, short term memory loss and many more symptoms are common with ABI patients.

It's still early days - I'm still struggling to fully 'accept' my limitations.

After returning to consciousness over a period of about 15 days in post traumatic amnesia, one of the first things I remember asking my family and worrying about was work. I am a vet nurse at Blackburn Animal Hospital and was very concerned that due to my absence, we would be understaffed. I had no reason to worry as the Practice Manager, Director of the clinic and staff members have been very flexible and understanding of my limitations.

During the first couple of years after my accident, a number of therapists and doctors were pushing me - well I felt they were pushing me - to work in a different field. Acquiring my brain injury meant that it is difficult for me to learn and retain new things. As this is the case, it didn't make sense for me to attempt a new job.

Returning to work at Blackburn Animal Hospital was important for me as I remembered everything I had studied and learnt on the job in the

year prior to my accident, as well as knowing all the staff, and them knowing me. They knew me as *Prue Ward*, not *Prue Ward with an ABI.*

Vet nursing is a very dynamic profession involving lots of heavy lifting, multitasking, mathematics, concentration, quick thinking and standing for long periods of time. Due to my fractured pelvis and collarbone, as well as my brain injury, the medical professionals didn't think I'd be able to cope and continue in my job. I, however, was willing to give it a go if Blackburn Animal Hospital were willing to retain me.

Fortunately, everyone at the clinic were keen for me to stay. I returned to work in June 2006 on only 4 hours a week, and over time, increased this to 22. This proved to be too much for me and we have now found that I can handle 15 hours a week comfortably. Resuming work has been vital to me gaining a sense of purpose and feeling of normality. It has also been essential in terms of financial stability and quality of life.

Open communication between my employers, Natalie Burns (Practice Manager) and Bill Harkin (Director), the staff and myself has been the most effective way in determining an appropriate work environment. In addition, there has also been communication between my rehab team, treating doctors and my employers.

It has been important for me to focus on my strengths and capabilities. We've found that outpatient nursing, where I'm working one on one with the client and assisting the vet, is the area I excel in. The practice is flexible and supportive and this has been vital in ensuring that I am still able to contribute to the workforce, and can, in fact, be a valuable asset to the clinic.

My acquired brain injury means that I now need to plan and allow enough time to get ready for things - be it work, catching up with friends, etc..

I used to be able to just have a shower, do my makeup, get changed and head out the door. Now, I need to allow time to rest after having a shower, rest after drying my hair - the fatigue as a result of my ABI is awful.

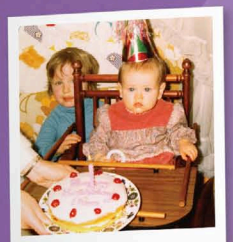
On numerous occasions since the accident, I've attempted to have a nice evening out for dinner, but it has literally done my head in. I find that noise, heat, lighting and trying to interact with a number of people at the same time causes me immense pain. My head hurts, as if a knife is stabbing me, my head feels like it's going to explode, I become dizzy and feel like I'm about to pass out. It's a horrible experience.

My friends have been terrific. They've stuck by me and we've figured out what works best for me and my 'new head'.

The thing with brain injury is that recovery is so unpredictable. Every person with an ABI is different. I'm one of the lucky ones.

It's important to know that anyone, absolutely anyone is vulnerable to acquiring a brain injury. I certainly don't wish it upon anyone, but like me, it can only take a split second.

BrainLink has been instrumental in helping me gain a sense of who I've now become. I don't need to search anymore for information about ABI. Every time I look over the comprehensive notes in their information pack, I feel a little less guilty about some of my 'challenging' and irrational behaviours that are a result of my brain injury. Every time I read the information, allow it to sink in and be 'real' to me, I come that little bit closer to fully accepting the new 'me', the new Prue Ward.



First birthday

With Justin

Nurse Pruey

Family (Gen, Amanda, Justin, Dad, me, Mum)

Graduation

:: growing up ::

:: life before the accident ::

Sailing on Sydney Harbour

Off to the races!!

Feeding a giraffe

On a gondola with Brownie in Venice

Work with Sea Turtles in QLD

With Brownie in the Swiss Alps

Camping with Kez

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First time standing

At Blackburn Animal Hospital
on day leave from rehab

First day at home

Impact of accident

Dinner time in hospital

In rehab with doggies and Dad

:: the accident ::

:: life after the accident ::

Streets of Vietnam

At work with Sage and Jack

Kyaking in Vietnam
with Ange and Mon

Fancy dress party
with Lozzy and Kez

Vet Ball

This logo is beautiful and delicate and symbolises the protective and guiding nature of the Angel. An abstract image of the brain and spinal cord is seen to make up the body of the Angel, highlighting the advocacy for brain injury awareness. Her head is held high and proud, and contains life lines, like the cross-sectional pattern within a tree trunk, as her insight deepens with time. The green backbone, which tracks the spinal cord, provides structure and strength. Her wings also represent the paths that people live that all connect at the one point. Overall, the Angel appears in flight in a forwards direction and forms an artistic "P" for Prue.

The feminine and soft purple colour compliments the green, which represents growth and life. Within the core is a sunny and bright spirit that is quintessential to the person that this logo represents.

This logo is dedicated to my beautiful soul sister.
I love you and I am so thankful to have you in my life.
You are one of my greatest inspirations.
With all my love, Kerryn

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