

## Life as Courage

Life isn't easy. It wasn't ever supposed to be.

Without fear, without stress we wouldn't grow stronger, couldn't evolve or surpass our perceived limitations. Until recently I'd always wanted things to be easier, always wanted someone to make things better for me, take responsibility for my pain, lessen the burden, do life for me...

Even as a professional athlete I wanted someone else to 'carry' me; to get me out of bed, motivate me to train, even race for me if they could.

Racing scared me. Fronting up to the race, starting the race, facing the unknown terrified me. Training scared me too. Fronting up to training every morning and every evening of every day challenged me to the core. I constantly battled with the demons of doubt storming through my mind: *Was I good enough, did I want it enough, did I feel like it today, was I fooling myself, could I handle the intensity, could I handle the pain, would I make it up that hill, was I improving, would it pay off, could I be bothered, was it worth it, would I fail?*

From one day to the next the answers to those questions changed. Some days I didn't make it up that hill, some days I did. The one thing that never really changed was my commitment and willingness to giving it another go...to dusting myself off, reflecting on my attempts and then placing my faith back into the process, instead of the outcome. As Buddha once said "it is better to travel well than to arrive"...I haven't always travelled that well, but I've always tried.

Every day was (and still is) another opportunity to back down or front up, another day to decide whether or not to do the hard work or take the easier softer way.

Every time I fronted up to training or racing I would meet myself in the deepest darkest places of my being. At 4.30am on countless cold winter mornings I had to make a decision; did I hit the snooze and retreat back into the warmth, certainty and safety of my soft bed, or did I face the elements, face my demons and solidify my resolve by taking to the hills, in the dark, in the cold, into the unknown.

Every time I fronted up I was challenging my perceived limits, digging a little deeper, discovering if I was truly willing to go further into the pain, to make peace with the demons and to grow a little stronger. I know now, with absolute certainty and clarity, that every time I fronted up, regardless of what my head was telling me, I grew stronger – mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of equal or greater benefit. I have benefited greatly from my struggles as an athlete, but there has been an enormous lag-time, of more than a decade, before which the fruits of my labour have become apparent. And the fruits of my labour are not what I had expected. I am not the Olympic Champion of my dreams, but I have become the honest champion of my life.

It's human nature to take the easier, softer way. But just because it's human nature doesn't mean that we have to take that softer option. It's also human nature to grow, change and evolve; to realise our true potential. And that has been my choice – always. Even in the bleakest moments of

despair, depression, darkness and fear, I have always chosen to realise my potential, even when I didn't know that this was the choice I was making.

It takes courage to walk through our fears. Alas, walking through our fears is not a one-off experience, after which we simply arrive at a place of eternal comfort and bliss, never to face fear again. God has a far better sense of humour than that! What I continue to learn by walking through fear, after fear, after fear, is that courage eventually becomes an unconscious habit, an act of faith, and an act of willingness to accept life on life's terms. Today instead of wanting someone else to do my life for me, or to face my fears on my behalf, I simply keep turning up, feeling my feelings, witnessing my reactions, dusting myself off and praying that more will be revealed in the fullness of time.