
It is a sad truth that while many people say they want changes in their lives, most are, in fact, afraid of making those changes. This is so because we are all, to some degree or another, influenced by a survival imperative that says 'change is bad'. For millions of years, changes in behaviours or routines, would more often than not be associated with RISK. And one hundred thousand years ago, RISK could easily lead to early death. Back then, it was nearly always safer to stay with the known or with the familiar; the unfamiliar, be it a new plant, a new animal, a new tribe or a new environment, would pose new possibilities, many of which were dangerous to our survival. Nowadays though, things are a lot different. Although we still equate change with risk, the cost of the risk is much less now and most of the time will not end in our death. The real problem is not the risk, not even the price we pay for taking the risk – the real problem is getting past the genetic hardwiring that continues to tell us not to take those risks. - JBW



FRANGAR NON FLECTAR

I AM BROKEN, I AM NOT DEFLECTED

1. ASH WEDNESDAY & ASIO

I returned from Indonesia with a seed in my belly.

In a short time, this seed would grow into a plant; and the name of the plant would be 'discontent'. Having a new world title and shiny new Black Belt; you would think I'd be happy. But having been back in Australia for several weeks now, the elation had well and truly worn off and I found myself suffering a mild case of post-world title depression. After having experienced a peak-state I was now back to a relatively unexciting daily routine. The question slowly coalesced in my mind: where to now?

In the months that followed I found myself doing a fair bit of travelling back and forth between Torquay and Melbourne. I was teaching a twice-weekly class on the coast, and training as much as I could with Richard Norton who was living in Melbourne at the time. Those sessions with Richard were great; they inspired me and fired my creative processes. We looked at all kinds of training models; we were experimenting with the many ideas and techniques that Richard would bring home from his trips to the USA. He would demonstrate and teach, I would analyse, synthesise and formulate even more training strategies. Although I sometimes felt as though I was just coasting along, looking back now I can see that I was laying down a foundation for analytical thinking and study that underpinned the future and direction of my martial arts career.

In an effort to deepen my understanding of the physical

aspects of the martial arts, I decided to go to university and do a year of bio-mechanics. I enrolled in the physical education course, which covered biomechanics, physiology and anatomy. I took psychology on the side to fill out the course a bit and went to work.

That year was an interesting one for me; I loved to learn and found that as an adult, study was joy. I also enrolled in a comparative religious studies course and found the process of philosophical debate to be one that I also greatly enjoyed. I did far more study than most of my peers there, most of whom were kids straight out of school. At year's end, passing most subjects with high distinctions, I decided to drop out and get myself a job at one of the gyms in town. I figured I could study anytime, but it was time I earned some money and got myself together financially. However, Mother Nature was to intervene.

Driving back from Melbourne one day, I found myself in traffic that had slowed to almost a crawl. Within what seemed like only fifteen or twenty minutes, the sky disappeared and a hot, dusty wind began howling in from the west. I had heard on the news the night before that there were bushfires way down the coast in the mountain ranges that bordered the southern ocean, but it was difficult to conclude that this impenetrable haze could be the result of something so far away.

I turned the car radio on and tuned in to learn that the fires had destroyed thousands of hectares of uninhabited forest and were now advancing rapidly toward the coastal holiday resort of Lorne. Airey's Inlet, the place where I was living, was only twenty minutes this side of Lorne. As the seriousness of

the situation sunk in, I recalled that my dog was still tethered to his running-line in the backyard. Although it was hard to imagine that the fire would not be stopped before it hit the coastal towns, some part of me began to worry and so I stepped on the gas.

After passing through Geelong and hitting the coastal highway, it became apparent that the situation was very serious. I could tell it was bad by the fact that I was the only one heading toward the black smoke; every other car on the road was heading in the opposite direction.

About twenty minutes this side of Airey's Inlet, the police and fire authority had set up roadblocks. I pulled up and wound down the window. I was immediately assaulted by a heavy mix of smoke and dust.

'You need to turn back' the officer said, 'Everyone is out. Airey's is closed.'

'My dog's still there' I offered, 'I need to get him out'.

'Sorry' he said, 'Can't let you in. Head back to Torquay. They'll let you know when you can come back through.'

Challenge.

As I spun the car around, I remember clearly thinking 'They? Who are they?' In my experience, the concept of 'they' was just that, a concept. I wasn't about to be swayed by page twenty-five of the state disaster manual; my dog was tethered to my clothesline. It was clearly a crisis, but I had switched over into 'engine on' mode. As a local, I knew all the back roads. And so only fifteen minutes later I had wound my way through the hills and drove into the abandoned township of Airey's Inlet.

I could barely see the road in front of me as I drove into my

yard. I leapt out of the car and was surprised by the noise. My dog, Yuda (Aussie Cattle Dog), was strangely quiet, but the air hummed with the roar of the fire. I couldn't tell how close the fire was, because I couldn't see anything, but I knew I didn't have long. I sprinted into the house with Yuda close on my heels and frantically looked around trying to decide what I should grab. In complete overdrive, I didn't think much about which of my possessions were most important to me. I grabbed my Black Belt, a few weapons, a boxful of books and a television. A television! What a stupid decision! At the last minute, I grabbed a blanket and a pillow from my bed as it occurred to me I might never be sleeping in this house again. I was taking a last look around, when I heard a very loud series of explosions, which galvanized me into action once more. Later I would learn that this was most likely the sound of gas bottles exploding at the gas station across the road. With Yuda on the front seat and my pile of miscellaneous treasures in the backseat, I drove as fast as vision would allow me back along the highway. Just before exiting the township, on sheer impulse I turned down a dirt road where my old friend Brian Poynton lived. Brian was one of Australia's best woodcarvers, and I knew he couldn't possibly have evacuated his vast collection of violins and other art works that filled his workshop in his backyard. Trees were ablaze along one side of the road as I hurtled on towards Brian's place. It occurred to me that I could always keep going if needed, and run into the ocean at the road's end. Later on I found out that many of the townspeople had done just that. Dozens had spent the night in the water. I ripped into Brian's driveway and there he stood, alone

in front of his workshop. He looked completely stunned. I jumped from the car, threw my television out and yelled at Brian to get moving. I don't remember us talking at all; I just recall throwing as many of his woodcarving tools and artworks into my car as I could. There was no room left for Brian. He gave me a hug before I jumped back in and started the car up. Brian headed off down the road toward the ocean and I drove back up the dirt road toward the highway. After driving right over several fallen trees and coughing from smoke inhalation, I once again came to the roadblock that I had been stopped at only an hour earlier. I don't think they recognised the car (it was black by now), and they asked me if I'd seen anyone else in the town. I told them about Brian, before driving off toward the township of Bellbrae. Yuda seemed to be taking it all in his stride. Strangely, so was I.

Challenge:

Life brings with it, many challenges. In dealing with those challenges we develop both confidence and the skill-sets necessary to better deal with future challenges. Confronting challenge is something we should embrace for it is the way we strengthen our will.

After a night of uncertainty in Bellbrae, I headed back to Airey's about lunchtime the next day. The place looked like another planet. There was nothing there. It was a blackened landscape, completely devoid of colour. Everything was gone except the odd brick chimney-stack

which poked up from the earth like tall blackened teeth. The townspeople walked around in a daze. Everyone was stunned. There wasn't much conversation; just lots of crying and hugging as people walked like zombies amid the ashes of what was once a beautiful and joyful beachside hamlet. Not a good day! Through various organisations, funds were found and the townspeople of Airey's Inlet were eventually relocated to Geelong and Torquay. Housing was subsidised and food parcels were handed out. As I walked the city of Geelong in the weeks that followed, I could tell the other refugees by the mismatching clothes they wore and by the look of loss in their eyes. I owned nothing but a boxful of books, a couple of weapons and my martial arts Gi (uniform). I didn't feel any real sense of loss; strangely, I felt a kind of freedom. My life had become a blank slate; I saw this as an opportunity to start over; an opportunity to take up a new challenge. And I was not alone in thinking this way. The day of that fire has now become known as Ash Wednesday, and property and material possessions were not the only casualties. As it turned out, many of the couples that had lived together in Airey's were now breaking up. With no physical possessions holding them together any more, they were re-assessing the basis of their relationships, which many found to be wanting. It is a disturbing thought that so many people seem to build their lives together on the basis of collectively-owned material possessions. Disaster sometimes has a way of giving us a new perspective on things; a chance to re-assess our lives and where we are headed. In the months that followed I continued my classes in

Torquay but also began another class in the city of Geelong. The owner-operator of the town's major health club, Maurie Raynor, was a forward thinking and prominent leader in the fitness industry. Maurie offered me a job as an aerobics instructor in his gym, which in timely fashion, supplemented my meagre income as a teacher of martial arts. Eventually, I took up the role of training aerobics instructors, which was my first foray into the world of 'training the trainers'. So now I was living in Geelong, and earning enough money to make ends meet. Maurie was a great mentor and taught me that education could be a joy. He always encouraged my martial arts training, and introduced me to the art and science of communication. 'Education' said Maurie, 'is a life-long process; and it usually begins when we finish school.' Well, school was out, and my real learning was about to begin. Later on, Maurie gave me a book 'IF YOU WANT TO BE RICH AND HAPPY – don't go to school' by Robert Kiyosaki, a best-selling author and educator in the field of financial self-help. It was the first self-help book I ever read, and I found it resonated deeply within me. In fact, Maurie introduced me to Robert several years later, and I spent a few days with that singular educator; a wonderful experience. The school down in Torquay was still up and running, despite me living in Geelong. I would travel there once or twice a week, and take classes. One day, I got a call from a federal government agency, requesting that I give an interview with several agents about my time spent in Indonesia. I agreed, and a week or so later, two suits turned up at my door. One handed me a card that read Australian Information Services about the same time as the other said 'ASIO (Australian

Secret Intelligence Agency) just wants to know about the time you have been spending in Indonesia.' Although it seems they slipped up on their introductions, I was quite happy to tell them about my Indonesian experiences. I was a little concerned that my various misadventures with the Javanese drug-dealers might land me in hot water, but as it turned out, they were much more interested in the time I had spent with Brigadier General Nalapraya. Makes sense now of course, but at that time, I didn't appreciate what the big deal was. They came back a few weeks later and interviewed me one more time, and that was the end of it. I had no plans to return to Indonesia in any case, but in fact, an opportunity arose only a month or so later that would see me visit Bali one more time. Bruce Raymond, one of the directors of the huge surf clothing company, Quiksilver, asked me to accompany him over there in the capacity of bodyguard and translator. There were quite a number of professional clothing manufacturers in Indonesia, who were producing rip-off versions of popular brands; including Quiksilver. Bruce wanted to head over there and put an end to it. What a gunslinger! In my naïveté I agreed to go. What we achieved was a huge coup for Quiksilver; one that people still talk about today.