



CHAPTER 1

PAIN TO PURPOSE

*“The journey of the hero is about the courage to seek the depths;
the image of creative rebirth; the eternal cycle of change within us;
the uncanny discovery that the seeker is the mystery which the
seeker seeks to know. The hero journey is a symbol that binds,
in the original sense of the word, two distant ideas, the spiritual
quest of the ancients with the modern search for identity,
always the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously
constant story that we find.”¹*

— Joseph Campbell, *The Hero’s Journey* —

HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WHO LOST HIS HEALTH

One day, at 26 years of age, I woke up as health professional who had lost his health.

All the accolades, continued learning, bachelors and master’s degree couldn’t save me from how I felt in this moment. My knowledge had failed me, and I had failed to listen to my body’s innate wisdom. I had failed to acknowledge its natural intelligence hidden in the depth of my genetic blueprint. I had failed to see the impact of my lifestyle choices. My ego had led me to be in a state of disharmony. Quite simply, I had pushed myself too far. I was stressed, tired, depleted, dysfunctional and depressed.

I thought I knew what to do. I was a health professional and leader in my industry and community. People looked to me for advice and support. Yet, in this moment I felt incongruent and lost. How could I help others if I couldn't even help myself? All my dreams and passions came crashing to an abrupt halt.

This was crisis point.

As I woke up on this dreary winter's morning in my home town of Fremantle, Perth, I was already an hour late for work. I had slept through six consecutive wake-up reminder alarms, but I didn't even try to get up. I couldn't. I had no choice but to surrender to my body and soul's need to rest. I was physically, mentally, emotionally and biologically stuck. Exhausted. Depleted. I had hit rock bottom and was helpless to change it.

I felt as though nothing mattered anymore. How could I move forward if I didn't have my health and a sense of wellbeing to move forward with? I was forced to realize the true value of my health; which was linked to every dream, aspiration, business, relationship and lifestyle I had envisioned. Without my health, nothing else was possible. Dreams were useless in the graveyard. I imagined all the dreams that were never lived and all the innovations never shared.

As I imagined being restricted from everything I loved doing, my heart sank. I was scared. A strong man on the outside, but a scared fearful child on the inside. I didn't get how precious this gift of health was, until I was on the brink of losing it.

Through my work, I had access to modern technology, scans and an impressive network of experts with whom I worked, but no one could help me in this moment. It was up to me, something had to change. I had to change.

As I lay there, I remember asking myself three questions:

AM I HAPPY?

AM I HEALTHY?

AM I CONNECTED?

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

“The first revolution is when you change your mind and beliefs about how you look at things, and see there might be another way to look at it that you have not been shown.”

— *Gil Scott Heron* —

Before answering, I took a breath and sunk deeply into these questions. My brain desperately tried to take charge and formulate clever answers, but the truth was too confronting for any mental gymnastics.

I answered a somber NO to all three questions.

I was a witness to my own situation. In my mind's eye, I could see the dark circles under my eyes, the muscle loss, the poor posture, the loss of energy and severe brain fog, the lack of mental clarity. All those signals and symptoms from my body were suddenly evident. Those aches, those pains, that digestive reflux, those intolerances to foods I once loved. All signs! But I was looking away.

It was as if I had simply existed in a state of dullness over the past 12-months, or perhaps more. Everything was finally clear in this moment. *I had chosen all of this.*

But how had I ended up here? Was I a passenger to my own human experience, erroneously thinking that I was in the driver's seat? Or had I consciously driven down this path, making my own choices every step of the way?

Something big had to change. But how was I meant to communicate this to my boss, to my long list of patients booked in to see me that day, my partner, my family and my friends? What about all the demands I had to meet, and my endless to-do list?

I felt like I had failed all of them. I felt like I was falling further behind. But, who was I racing against?

A deep sense of shame and guilt encompassed me as I lay there, unable to help myself, let alone anyone else. I replied to the 10 missed calls from my manager and said that I was sick and unable to come in. She replied with a worried but empathetic voice and said that she would move all of my patients across and clear my schedule for as long as I needed to recover. It was as if she had been waiting months for this moment, watching me ready to crash and burn, without saying anything.

My mom warned me that I had been “burning the wick at both ends for nearly five years.”

In that moment, I finally received that message, albeit five years too late.

How could I have been so goal-orientated and narcissistic, yet oddly combined with an equal blend of selfless empathy, prioritizing other people's needs before my own? I knew that my heart wasn't selfish, but I had lacked in prioritizing

my own self-care. My desire to serve others was driven from an unconscious desire to find my own self-worth and obtain self-value in helping others, at the expense of myself.

I knew what to say and do, but had no time, and had not prioritized myself into my own schedule. I was not walking my talk. I had never felt so incongruent. Whilst being at the peak of my career, I was at the bottom of my life. A bizarre paradox that shocked me to the core.

This had been a long time coming. I had been blinded by cultural and societal expectations of who I should be in the world and how I should serve. I had been working 100 hours per week in the healthcare system. It all of a sudden seemed odd that the healthcare system was set-up in a way where the leaders, healers, coaches and experts were forced to live as part of the very statistics they were inspired to change.

I had to step back and see the bigger picture.

THE CRISIS, THE CATALYST AND THE COMEBACK

I reflected on what had led me to this point. Growing up in one of the most isolated cities in the world, I had a warped view of reality. Was I always a candidate for a burnout? Or was this an environmental factor? Surely there was a better way.

I remembered my dad, a 27-year-old man who had met my 44-year-old mother. An amazing painter with his whole life ahead of him, who not long after my birth succumbed to mental health challenges that led him to seek mind-altering substances as a way of numbing the pain created in his mind.

I remember walking through the streets of my hometown in Fremantle with my two best friends, and seeing a homeless guy rolled up in the corner of a shopfront with a bottle of beer next to him. We started laughing and joking at the situation, until I realized that it was my dad.

I remembered my mother. A strong, powerful and independent woman with an unlimited work ethic. She had sacrificed so much for my brother and me and always showed up with a sense of unconditional love and an unwavering belief in anything we put our minds to. For most of my upbringing, we lived pay check to pay check. She had invested in our home and I soon learned that her being born just after the Great Depression meant she had a strong belief to not owe anyone anything. She showed me the transformative power of unconditional love and served from an empty cup, going without, so we had every opportunity in life. She was relentless in ensuring we owned our home and had our basic human needs met, even if it meant that she sacrificed her own.

I remembered the day we were debt-free as a family. My mother came home with three round-the-world tickets, saying, "You know what boys, life is for living!" She'd gone back into debt, inspired to show us the world she had seen as a young

air-hostess traveling to all the corners of the globe. She said that we weren't meant to simply pay bills and die.

I watched as my brother had to make a hard decision: come on the world trip with us, or take the apprenticeship that paid less than \$5 an hour so that he could secure a future for himself and his family. He chose his future career over this experience. I remember feeling as if this was a turning point in both of our lives. I imagined what would have happened if he had gone and I had stayed.

As I ventured on my first trip outside of the city I was born, I felt things changing inside me as mom and I boarded our first plane from Perth to Bali. The first thing I remember on this trip was meeting a man called Wayan. I learned he was living and supporting his family on \$150 a month; the same amount I had in my pocket for spending money. I was confused, he had more happiness than anyone I had seen in my young life and yet he was so generous and giving. I felt a desire to give him everything I had. This experience also evoked a sense of guilt within me as I questioned my own happiness and it challenged everything I thought I knew about happiness.

We traveled to Thailand and I remember seeing a young girl dying of malaria in a small hut with no access to an ambulance or healthcare. Something I had always taken for granted. My mother and I had to walk away. I remember feeling something deep in my heart, a sense of helplessness and despair in knowing that she would not last the night. Things started to change within me. I was beginning to learn profound things on this global journey.

I remember walking along the Champs-Élysées in Paris and hearing a woman's excitement over her latest "bargain"—she had just purchased a pair of shoes for €1000. My young mind reflected deeply after hearing that the malaria medication for the young girl in Thailand would have only cost ~6 cents if she had the means to access it. I felt my worldview shift rapidly in that moment as I came to understand that we weren't born equal. I wondered how many lives could have been saved for the same cost of those shoes?

I remember seeing an old man in New Orleans playing a saxophone that looked older than he was. He had no hat out for money and seemed like he was just doing it out of passion, that his heart simply felt the need to share his music with the world. As he played, I watched bystanders start dancing and other musicians sat down to join in. I felt what passion really was, but resisted dancing with everyone else through fear of being judged.

I remembered all the knowledge I had accumulated studying when no one was watching. I remember feeling those chemical reactions spark and fire as my brain connected pieces of life's mysterious puzzle. This unique feeling inspired me to be the first person in my family to graduate from higher level education at university. I went on to attend university straight out of school, dissecting human bodies that had been donated to science. I saw cancerous tumors in real-time that had taken over a man's body. I knew it wasn't a normal part of aging. I

saw what lay beneath each layer of our amazing human bodies. I extracted DNA, the evolutionary blueprint of life onto a stick to see it live. I worked with elite athletes and studied how the human body could perform at its highest level. This curiosity led me to further study as I grappled with my own injuries that inevitably derailed my young sporting desires. But in hindsight, this led me to explore how the body not only performed, but how it could repair.

I worked in hospitals with patients who were in intensive care (ICU), teetering on the border of life and death. I remember a doctor describing it as “angels gates”—a place many people never left.

I remember seeing a Buddhist monk have his life support switched off after being a victim of an unexpected assault on his morning run for the \$20 he had left in his wallet.

I remember working in the children’s ward with kids who had cancer, trying to morally understand how they had been dealt this card in life. I watched them laugh and make the best of their situation as their parents cried in the background, too afraid to show their child the reality of the situation.

I remember working in the respiratory ward, walking a middle-aged woman 10-meters down the hallway before her oxygen saturation dropped to a level where she could go no further. Coming to terms with her lifestyle choices and smoking from an era that promoted.

I remember working with a father who had a heart attack on the way to work, even though he looked fit on the outside. I watched as his three young children lay by his bed all day, waiting for their hero to wake up from life-saving surgery. It made me appreciate the wonders of modern medicine but I felt that we could have prevented it from happening at all.

I remember working in the neurological ward helping a young man walk again after he had sustained a head injury in a car accident he had caused. Only to find out that the person he had collided with had not survived the crash. I questioned why he had survived but the innocent mother had not.

I watched a lady get her leg amputated because her foot became gangrenous from a metabolic issue associated with Type 2 diabetes. Her lifestyle choices were deplorable, and I wondered what circumstances or emotions had led her to making those choices. It seemed like she was destined to remain ingrained in the system, supported and funded by tax-paying individuals who had made different life choices. I questioned whether she was at fault, or whether the wider community and health system had not really helped her. I wondered what past traumas she had experienced, or whether her poor lifestyle choices were conscious or a result of deeper troubles.

All of this became a personal driving force. It lit a fire within my soul to be part of the solution, part of the change.

TO KNOW AND NOT DO, IS TO NOT YET KNOW

The Japanese have a proverb that says, “Knowledge without wisdom is a load of books on the back of an ass.”

Like most, I came out of 18 years of study gaining knowledge, minus the wisdom of experience. A sobering reality that made me feel like the Japanese proverb. I came fresh from college with a desire to change the world, feeling like I knew it all and was ready to show the world. I worked and worked, determined to do my part in changing the world.

It didn't seem right that there was a large proportion of the world that was not living in a state of good health and wellbeing. I was not yet sure of the extent, but I just knew it wasn't right. I had to try and fix it.

When I woke up at 26—unhappy, unhealthy and disconnected, I realized that I had become a statistic of the very system I was inspired to pivot and change. As I reflected on this moment, still laying in bed, the words of leaders and giants who had come before me echoed in my mind.

W. Edwards Deming suggested that “a bad system will beat a good person every time.” I knew in my heart that I was a good person and this social and cultural environment and “system” had definitely beaten me. For now.

Albert Einstein shared, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” I knew that all of this health knowledge I had accumulated did not translate into living and serving from a place of good health and wellbeing.

I felt like I had spent years banging my head against a wall, learning and being forced to apply “health” concepts that didn't add up in the real world. But I had trusted the system. I felt like my \$100,000 in student loans had been a total waste of time if this “knowledge” was the ultimate and final outcome. I felt cheated by the education system, by society and by the social constructs that had molded me to think this way. Trading time for money and working at the expense of my own health and wellbeing.

As I stepped in deeper reflection, I remembered the words of Buckminster Fuller, “You can never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

It became clear; I was both the problem and solution. I had to step outside the system in order to heal and make a real difference. I dreamed of co-creating a system that empowered people in their own self-care. A model that would one day make the existing model obsolete. I was sick of fighting within an inefficient system that had the best intentions but was flawed in its very foundation of passive care, disconnected from the essence of humanity and disconnected from nature, our true source of healing and regeneration.

SelfCare and self-governed communities seemed to be an appropriate way forward. If we all simply looked after ourselves, each other and our

communities, we'd thrive. My gut feeling was that we could slowly create a global change. We could change the current system and ignite a more human-centric approach founded in nature and in our innate connectedness as tribes and communities.

In essence, I wanted to remind people that they are their best SelfCare doctor. Not a doctor in the technical sense of an administering health professional, but a Dr in the sense of administering healthy daily rituals and lifestyle choices.

In hindsight, I can now see that my past and present experiences were necessary in order to come to this realization. As I reflect, it all adds up. Choices add up! Author and entrepreneur James Clear shares that if you can get 1 percent better each day for one year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you're done. Compound your health! In the same way you dream of compounding your wealth. Health is wealth.

Seeing my dad homeless on the streets did leave me with a choice, walk on by and ignore his very existence or stop to acknowledge him as the man who brought me into this world. After all, I was a 1 in 4 trillion chance of being born and he made that miracle possible.

I stopped and went over to my dad, kneeling down as I pressed on his shoulder. He woke up in a daze, smiling as he saw his son in front of him. I later found out that I am the one reason he is still alive today. That one simple caring gesture inspired him to keep going that day when he had no reason or want to exist.

He wasn't a deadbeat, he was my dad. An amazing painter and creative soul. He suffered mental health issues not long after I was born in 1987, which led to addictive escapism. Society would call him an alcoholic and homeless. But to me, he always has and always will be, my father.

His journey taught me a valuable lesson in empathy, compassion and how resilient the human body can be to self-harm. He is still alive, even after succumbing to a head injury in his 40s. Without access to our amazing healthcare system and the allied health professional team he would not be here. I am grateful for everyone that is part of the integrated support system that means that my dad still lives on today.

Did you know that over a billion people do not have access to healthcare? This means that children are losing their parents globally. But that doesn't need to be the case.

My father's recovery from a severe brain injury also taught me how amazing neuroplasticity is. A year after his injury he could not even throw a ball, today he still paints and lives relatively independently. Something miraculous happened as well. After his head injury, he lost his long-term memory. He no longer remembers the demons that once ruled his mind and led him to seek mind-altering substances to silence them.

His paintings used to be of natural environments with solitary characters who were intimately connected with the land. It was almost as if he found peace within

his paintings. After his injury, his paintings became more colorful and vibrant as if his mind was seeing the world differently. He even started to sign his name at bottom of his paintings, something that a man who lacked self-love, self-worth and value could never once do.

He helped me realize the true damage of suppressed emotions. I grew up without a father because of them. Even at the bottom of a bottle, he didn't find what he was emotionally searching for. It helped me understand that at the deepest level, we all need emotional connection. Emotions are unique and contextually relevant to the events and experiences of our life. They weave our memories and envelope our feelings of unity or aloneness.

My mother taught me my most valuable lessons. The way she spoke of my father in such a positive way, when she had every reason not to. She showed me a level of compassion and empathy that would change the way I see and treat people forever. She showed what could be done by serving from an empty cup (in the material sense) but an overflowing cup in her sense of unconditional love for her children and the world around her. She inspires me every day to serve from overflow. I always wondered what she would have been capable of, if she was ever able to receive the love she gave so freely and willingly.

THE ARRIVAL AND RETURN TO HARMONY

As I lay there, that fateful day in bed. I became inspired to create a different future and reality for myself and others. I wanted desperately to one day sit in the depths of happiness, with a sense of inner peace, connected to myself, my partner, my friends, my family, my community and the world. A healthy and unrestricted human being.

The good news is: I made it. I am happy, healthy and connected beyond my wildest dreams. Yet it could never have happened if I had stayed dwelling in a system that didn't have the deeper resources or understanding to spark my self-healing capabilities.

Now, I want everyone to wake up feeling happy, healthy and connected in a sustainable and unified world. We were never meant to survive alone, we are here to learn how we can thrive together. And yes, it wasn't just an overnight epiphany—I had to make a giant leap and make new and consistent choices to come back from the brink of ill-health. I had to move from a broken system in order to fix myself. I had to move from Healthcare to SelfCare. It was up to me. Self-acceptance and ownership was just the beginning.

This is the inner revolution many people are now taking. It doesn't mean that they're dismissing traditional medicine, it simply means that they are making self-care choices toward wellbeing and happiness.

Many people are disappointed that they don't get better, that all solutions aren't found inside our current healthcare system. Though as a health practitioner, I'm not

suggesting you walk away from any healthcare providers, I am simply suggesting you begin to make empowered choices in your own life. A choice to not solely rely on others to fix you but begin to look at fixing yourself. Move from being over-reliant on HEALTHCARE and start to realize that SELF CARE holds many answers you may have never investigated (or been advised to look at).

This is the inner revolution. This is the new step forward.

Seek mentors that remind you that you don't need to be fixed. Mentors who show you where to look, without telling you what to see. Mentors who help you focus on the solution and work together with other mentors in their fields of expertise, being truly human-centric in their approach.

SELF CARE is the foundation, the 80–95% within our control. HEALTHCARE is the intervention, for the 5–20% outside our control.

CALL TO COURAGE (C2C):

WHAT is one painful event that taught you a valuable life lesson?

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