

THE ART OF RECOVERY

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10 years in the compilation, 'The Art of Recovery' was commissioned by the late Alan Clarke, executive director of the New Zealand Spinal Trust who sadly passed away hours after writing the introduction for the book in 2007.

Alan's philosophy was that "rehabilitation is about taking charge of one's return to full participation. Rehabilitation can't be "done to you". It is not a treatment or a therapy. It is a learning process, educational not medical. One must set one's own goals and make sure one gets there."

"Good quality recovery is personal; it's definitely not a medical process. The reader will come to understand why the recovering person must be in charge"

Alan, who sustained a spinal injury when he fell off the roof of his house, was also a keen proponent of Gerben DeJong's independent living paradigm, which emphasises the need for the person to be in control of and responsible for, his or her recovery.

In the foreword to the book, Gerben de Jong wrote that "the six narratives that comprise this work are indeed about the art of recovery but they are much more. They are also about the art of reinvention — about reimagining and reinventing one's life and knowing that one can never go back completely to what once was. From restoration to reinvention"

Each person who endures a serious illness or injury followed by a journey of rehabilitation has a compelling story to share. In the book six brave New Zealanders share their accounts of recovery through self-determination and courage.

Whether recovering from a spinal cord or brain injury, drug/alcohol addiction or congenital condition, each of the six personal stories is an opportunity to step into the rehabilitation process through the eyes of those who have lived it.

Among those whose stories feature is Shane Thrower who survived testicular cancer and a traumatic brain injury; Ken Hird who was paralysed in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake, and Roydon Gibbs who's battled addiction and depression.

A book of this calibre appeals to everyone, whether or not they have had similar experiences. We all go through hard times, and some may be similar to the stories shared in this book. Ultimately this book shows that there is a way through and that successful rehabilitation is possible, no matter who you are, where you're from or what has happened in your life. The authors in the book all went through a variety of different experiences, from depression and addiction, cancer and a traumatic brain injury, a life of crime and spinal cord injury, growing up with cerebral palsy, having two limbs amputated, and spinal cord injury. But here is where their differences end, and their similarities begin. All six men took charge of their own recovery and realized, in line with Alan's philosophy, that they needed to be in control in order to succeed. And succeed they did. They are all living successful and positive lives, but

as Roydon Gibbs said in the book, it is still very much a work in progress. Life is about living the best life we can.

Shane Thrower shared his battle with testicular cancer and a brain injury in the book. He'd met Clarke several times when the idea of the book was first mentioned.

"Alan was very interested to hear my story and how I was leading my recovery with the support of my family and friends," he said.

"We talked about how the medical professionals were only one of the tools to recovery and that ultimately I was the one leading my recovery."

He said he was happy to be a part of the book project if sharing his story could help others with their recovery or help health staff in dealing with patients.

According to co-editor Carolyn Beaver the book will be of interest to people in all forms of recovery and to health professionals with an interest in rehabilitation.

The book has been published by the Burwood Academy of Independent Living (BAIL), a not-for-profit organisation committed to improving the life experience of people recovering from serious injury and illness. Based on site at Burwood Hospital in Christchurch, the Academy is dedicated to building a vibrant culture of research and learning.

The book "THE ART OF RECOVERY: SIX PERSONAL JOURNEYS" is edited by Bernadette Cassidy and Carolyn Beaver. For more information, see the BAIL website www.burwood.org.nz.