
Ordinary Blokes Finding Peace

Chris Clayton

Chris is a local lad. He has lived in Warwick all his life. He is a black belt in karate. He teaches many young people how to find self-discipline and self-confidence.

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My name is Chris Clayton. I've been asked to come along tonight and share my journey with you and I'm most pleased to be able to do that. And life is a journey. It's definitely not a destination.

Themes

I want to set a couple of themes that I'm going to be talking about tonight. One is the self. The journey of life is about yourself. Second, I want you to think about trees. I'm going to talk about trees. I also want you to think about friendship or mateship because that's had a very strong influence in my life.

My Grandfather

So I thought I better start with my background. I'll start with my grandfather, my father's father. I don't like the term hero because too many people are made out to be heroes. And many Australian men don't like to be called heroes. In fact, in my time, and I'm just about 40, if you were called a hero you were a bit of a lair, someone who was probably big noting themselves. Although in my life my grandfather was my role model and when I was younger I used to call him my hero. I thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. My grandfather was a drover. He left South Australia at the ripe old age of 15 as a drover and drove to western Queensland. He decided Queensland was a much better place to live than South Australia due to the climate. From there on he became a blacksmith and then a 'B' grade ships mechanic by correspondence. I don't know how he did that from way out west past Charleville but he did. Then like so many men did in 1939 he became a soldier and like so many men he fought on the Kokoda track. He suffered some severe wounds to his legs. He went from a private to a major in that time, suffered grenade injuries, vehicle injuries, all sorts of things. But his outlook on life was always positive. He watched my grandmother die slowly and yet for all his toughness, and this man was as tough as men are made, he was very compassionate and caring for my grandmother, his wife throughout his whole life.

Why I'm bringing him up is that as a five year-old my grandfather lived right next door. Or across the road I should say, because as a five year old a driveway is a road. And I would scamper over there, because my father was usually away with carpentry work, he was a master carpenter and would travel all over Australia.

So I got to spend a lot of time with my grandfather. I was terrified of getting into trouble because I was told that he had a steel arm and steel head. Probably from his injuries in the war but to me it somehow made him like superman. But it didn't take long to realize that he still had blacksmith's arms. Not that he ever did anything other than scold me. It was always 'Mr Nobody' if I did something wrong. That was acceptable. The joys of being a grandchild.

One day I poked my head around into his office just after my grandmother had passed away. He had earned a number of decorations in the war and he was looking at them. He folded them up and put them away and we never ever saw them again. He refused to wear them. In fact when they sent him more decorations after the war he sent them back, saying, "They belong to my men". The lesson I learned from that was one of humility. The point I want to make is that, as far as my grandfather is concerned, the people he disliked more than most were the people who were trained for it, but who weren't in it.

My Father

My father grew up as the son of my grandfather in the difficult times of post war and saw a lot of horrible things in vehicle recovery on Cunningham's Gap and a lot of terrible sights of people injured and killed in car accidents. He has often said it desensitised him as a human and at that time you weren't allowed to show your emotions. My grandfather suffered the same thing with posttraumatic stress syndrome from 6 years of war but they didn't talk about it. They might laugh and joke around but that was all. It didn't do my father a lot of good he often says now, because he also had a very nasty temper. Not with us children, I am talking about in his 20s.

He was also the most feared street fighter in this town. Not a great thing and it doesn't give him any enjoyment. It's not a reputation he wanted to have. But that was what was expected. He was desensitized and didn't care what happened to him physically. He would go and protect people all the time. Right or wrong he would defend them. He found late in life that wasn't the way. But as a father, he was a very compassionate and caring man. Very hard physically, he survived a tractor accident in which he fractured three vertebrae, he had seven heart attacks and he is still going. And yet if someone needs help, he is always there. The influences of his era had that effect.

They are the people who have had a major influence on my life. So I had one of humility and another one the toughest person I have ever seen who could show great compassion. And that's what I've learned from them.

Myself

Then myself. I came to Warwick via Boonah in year 6 after my father had his tractor accident. I had some very good friends here and still have now. Those people, especially a

fellow named Ivan, he's like a brother to me. Those long-term relationships really mean a lot.

Talking about a tree, talking about foundations, as the two previous speakers have spoken, they were the roots forming the tree, my foundations. Starting to sprout, if you like.

At the ripe old age of 14, I had low self-esteem and I was shy. I really cared about people, I had compassion, I hated injustice. One day I saw an ad for martial arts training. I turned up with a couple of friends, saw the instructor who was built like some Greek Apollo, and I was horrified, terrified, but at the same time thought 'this is quite exciting'.

The first thing I noticed about martial arts was that the very thing I put into it I got out of it. If I put integrity and effort in, I got results. And it was something I could do myself and so began the journey of self-discovery at the ripe old age of 14. Twenty-four years later, I don't use the word expert, I'm a 24 year-long beginner. Life, like martial arts, is a funnel. I'm at the narrow end and the further I go the broader it gets.

I believe knowledge should be free. I've never ever accepted any form of payment for teaching martial arts. The payment is the reward of seeing people grow and develop. It's outstanding. I can't express how much I enjoy being involved in people's lives. In the long run they become like nephews and nieces. So your family grows and expands with it. They rely on you, they look to you sometimes. They are there if you need them. It's a fantastic place.

Through that period of moving on and developing, I had my foundations start to be set and I started to sprout. Once I started to teach also some branches went out there. I'm trying to get more leaves though they are falling off here (points to head)!

The thing about trees is that you need a good root system to nourish the trunk and provide growth. That is what teaching does for me. It gives me the opportunity to grow. I get more out of it than I put into it.

Conflict, violence and fighting

There is an old saying "The more you learn about battle, the more you begin to respect peace." That's my point about bringing up my grandfather and veterans. Anyone I have ever met who has actually been involved in conflict, whether in Australia or overseas, generally has no time for violence. They have been there; they have seen the worst of it. They would probably, though not in every case, respect peace more than we do. They have seen the worst side of it.

I'll talk about myself. I have been a doorman. I have been in the Royal Australian Infantry for 18 years. I have one subject to go and I'll be a warrant officer. I have trained in martial arts for perhaps 24 years. Yet you will find me the last person to enter into any violent conflict whatsoever, because I have seen the worst of it. Becoming a doorman was through trying to raise money for charity. I was doing it for free for a kids' sporting group. But the thing I did

know was that because of my training, I didn't have to hurt anyone. I had learnt to become a master of diplomacy and not a master of fighting. I could generally talk my way around.

Finding Self-belief

The martial side of martial arts is that fighting is the last resort. It sounds a bit corny but it is actually a lot deeper than that. It's very deep and if you go on that path you feel it for yourself. How it worked for me is that I started as a nervous 14 year old, couldn't talk much and was very shy. And then finding that incredibly rare and valuable thing, that magnificent thing that is worth more than anything. And what is that is that thing? Self-belief. I didn't believe in myself. But I found that, over time, I could believe and trust myself. Clive brought out the same thing. Learning to trust my own judgement and that I have good points and bad points and to identify what they were. Once I developed self-belief, I could develop self-control. And once I could develop self-control, I could help myself develop more things. This in turn helped me go out and teach, branches going out and leaves growing, and help other people develop.

Mateship

I said at the beginning about mateship. I've always physically trained as hard as I possibly can. And now that is paying dividends. Although the chiropractor does sit me down and say, "What does phase two degeneration mean to you?" "Can I train?" "Yes, but you might have to stop falling off cliffs".

Mateship is about turning back to your mate whilst going up a long climb on a steep mountain when you are exhausted yourself, and grabbing hold of their hand and helping them up. I have found it incredibly touching to see soldiers completely exhausted with nothing left to give turn round to a mate and say, "I'll take that". They help their mate. That has happened to me, not only physically but also emotionally. They have been there to help me or they turn back and wait for you. There is no greater feeling to do that for someone and it's such a great feeling to have someone do that for you. You learn that in martial arts. I can't say that for every art but it's certainly something that I like to promote. I hope we do it.

Becoming a better person

A lot of people don't realize that the real art in martial arts is becoming a better person. I have a friend who is supposed to be a martial artist. He has trained for 40 years but considers himself a beginner. I read his black belt certificate one day. It was signed by one of the modern masters, Gogani Luichi. I was so excited I ran into his kitchen, "Hey Colin". He said "What?" I said "Your certificate. It's signed by Gogani Luichi." As if he didn't know! To me, that was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. But it didn't matter to him. And he was

right. It didn't make him a better person. You see the difference is about being better from the inside.

So as that tree I have been mentioning keeps developing its root system, it takes time. They say experience takes 20 years, Clive. The trunk gets bigger and the boughs are growing. If it grows too fast, what happens to the root system? It can't keep up. The tree may fall over. So take time to develop and expand in all areas, not just looking good at the top: "Oh what a great tree am I; look at all my leaves, fantastic." But it's what's underground that people can't see that's really important.

Peace

I have a personal theory that peace can only come from the inside out. And if you want a peaceful world, to start with we all have to find peace within ourselves. We need to ask ourselves every day, "Am I at peace with myself? Is there an issue?" Sometimes you can deal with it yourself, sometimes you need to use someone else. Maybe it will take time. As I said, you have your good points and your bad points. These are the things that help your root system grow. Keep our tree healthy, create good leaves. To do that, we need to accept ourselves, goods and bads. To be honest. I think that was said before. If you can't be true to yourself, who can you be true to? No one, absolutely no one.

Being honest with yourself

You can't pretend to be honest with yourself if you think there is something about yourself which is terribly horrible. For example, when I was younger I used to think, "I'm really shy and I'm not real good at this and that." Then I realized I'm actually an optimist but I had a pessimistic attitude. So once I realized that I am an optimist I would say, "Well yes, this is a problem but I can do something about that." As long as I have got a plan and a motive, I am happy. You could tell me I've got to wheel barrow 400 ton of material from one spot to the other, as long as you give me a wheelbarrow and a shovel I'll have a crack at it. Because I know that one of my strengths, probably a weakness sometimes, is that I'm incredibly stubborn. But I'm also accepting of it too. So take yourself as you are and be happy about it. If there is something you want to grow at, do it. You can, no matter what age, and I'll touch on that at the end.

Be willing

The other thing is that if you have something you want to develop, be willing. That's all you need. If there is a will, there is a way. We can all grow and develop. As I said, the real art of life is to become a better person and we can do it. I'm not real good at it yet, but I give it a go. One day I'll start and that will take me to places where I can stop and help other people.

Just quickly on that, recently a very good friend of mine who I met a year ago all of a sudden just started talking. It ends up that she was involved in a bad horse riding accident three or four years ago and broke her neck. Apparently there are nerve connections in that part of the neck that cause chronic depression. She went from being an outgoing individual capable of everything she did to sitting in her bedroom for a year and giving herself a job each day. Like, today I'm going to count flies. Tomorrow I'm going to tie up my shoelaces. Her determination to survive was: if I give myself a job, I've got something to wake up for. Her mother had to care for her and take her out in the car. She wouldn't get out of the car, but that was her outing. She spoke about this at length and felt that she was weak. Nothing more but listen was all I did, and care. Through that, that individual is obviously happy that they have someone to speak to about it. They have come through the depression situation and are able to manage it now. They feel so much better about themselves, not because of myself but because of their own willingness to develop and achieve. That person has also been there for me, which has been fantastic. And that gave her such a boost because I could say, "but I talk to you so you must be the strong one."

What is strength?

But what is this strength thing? What is strength? It's more about being comfortable with who we are and being at peace with ourselves, and that will flow on to others. Being in a situation where we can be there to help someone who is upset.

So, trees. They grow, they develop, they establish themselves. Other trees may grow up in the same area. Have you ever noticed how people love to sit under trees? And as we get older, we may become such a beautiful tree that other trees may grow up close by. Have you noticed that we call a bunch of trees a stand? Because trees stand together and they support each other. I think that's a good theory. That's why I have a little bonsai tree. It's always close by and it reminds me that trees grow and develop in life.

Just Breathe

I would like to close with just a few things. I have recently been reading a study on Okinawans and why they live so long. One of the ladies interviewed was 113. She was the oldest of 11 brothers and sisters. Her parents were killed during the war which was put to her must have been a very stressful time having a dramatic effect on her health. She said "Yes, I have a theory on stress". And the interviewer said, "Wow, this must be amazing". She said, "Yes. Something my father told me. When in the face of a typhoon wind, become a swaying palm. When in the face of a castle wall, become a typhoon wind." And that was her theory on stress. Simplistic, but I get a lot out of that.

The other thing as I mentioned before is breathing. In martial arts breathing is about developing core strength. Breathing can be breathing from your heart by not locking yourself up, and expressing yourself openly. People having inroads and you having

outroads. That's a form of breathing. Whatever it is for you, it's a good thing to find it. Whether it be spiritual, physical, mental, it all helps.

So I would like to finish with something I've watched. I'm a bit of a back-yard philosopher and I was watching an interview of, at the time, the world's oldest person, a 113 year-old lady. And she was asked, "What do you think your secrets to longevity are?" And she said "Well, firstly I still have a little alcoholic drink each day (I'm not saying you should drink!). And secondly I still like eating my pickled fish." And she was asked is there anything else and she said, "I suppose, just remember to breathe". What else can you do?