

UNITE FOR A CHANGE

Who: Alex Petrou.

What: An attempt to walk 1700kms, From Brisbane City, Qld to Cairns, Qld. In under 30 days, unsupported and self-sufficient.

When: November 24th, 2010 – December 25th, 2010.

Why: To raise funds for Sunrise Children's Village, Cambodia and Camp Quality, Australia.

DAY 1

I wasn't sure if Day 1 was going to be great or horrible. The day was hectic with a friend of mine, Sarah, running me all over town, picking up sponsorship material and other necessities for the trip. I had a great dinner with Sarah and Luke at Toscani's --- spaghetti bowl was amazing! We arrived home at around 8:30pm and Sarah was adamant I stay the night to energize and leave the next morning --- I couldn't do it. I guess I just wanted to get started and see what I was in for. So at 9pm, we left to go and pick up her roommate and friend of ours, Salvo, from the airport and the plan was that I would then leave from there.

Salvo jumped in to the driver's seat at 10pm and they dropped me on the outskirts of Brisbane at around 10:45pm. It was a little cool and my backpack weighed an absolute tonne. I wanted to throw half of its contents away there and then, but I had no idea what I would and wouldn't need. Shift one started off well but to be fair, it deteriorated quickly. It was raining on and off and every semi-trailer on the road threatened to run me over. My shoulders were absolutely aching (backpack weighed around 40kgs.) and I went from walking down the highway singing old school Police songs to kicking the ground and having regular tantrums. In fact, I figured out I had a funny little pattern of emotions going on --- I began with singing to myself, followed by feeling sorry for myself, and finally, with a game of 'when will I stop for a break' (which was becoming more frequent as my shoulders and back tired).

At 4:30am, I had enough. I wasn't sure how far I had walked, but I was not in the mood to keep going. Over the 6 hours, I had already managed 4 world class blisters and I was tired. After taking on an army of mosquitoes and March flies, I pitched my tent in a small camping ground near Roys Road. I had to laugh at the humour of it all; I just wanted a bed, a shower and a good meal. Instead, I was stuck with a tent that had holes in it, 5 billion mosquitoes waiting to suck the very life out of me, and a can of spam for dinner/breakfast --- good times! Needless to say, that night I did not get very much sleep, apart from the foul spam burps and the chill I got from the cold wind and rain. A car pulled up next to my tent at around 5am (I was way too quick to draw out my machete) and from then on, all I could think about was the movie Wolf Creek. After around 4 hours of forced rest, I became frustrated, put on my "me against the world hat" and started marching again.

DAY 2

The day kicked off in the mid-afternoon sun which vanished quickly. I spent two hours getting pounded by the rain and to humour myself, I danced a little much to the delight of passing vehicles --- I think someone actually threw some coins at me! 3 pleasant citizens stopped and offered me a ride, and each time, I refused and explained to them why I was walking --- the immediate response was to reach in to their wallet. After almost arguing with them all about not accepting their money, I directed them to my website and asked them to donate online, which they said they would. When you're out on the road alone, walking, it is funny how much you appreciate conversation or contact with someone else. One guy (Tommy) was trying to drive off, but I just couldn't help it, I just kept chatting to him, asking him all sorts of questions. In fact, I think I scared the poor bloke; he just wanted to give me a lift and help me out and he probably drove off thinking, thank god that guy didn't get in!!!!

This trail of thought gave my small, little mind entertainment for hours and I put together further questions I could ask others who stopped to offer me a lift. In fact, it was a new little game I had --- to see how long I could keep people talking to me. Anyway, the day continued on and by now, my blisters had their own blisters and I had a grand total of six. At 5pm, I took my first step off the highway and as I did, I stepped in a huge puddle of water hidden under the grass, time to change socks --- take one. I sat on the side of the road and put a fresh clean pair on, got up to walk off and BANG! Another foot in another hidden puddle, time to change socks --- take two! I was now annoyed and kicking whatever I could find as I walked. To make matters worse, it was getting dark. My phone told me there was a BP service station up the road but there wasn't (we still aren't talking), and I could smell BBQ sausages coming from a small camping ground full of nice little camping cars and happy people! Ha! I cursed all of them and wished them 10 inches of rain over night so they all got bogged and their bread went soggy.

On a serious note, I walked for another two hours and then I became more optimistic --- I think the bright lights up ahead had something to do with it. The distance looked short but it still took me another 30 minutes to arrive at the location I stared at, and at around 7pm, I stumbled in to the Ettamogah pub where I would have my first meal of the day. I ordered chicken parmesan (a recommendation from other customers) and in my tight little white compression pants and shirt, I sat there and inhaled every last crumb. It was amazing. The Ettamogah pub is an awesome place with so much culture, I got lost for almost half an hour checking out all the memorabilia they had there. So I grabbed a photo with the Owner and Bar Manager (Peter and Hugh) and met a few patrons before having them sign one of my shirts. After getting my free Ettamogah hat and the guys wishing me luck with my fundraiser, I hobbled out the door ready for round two.

It was 10pm and I was preparing for a tough night. I was only about 50 metres down the road when I was chased down by a young man who approached me and asked what I was doing (the poor guy must have seen me struggling and felt sorry for me, thank god!!). Apparently, word had got around the pub I was raising money for kids with cancer and an orphanage and they were trying to find me a place to stay for the night, BLESS!! I introduced myself, and the young man did the same --- his name was Nic and he was the Queensland and NT Sales Rep for Ugly Fish

Eyewear. We threw my bag in the car and then went up to finish a drink he was having with some friends.

At the table, I met Roy and Christina, a polite couple who were really down to earth, and we established a great conversation about life, global society, and people in general. Roy and Christina had many similar views to myself and wanted to see change. The point of difference is that Roy and Christina were once financially stable and had big plans. This all changed, however, when their son (Heath) fell ill with juvenile arthritis. At one point, he was in a wheel chair and living off a feeding tube. As Roy and Chris told me about Heath, I felt sad, the emotions built up and I was ready to start walking right there and then. They spoke so fondly of young Heath and it did not take much to see that they adored him, and would sacrifice the world to see him happy. With that in mind and with a place to stay I asked Roy and Chris if I could come to see Heath tomorrow and hang out for the day. They agreed and we organized to be at their place at 8am as Nic had business to do and had to travel to Brisbane. With that said, we parted ways. The drive back to Nic's place was about 15 minutes. I learnt a lot about Nic and he was a top guy who loved his job. The enthusiasm I heard in his voice was amazing, and I was grateful Nic reached out to me when I needed a hand but was too proud to ask. We arrived at Nic's house around 10:30pm and he set me up in his spare room for what was a great night's sleep.

DAY 3

The day kicked off with a bang at 7am. Nic was up running around sending emails. We arrived at Roy's and Chris' place and I was ready to rock on with Heath, much to my disappointment he was at school. I sat and had a coffee with Roy waiting for Chris to arrive home. When she did, she asked me how I felt about speaking to kids at Heath's school --- Mooloolah State Primary.

As most of you know, I believe the youth of today are the key to improving and saving our society. I couldn't knock back the opportunity to go and talk to a group of young primary school students about my journey, my future plans to change the world and hopefully, to leave in imprint in their minds and become a figure they looked to for inspiration. The morning went great and I spoke to four different classes; the kids were amazing and asked some fantastic questions. Equally, all the teachers were supportive and very enthusiastic.

After I had finished, I met perhaps two of the kindest hearted humanitarians I have ever met --- Karen and Chappy. Karen is the special needs co-ordinator at Mooloolah State Primary and Chappy is the Chaplin between Mooloolah State primary and another local school. Both Karen and Chappy were full of energy, support and enthusiasm and offered to help me throughout my journey in any way possible. Chappy offered to walk down the highway with me in the afternoon in a clown suit which I thought was hilarious as Chris indicated her and Heath were also going to accompany me for approx 10k. I exchanged numbers with both and Chris then took me back to her place to have some lunch.

At 2pm, the Starlight Children's foundation arrived to give Heath a new apple Mac computer. I was lucky enough to see the joy on Heath's face --- what an amazing difference the starlight

foundation makes, my hat goes off to those guys. Chris then organized for me to get a new tent as the one I had was not in good condition. Chris drove me down to Ray's Camping World and introduced me to a friend of hers, Tania. Tania was a top woman and donated a two man tent to me without even blinking, she was lovely and supportive and I can't even begin to thank her enough. She then took me next door where I met Lesley, the Manager of BCF, who also donated some equipment for my journey --- Lesley had lost her mother 14 years ago to cancer and as we all sat and spoke for a brief moment, it was quite emotional.

We got back to the house and then Chappy called me. We organized to meet at the Ettamogah pub at 4pm. He also advised that the Sunshine Daily would be there to do a story which was fantastic. I wanted to be more excited, but to be fair, I couldn't stop talking to Heath. This kid was an absolute legend; he is smart, hilarious and his attitude is infectious. I felt an instant connection with Heath. He inspired me to be a better person and to stay positive; this kid even sacrificed computer time to hang with me because I was 'way cooler' in his words so equally, I was flattered. Heath, Chris, Roy, Dillon (Heath's older brother) and I hung out for another half an hour before heading down to the pub to meet Chappy.

We arrived and the photographer was waiting. He took photos of me and Chappy walking down the road and then we had one last drink at the Ettamogah pub before heading off. The start of the walk was great, Chappy and I spoke of some passages in the Bible which he thought I would enjoy reading so I promised I would. Chris was powering up ahead of us, and Heath, as usual, was talking away wearing one of my shorts that were sponsored by Gorilla Sports. It was huge on the kid but he loved it all the same. Chappy left after about two kilometres as his knees are shot, so myself, Heath and Chris powered on and spoke happily until a car drove past and threw a red bull bottle at us. Now I had been exposed to a fair amount of abuse along the way (mainly young P platers) but this really annoyed me, what is it with people feeling the need to take part in random acts of stupidity, particularly when they could have hit a young kid like Heath, who at this point in time I would almost have killed for! It makes you lose faith in people particularly when it is those very people that I hope to fight for in my future endeavours around the world advocating for human rights and social justice. Nevertheless, we powered on and arrived at a BP station approx. 10kms. down the road. Roy met us there and the 4 of us had dinner before we said our final farewells. Although I had only met Roy, Chris, Heath and Dillon the day before, I was sad to leave them. They were such a kind and caring family who were willing to help me in whatever way they could. I promised Heath a mobile phone for Christmas which I intend on giving him and we agreed to stay in touch.

As the guys drove off, I began marching again hoping to cover 84kms. I was equipped with Heath knowledge (This is, as Heath explained to me, knowledge that every Heath is born with that covers 99% of the important facts in the world. I only obtained such knowledge by walking through the grass that Heath had taken a pee on earlier, as myself, Chris and Heath tried to hike up the only trail of a small mountain leading to the highway). So next stop, Gympie! After 2 more hours of walking, my blisters were again taking their toll and slowing me down, plus I had about 70kms. to go! On the turn off to Eumundi --- where I was walking to get some food --- I was stopped in my tracks by a well-dressed man driving a BMW. He got out of the car and asked if I was ok. I explained I was and introduced myself, he introduced himself as Sherman and offered to drive me to the Eumundi pub to get a feed. I accepted his terms as it was not affecting

my walking distance (we were driving East as opposed to North, and the pub was only 4k down the road).

While we were driving, I found out Sherman was a financial planner and successful businessman who had very similar views to myself on society and the exploitation of both Western people and developing countries by financial institutions. Sherman was an interesting character and recommended I read a book called "Freakonomics" which I said I would, and I returned the favour by recommending a few books of my own. When we got to the Eumundi pub, Sherman and I exchanged details, and I was looking forward to speaking with him again. After an hour or so of sipping Coke, I started chatting to the bartender called Tony. He was an amazing young artist, and I mean AMAZING! The pictures he showed me were great and when the pub closed at 10pm, Tony offered to take me for a drive to show me around Noosaville before getting back to my evening shift. During the drive, Tony and I found we had a lot in common. He had recently split with his long-term girlfriend as had I, and he was also interested in changing society but was not sure what he could do. I explained to Tony that there were many people out there who felt the same and that we must all start small, standing up for our beliefs, becoming more compassionate towards one another and inspiring those around us was a good start. I told Tony about Heath and he was equally amazed at the strength Heath possessed. After sitting on the side of the road chatting away for another half an hour, I advised Tony I had to start walking and he dropped me back to the highway.

The walk this time around was long! I knew I had about 11 hours ahead of me (thank you Google maps), but the main problem with this stretch of road was that it was very hilly, extremely dark and quite scary. After nearly 3 hours of walking, I had not seen a decent road sign, actually I hadn't seen anything but creepy rainforest which always looks freaky in the dark. Nevertheless, a short time later, I walked pass a house just off the highway that was blasting its music so I decided to go in and ask if I could top up my water bottle, plus my feet and back were absolutely killing me. As I walked in the house, I could smell the marijuana all around me; I kept my eyes peeled for any dogs or crazy dealers with shot guns but none appeared. As I knocked on the door, there was a loud.. LOUD bark. I couldn't see the beast for a minute, but when I did, I had no choice but to let myself in. This thing was huge! It looked just like Beethoven and stood just above my waist height. I prayed that inside was not any worse.

I knocked and yelled for around 5 minutes before I finally heard a loud voice "who's' there" --- it sounded aggressive. I was greeted by a fairly hippie-looking bloke with pupils the size of a pin head. I explained to him what I was doing and he just sat there giggling to himself. Apparently, he saw my flashing red light on the back of my bag and thought it was the police, so he didn't want to come out. He kept laughing and apologizing and laughing and explaining, until all of a sudden, I wasn't thirsty anymore so I asked him to please remove his baby horse and let me out. Sean --- the guy that got me high by smelling his breath asked if I wanted a lift or if I was hitchhiking, I said no and just kept walking while listening to his continued apology fading in to the background --- man it was funny and I laughed for at least the next 30 minutes. About 2 hours later, I hit a wall and it was a bad one. My blisters were so sore, my back was aching, I had been rained on and there was still nothing in sight. The more I thought about things, the weaker I became. I felt helpless, I felt as though no-one was going to listen to me, I was sad that society

was becoming so corrupt and egotistical; it just all got to me and I took my shoes off, sat down and decided to cry.

Now I ain't no pus*y but man, things really got to me and I saw no other alternative. After about 5 minutes of feeling sorry for myself, I started to think of Roy, Chris and Heath, the kids at Camp Quality and the Orphans at Sunrise Children's Village. I then thought of society and a quote I recently read by Gandhi --- "we must become the change we want to see". From nowhere, I gained a second wind, so up I got bare foot and stormed up the road. If there is one solid belief I have, it is the belief in myself. I know that with the right attitude, the determination and the support around me, I can change the world and that this walk was just the beginning. The pain I was experiencing was a choice that others often don't have. At 6am, with bleeding feet, I walked in to an abandoned house on the side of the road and fell asleep for a few hours.

DAY 4

At 12pm, I woke up due to the heat inside my tent. I brushed my teeth for about 10 minutes (for some reason that always makes me feel more hygienic), applied some sunscreen to my shoulders, text my mum and dad and started walking. I had made the decision to commence walking through the days regardless of the heat for two reasons. Firstly, it was safer, and secondly, so more people could see me walking. About 3 kilometres out from Matilda, a car pulled over to see if I wanted a lift. I declined as I could see the next service station in sight, but I got talking to the driver (Mark) and he was quite a chatty bloke. He told me he had just been to Happy Herbs to pick up some legal drugs. Mark showed me what he had brought and explained to me that they were replacements for marijuana and speed. I was curious so I asked Mark if he had been off such drugs for very long. He replied and told me it had been about 3 weeks. I told Mark I was inspired by his efforts and I hope he kept going along the same path; he advised he would and that at 40 he needed to sort his life out (props to you Mark, it is never too late for positive change). I arrived at Matilda about 30 minutes later and immediately called Karen (my new big sister from Mooloolah State Primary). Karen had been working tirelessly to find me accommodation up the coast of Queensland and she was doing a hell of a job (thank you again Karen!). Once I arrived at Gympie, she had arranged for me to stay with a veteran runner and Masters Games athlete --- Carl Hebel. So I had a quick bite to eat and made my way to Gympie arriving at approximately 4pm.

Carl picked me up at around 4:30pm with his partner Jean. He was different to what I expected which I will explain. In order for you to get a solid understanding on Carl and the amazing things he has done, Carl is a 71-year-old runner, who walks around like a 30-year-old. He is originally from the USA and has an American Indian, German and Italian background. The guy is sharp and full of knowledge. As an athlete, he has participated in numerous Masters Games and been placed. He currently holds the record for the fastest mile for men over the age of 45 (4mins. 6 secs.) and he is also planning to run around the world (20,000kms. in 500 days). When we got back to Carl's place, he showed me to my room. Carl lives in a small house across from the Gympie Golf club FOC as he is renovating. The bed was on the floor and it was only a small mattress, but I appreciated it all the same and it was much better than bumpy ground in the middle of nowhere.

The first thing Carl did was ask to see my blisters which he could obviously see were hurting me. I showed him and he gave me a pin, some antiseptic cream and told me to pop them and get in a hot bath for at least half an hour. Now, those of you who know me well will know that I get irritated being in hot baths for too long; I get fidgety and annoyed and want to do something, anything! Anyway, I was gritting my teeth here but I did what Carl asked --- and it did help a lot! After my 30 minutes in hell, Carl came in to my room and gave me a small container; it was filled with Tiger Balm and olive oil. This was a blend a Vietnamese man told him about to stop colds and soften the feet so I had to apply it twice a day (morning and evening). Carl and I spoke about fund-raisers, had some dinner, and then spoke about his adventures as a swagman before I retired to bed around 9pm.

DAY 5

I woke up at 6am and packed my bag. My feet were sore but I was feeling great after a decent night's sleep. Carl entered my room shortly after and asked what I was doing --- packing and about to leave I replied. Carl shook his head and in his American accent said, 'ya ain't going nowhere, mate, ya need ta rest ya feet for another day'. I wanted to argue, just for the sake of arguing, but I knew Carl was right; I could barely walk. I was worried however of losing ground. The trip was going to be hard enough without needing to make up another 56 kilometres. Carl's next move was even more humorous. He walked back in to my room with a pair of surgical scissors and told me I needed to cut my shoes at points they were rubbing. At first I laughed, 'get out of here old man', I thought --- long story short, I cut my shoes. Did it make a difference? Yes, Carl it did, whatever. At that point, Carl also advised me that he would be walking with me the next day for a short period. With free time now upon us, Carl told me we were going to the Gympie markets (Yes, it is very rarely a question with Carl). We arrived and had a look around. Carl took his little dog, Di, with us who runs everywhere with him. She was even the centrefold for Woman's Day magazine as like, the fittest dog ever.

I don't want to bag Gympie but it needs some serious attention and a boot camp; people are either lazy or disinterested in self-appearance. After the markets, we went home and Carl made us lunch and the rest of the afternoon we spent talking about Carl's adventures, the business he was starting (at age 71!!), his future plans for running and his daughters. Carl is an extremely interesting bloke who is well-educated. I know he has a touch of Heath knowledge in him and he is cheeky as hell. At 5:30pm, we went to dinner at Jean's house and watched 60 Minutes (thank you for the great meal, Jean). One portion of the show was about Haiti and the orphans over there. I got thinking and I guess it is always an out of sight, out of mind thing. Many of us are aware of the pain and suffering around the world, yet each time I see it, it never gets any easier to accept or understand. Anyway, back at Carl's at around 8pm, I opened one of my books up for an hour and then went to sleep.

DAY 6

Carl came in to my room again at 6am the next morning. I was polite but in all honesty, I nearly threw my freshly cut shoe at him. My greasy feet and I got up and had breakfast, and Di felt the

need to lick in between my toes, which at that time of the morning was inappropriate! Carl threw me the keys to his car and told me to go to the city (Ha! Gympie has no city, I thought --- which obviously amused me) and find a computer to write on and then come back and pick him up. Amazing this guy already trusts me with his car I thought, good stuff. Anyway, I did just that and wrote a few emails during which time, Potts and Pacey (Cairns) called me for a radio interview.

They were pleasant and we had a good chat (Thank you for your support, Potts and Pacey). When I arrived home, Carl and I sat down and Carl was blunt. He told me I needed to decide whether or not I was going to continue my walk or whether it was time to finish up? WHAT!? I thought in my head, for the second time in 2 days Carl nearly felt the wrath of my newly split shoe. His comment annoyed me, frustrated me and definitely got me thinking. Shortly after a friend of mine called and he asked how I was going, I told him all was well and he paused. 'Bro' he said, 'a lot of people don't think you are going to make it' --- man, that was it, SERIOUSLY!! I started packing my bag as I recalled a quote I read a while ago by Michael Jordan --- "I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying". I had only been on the road for 5 days and already had friends doubting me, not to mention the others out there I didn't know. In a split second, I overcame the wall I had been battling since day one; don't ask me what did it --- I don't know. What I did know was that for all those who did not believe, those who live in fear, and those who often take the easy road --- prepared to follow the trails of others instead of blazing one of their own. There were many, many people out there who wanted to see me succeed and wanted to believe that the good can still overcome the evil and corruption in the world today. So I rubbed a little extra Tiger Balm and olive oil on my feet, gave the mirror the middle finger (while taking time for a quick flex) and jumped in the car ready to go.

Carl followed shortly after. Carl and I walked the first 5k together before he turned around as he had a doctor's appointment in the afternoon. We said our goodbye's and I promised to stay in touch with Carl. From then on, I just powered on. It was catch up time and I often enjoy a good challenge. After approximately 3 hours, I ended up at a service station and sat to get a bite to eat. I was sitting opposite a truck driver and we began talking. His name was Pat, but his friends called him 'cowboy'.

Cowboy was a solid bloke, and he asked me what I was up to. I explained my story to Cowboy and as it turns out, Cowboy spent years volunteering for a camp that helped kids with leukaemia. This bad ass truckie had a soft side. He continued to tell me about his future plans to create a property that housed kids and taught them life skills; he and his partner had been working on the plans for a while. The light in Cowboy's eyes was as bright as ever, and I had no doubt that with that kind of enthusiasm, he would succeed and change people's lives. Cowboy then left the station, but before he did, we exchanged numbers. I got back on the road shortly after and after grinding out what was close to a 6-hour shift, I met another trucky at a road stop named Larry. Larry was a top guy and asked where I was going. I told him I was walking to Cairns and Larry asked why. As I explained to Larry that I felt society was on a crash course and the youth of today needed to be better influenced, he agreed. Larry then went on to tell me about his 12-year-old daughter. He was proud as he spoke of her recent silver medal at the national taekwondo championships, but then went on to tell me that she was bullied at school frequently, and that there was a lack of support from school administrators to put a halt to the problem. Although I couldn't do much to help Larry, I was shocked at his story but not surprised. I gave Larry my

website and we exchanged numbers. Larry said he would be coming back the same way in a few days and would give me a wave. As Larry left so did I, and later that evening, I arrived at the Maryborough turn off.

About 100 metres in, a car pulled up next to me, and there were two people in the car. At first glance, they looked a bit worse for wear and I was hesitant to speak with them. They greeted me in a friendly way and asked if I needed a lift. I paused for a second and decided to jump in the car, I introduced myself and found out the guy in the passenger seat's name was Wayne and the lady driving was Kylie. While we drove in, I spoke about what my journey is and both Wayne and Kylie were so enthusiastic. They offered me a place to stay and dropped me at the Post Office Hotel. I grabbed their number and told them I would call if need be. After grabbing a bite to eat at the Post Office Hotel and speaking to a few staff, I called Wayne and he came and picked me up. I wasn't sure if this was a good decision but I decided to go with it. In the car, Wayne openly told me that both he and Kylie were both ex-drug addicts and were on the suboxone and methadone program. Alarm bells were ringing, but I guess this is a trap many of us fall in to (judging people and not trusting them due to appearance). Wayne and Kylie seemed nice, compassionate and willing to help, so I buried the negativity down deep and decided to openly trust in these guys although my initial instinct was to jump out of the car and run. We arrived back at the house and Kylie was cleaning a room for me. Wayne was polite and went to bed shortly after. I had a shower, did some reading and then lights were out. It had been a long day and I had racked up some kilometres.

DAY 7

In the morning, I woke at 6am. I would be lying if I told you it was a solid night's sleep, every little noise caused me to jump up and get ready for a wrestle. Kylie, Wayne and I sat at the kitchen table and I decided to ask them about their situation. Kylie told me how she had lost her husband 4 years ago and decided to turn to drugs. Wayne had been a drug addict since age 16 and found it hard to stop. What I found in both Wayne and Kylie was inspiration. They both put themselves on rehab programs, they both wanted to move past this point in their lives and they were brave enough to take on their problems head on instead of taking an easier path and turning back to the drugs. Wayne told me a bit about the programs, and after 30 minutes, I had so much respect for the pair of them. Winston Churchill once quoted "We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival", I believe that if I ran in to Wayne and Kylie 12 months ago, I would not have got in to their car, and I would not have taken the time to find out their story, yet today here I was inspired and proud to be at a table with them listening to the demons they battle daily. Wayne and Kylie have a dream to help other addicts break away from their addictions, but as Kylie said to me --- Addicts need to want to get off the drugs; otherwise, it is too easy to go back. With that said, I got a photo with Wayne and Kylie and then got dropped back at the highway. Kylie asked me to call her when I arrived in Childers so I promised I would. Before I started walking, I had a quick call from Scott and Andy at Frazer Coast FM and did a quick interview (thank you for your time guys, it was good fun!)

At the Caltex (approx 5k from Maryborough), I met a lovely bunch of staff who gave me a free meal and took the time to talk about my fund-raiser with me (Thanks Brendan and the team!).

Shortly after, I was off for a huge day. Childers was approx 57k and it was hot. My feet were feeling sore but I was now over it and just wanted to get on with the job. 2 hours in to the walk, I nearly ran out of water (I had drank 4 litres), so I stopped in a small farm and asked a couple if I could refill my bottles. There were three of them there (sorry I have forgotten their names), but they were extremely friendly. I stayed for almost an hour and discussed some politics and life with these guys. They cooked me some prawns and gave me a fresh batch of sugar bananas for my trip. As I left, they wished me luck and told me that as tough as it got, if I stuck with the walk and believed in what I was fighting for, I would make a difference. To be honest, I don't really know what happened to the majority of the afternoon, I guess I just went in to auto pilot. I just kept walking, I rarely stopped, the rain clouds hung over me so I didn't need much water and I just spent time thinking about all sorts of things. Around 6pm, I was approximately 5k from the Caltex service station just outside of Childers when a more mature-aged lady pulled up beside me. I said hi and that I did not need a lift but she wouldn't take no for an answer. She (Anne) told me she saw me walking at 9am this morning and couldn't believe I was still going.

I jumped in the car, I knew I had covered close to 51k's for the day and Anne seemed like a real character so some chat time would be nice. I didn't have much time in the car with Anne, but it was enough to explain why I was walking and to learn a bit about her. She was 61 and had a motor bike accident some time ago, resulting in a full hip replacement. She was a qualified hairdresser and her and her partner lived on a property near the river. Anne was coming back from visiting her father, who was 100 years old, and she also had a desire to adopt a child from a developing country and give him/her a better life --- Good stuff, Anne! Anne dropped me at the Caltex and we spoke for another 10 minutes. She donates to charities every year but recently felt her money was only going to administration. I encouraged Anne and told her that some would ultimately make it; I was sure, but not as much as we hoped. Anne promised to give my details to all her friends so they could sponsor my trip and I was grateful.

When I turned my phone back on, I had a message from big sis Karen, who had organised accommodation with a friend of hers in Bundy. The problem was Bundy was 60kms. away and was way off track. Going to Bundy would add an extra 50kms. on to my trip and I was already behind. But a bed is a bed and the side of the road was looking ordinary. After 2 hours of trying to get a lift to Bundy with a few truckies, I got annoyed, most people I spoke to were rude (I guess it's because I looked a bit scraggy) but still, I wasn't feeling the vibe of Childers. I threw on my bag and thought stop it, I will walk to Gin Gin if no one is happy to help. I got walking and approximately an hour and a half later, I arrived at Apple Creek. I stopped in the gas station as I was exhausted. As I approached the worker there, I explained what I was doing and asked if she could ask her clients as they came to the counter if any were heading to Bundy and if so, if I could grab a lift. Her response was not inspiring so I sat down and peered outside for a puddle of mud I could walk in to dirty her floor... joking... but seriously :) 30 minutes later, a more mature-aged lady pulled up in her flash car, and I thought what the hell, I will ask her where she is going. I did and she told me she was going to Bundy. I then proceeded to ask her if she would mind giving me a lift and why I needed to get there, etc. This lady was very hesitant, in my mind I was thinking far out! Is anyone interested in lending a hand in this town!!!

Anyway, I could see the worry on her face (I was unaware I was that frightening) and I was blunt. I said look, I can see there is a trust issue here and I understand your position, thanks

anyway there is no need to give me a ride. To my horror, she looked relieved ha!!!! I went back inside and sat down, and after 5 minutes, she called out to me and said come on, then the funny stuff "if you do anything to me on this drive --- while waving her fingers at me" I tried not to smile and to put her mind at ease, I showed her my licence, JCU ID and my blue card. The lady's name was Zona and what began as a funny relationship turned in to one of the most interesting conversations I have had so far. Zona worked for a government department which assisted indigenous people to create and pursue social enterprises. Her previous life was in education and she was an interesting and well-educated woman who had experienced many hardships throughout her life. As Zona dropped me off in Bundaberg, I wished we had more time to chat but it was now very late. At the BP, I grabbed a taxi that was filling up, although the guy was off duty, he asked where I came from and I gave him the usual story so he volunteered to drop me at my accommodation for the night (well not volunteered, I still had to pay! but he was off duty). This guy was a legend and just kept asking me questions. By the time he dropped me off, I had given him my website and he was eager to follow my future endeavours.

When I jumped out of the car, I met Andrew; his wife was a friend of big sis Karen and although she was away Andrew was kind enough to offer me a room for the night, what a guy. We only briefly spoke and I did some washing before retiring to my bedroom for the night.

DAY 8

The start to this day was an emotional one. I had spoken to a friend of mine who advised me that she had just been diagnosed with a brain tumour and I was absolutely devastated. What made me more emotional was that she just wanted to talk about my trip and how it was inspiring her and others. I vowed to not complain again for the rest of my journey and I would like to quickly say - -- Saffron, you are an absolute sweetheart and I am with you, behind you, and will do whatever I can to support you. From now until the day you overcome this hurdle, we are a team. After laying around thinking for another half an hour, I got up and met two of Andrew's boys, packed my bag and off we went. During the drive, Andrew and I discussed the state of society, both of us agreed at how superficial it had become and that without a more humanitarian outlook from the majority of our population, our youth are going to become even more selfish and egotistical. Andrew dropped me in the city, where I had a few things to do.

After approx an hour, I started asking around for a lift back to the highway so I could get walking. For around 30 minutes, my attempts failed so I jumped in a cab. The taxi driver asked me where I was going and I advised him I was heading to the Bruce Highway to continue walking for my personal challenge fundraiser. He was a top guy (Craig), he then confirmed that the best way to go to Rose Dale was a back road not the Bruce Highway (Andrew had also recommended this route). Craig then took me to the turn off to Rose Dale, along the way he told me about his kids and how having a daughter changed his life. We then spoke about my walk and Craig told me it was great to see people acting to change the world and not just talking about it; I agreed with Craig, but it takes more than just one person and that in order to create a voice loud enough, this wasn't a journey I could take on alone. Craig seemed pretty inspired and I gave him my details. He said he wanted to give them to his kids so they could follow my journey for

inspiration. By that time we were at the Rose Dale turn off, Craig offered to take me all the way but I declined.

The road to Rose Dale was a killer; it was up and down like a roller coaster and really took it out of my legs. Not just that, the constant ups and downs gave my feet new places to create a few more blisters (Yayyyy). Along the way, three cars stopped and asked me if I wanted a lift, again declining; it gave me a bit of a giddy up every time. The thing about people stopping is even though it is hard to say no, it is just nice to know that people care enough to stop and ask if you need help. In the afternoon, the sky started falling in and I was pounded by rain for about an hour before I arrived.

During this time, I was also now on snake alert, let me explain --- when you are walking on the side of the road in a world of your own (thinking deep thoughts) and all of a sudden you see a snake at your feet, I do not say this lightly, you absolutely sh*t yourself. I know many of you are familiar with the fight or flight response, well let me tell you, this is 10% fight and 90% flight especially when it is a massive brown snake with 'kill' tattooed all over its forehead (if snakes in fact have a forehead). I had seen three so far today and every time, I was like a Mexican jumping bean leaping to safety.... I would like to say I acted tougher and usually snakes really don't bother me, but when you have two choices --- hop out of its way and look like a fool or jump on the road and risk getting hit by a car, you hop and pretend it is actually part of your walking style while feeling embarrassed as cars drive past and wonder what the hell you are up to.

Rose Dale was an extremely small country town. I arrived at the Rose Dale pub and picked up my keys to the 5 star caravan I booked earlier in the day. Now, I have never stayed in a caravan before and it was an experience, not to mention a little creepy. To get to the shower, I had to walk around 50 metres to a small block down the mountain. I patrolled the perimeter of the block to ensure there were no creepers hanging around and then had the quickest shower of my life --- it's not that I wanted it to be quick, I was just a little spooked at this random shower block. After my shower, I went to the Rose Dale pub and ordered chicken parmesan, which was amazing. I was then approached by a mature-aged woman named (Lucy) who heard me on the radio a few days beforehand. She asked me about my trip so far and why I was doing it, she also told me about her previous working history and how she was a social worker and absolutely loved her job and helping the kids. Then came the big question from Lucy --- "Alex, do you think you are really making a difference, you know, do you think you are helping anyone?" Lucy, I paused for a moment to gather my thoughts, I don't think, I KNOW, I am making a difference. Your question doesn't surprise me because I believe that this is the thought process of the majority in today's society --- that no matter how much we try, it will never change anything, so we try, and then we quit.

Let me assure all of you who have your doubts, to change the life of another person can be as simple as a smile or a kind gesture, neither of which are strenuous on your body. This is a start, and suppose you do a little bit more --- you try to inspire those around you by being positive, by standing up for your beliefs and by understanding that the current state of the world is not set in concrete. We do not have to succumb to the pressures of society, we do not have to stand back and let our world --- our future, be moulded by financial institutions, corrupt political dictators and transnational corporations who view each human life as a dollar sign on an international

balance sheet. The working class society --- the masses make up the majority of the world's population, what does this mean? It means we have the manpower to change the fate of humanity for the better, and it all starts by raising awareness, by becoming more compassionate towards one another, by accepting religious, cultural and social differences and by inspiring and educating our youth of today. In a not so short answer, Lucy looked quite convinced, and with that said, I wished her the best and retired to my room for the night.

DAY 9

The day kicked off with some heavy rain and I had a feeling it was going to be a long one. Carl called me around 7am (He calls me every morning with a weather report) and after I spoke to him, I was off. I stopped at a small convenience store and spoke to the worker there about how to get to Miriam Vale --- the locals had told me the night before that there was a shorter way to go instead of walking on the highway. Another lady who was behind me heard the conversation and told me the roads may be flooded. She (Jan) then offered to run me down to the first creek before it did go over (approx 3k down the road). I hesitated and then accepted the lift as I really didn't want to spend another night in Rose Dale. Upon arriving at the bridge, we were too late, the river was gushing over, I jumped out of the car and thanked Jan for the ride. Contemplating for some time, I decided to cross; I wasn't sure if there were crocs in the river, but I had to do it to stay on track. As I waded over, the current was stronger than I anticipated and I was lucky not to get swept over. I decided from that point I would not be crossing any more creeks! By the time I arrived at Lowmead, it was early morning and I calculated that the trip was only another 30kms. I walked in to the Lowmead pub and confirmed my route straight down an old dirt track. It was then that the pub owner told me that three more creeks had gone over and I had to head back to the highway. I was devastated; this meant another 51kms. over an intense bush track. I started walking, kicking stones and abusing kookaburra's as they laughed at me, then it started pouring rain, I mean why wouldn't it right?

About 7kms. In, I became annoyed and decided to repack my bag. Now, I must admit, this episode was quite funny. I unpacked everything and laid it on the road. I became annoyed at a handful of sand --- convinced it was making my bag far heavier than it was supposed to be, I then got angry at a few ants and told them to get off my straps as I was already carrying enough weight! Weird, I know, but amusing all the same. I repacked and started marching... it wasn't long before I got bored again and needed to change things up a little. Now I don't want to alarm any of you out there, but at 4pm I had to use my machete for the first time... don't get excited. I hadn't had the chance to cut anything yet so I dropped my bag, walked in to the long grass and cut myself a little circle. It was fun and I gave myself a quick pat on the back (it was quite a nice circle) I then congratulated my machete on his first battle --- and victory! He tucked back in to his sheath nicely and we continued to walk, arriving at Miriam Vale in the evening.

When I arrived at Miriam Vale, I went straight to the Miriam Vale Hotel where Chris had organized for me to stay for the night (A big thank you to Charlie and the crew for donating a room to me FOC, I appreciate it!). I had a much needed shower and went to eat downstairs; I also met two chippies' who were driving up the coast to work in Mackay --- Regan and Dino. Both guys were good conversation, we discussed the youth of today and Dino told me about his

apprentices and how he often seen many give up believing that working was too hard, and that this trail of thought seemed to be becoming more regular in the trades industry. I enjoyed listening to the guys tell me about an industry I knew little about. After dinner, I exchanged numbers with the guys and walked down the street to get some cereal for breakfast in the morning.

On my way back, I walked past the beer garden and there was a group of ladies who decided to make fun of my Gorilla Sports Gear. I turned around to see what they were on about and they invited me in for a drink. Sharon, Cassie, Annette and Melissa were cool cats and we enjoyed a solid conversation; they were all extremely supportive of my campaign and quite surprised at what I was doing at my age. They then asked why I was doing it --- did I know someone who had cancer or had I been to Cambodia? Now I would like to confirm a few points here, ones that I also offered to the girls. For those of you who do not know or understand why I have decided to take on this challenge or the future challenges I have planned, I do not know any young children with cancer personally and I have not been to Cambodia and I see no reason why I need to in order to raise money for these charities. In order to change the world, action is required and not as a reaction. We all need to be proactive in this struggle. Like all things in life, you won't gain any ground if you do what you have always done --- in other words, think outside the box.

We are all accountable for the current state of global society, and as a result, we all need to share equal responsibility if it is to change. I believe more than ever that there are people out there who want to see a positive change, people who cannot stand to see children starve to death, or others suffer, people who do not want to spend their life being exploited by an elite class of actors who all along become more wealthy, while the general population continue to be exploited. What we all need is an outlet and to come in to contact with those who share the same beliefs. Right now, I can be that outlet, and I hope that I can inspire as many people out there as possible to reignite their flame of altruism, and in turn, they choose to not just talk but to act in order to create the change we want to see. It takes no extraordinary person to do this and not everyone has to walk from Brisbane to Cairns, just look at the local hero's around you for inspiration, I have met plenty in the past 10 days. Furthermore, our youth are what I believe to be the key link to a more equal and just society, but we need to give them the resources and knowledge so they are able to alter the destructive fate that right now they are destined to inherit. Anyway, after explaining my reasons to the girls and participating in further less serious conversation, I bid them all farewell and went to bed. The local weather report advised of some rough weather coming my way and I wanted to be well rested.

DAY 10

The day kicked off early and it was nice to get back to relatively flat roads while I walked to Gladstone. One thing I was sure of --- when I arrived back in North Queensland, I was definitely going to spend more time learning the lyrics to songs. The whole way I was singing to myself, I realised that for many of the songs I only actually knew the chorus and that was starting to bug me (going from one chorus to another). I arrived at Benaraby in a good time (averaging close to 6.2kms. per hour) but I was exhausted, and I knew I couldn't sustain this pace any longer my feet

were wrecked. I decided to head another 16k down the road and then get a lift to Gladstone as it was off the highway and I would have then covered my distance for the day.

Along the road to Gladstone, three things happened. Firstly, I decided to walk the rest of the way to see how I would go mentally. Secondly, I kept walking past creeks that were named after distance, e.g., 11 mile creek. I became increasingly interested as to why they were named like this (forgive me if this sounds silly) --- I mean did someone actually measure the exact distance of the creek, huh? Somebody tell me please!!! Third, was the amount of remembrance sites I passed along the highway of people who had been killed on the road. This made me think of how precious life was, and how often I took my own for granted. It also reminded me of how quickly life can be taken from you, I didn't want to leave this world without knowing I didn't give it my all to make a difference and I encourage you all to do the same.

Along the road, four cars stopped to give me a lift (thanks Gav, Andrew and Gaz), the fourth car was a woman driver --- the first of the trip. She (Clare) had her two kids in the car (Charley and Tarj), and although I didn't accept the lift, I asked them if they knew anyone in Gladstone I could stay with. Clare took my number and told me she would call. About an hour later Clare did call and she had organized for me to stay at the Gladstone Backpackers FOC (A huge thank you to Linda and Peter for providing me with this accommodation and looking after me for the night, you guys are awesome and changed my perception of backpackers! This place is clean and well looked after – <http://www.gladstonebackpackers.com>). This got me moving on the road and I arrived in Gladstone in the late afternoon. By the time I got to the city, I was saturated; I had spent 4 hours in the rain and my blisters were killing me. A car stopped beside me and asked if I wanted a lift so I accepted. His name was Brian a polite old bloke who was 71 years young in his words and I believed him, this guy was talking and moving like a 40-year-old! Brian and I got talking and he was the proud president of the Gladstone Wolves Soccer club. He asked what I was doing and I advised him. Brian was really interested and we spoke about how he and his wife had recently watched a documentary on orphans in Africa. The documentary showed the families choosing these kids and how they lined these kids up and had them smile while the family walked up and down and chose which one they wanted (I understand that these kids were going to a better place, but do we have to treat them like animals in a cage). We then went on to discuss how the youth of today lack self-respect, respect for others and respect for life.

As I told Brian, my belief is that they are far too egotistical and that we have left them with a society that promotes materialism. Brian agreed and punched his steering wheel and showed off his striking vocabulary of swear words --- much to my amusement. Brian was on his way to the Observer (the local paper) to have a photo taken for an article on Australia missing out on the 2022 world cup. I decided to go with Brian and see if I could have a story done on my walk. When I arrived, the girls at the Observer were fantastic; they were polite, welcoming and really efficient. They took my photo straight away and then had a young good-looking journalist (Sasha) interview me. I was a little confused at the time; along my journey I have bumped in to numerous media who have jumped at the chance to write about my walk, yet the Cairns Post (in Cairns, obviously) had interviewed me 3 times and taken photos over a period of 3 months without publishing my story, not once --- and Cairns was my home town! Anyway, I thanked the observer for their willingness to fit me in at such short notice. They all pleasantly waved goodbye and I headed down to Gladstone Backpackers. When I arrived, I planned to blog, wash

my clothes, call a few friends and chill out. Instead, I passed out on my bed and woke up at 9:30am the next morning --- man, I must have needed rest!!!!!!!

DAY 11

After a great night's sleep, I was ready to go. I checked my map to see where I would aim for today and I was overwhelmed by excitement, Mt. Larcom was only 36k's away whahoooo an easy day! So for the rest of the morning, I just relaxed, did some blogging and spoke to Peter and Lynda.

At around lunch time, Lynda dropped me at the Mt. Larcom turn off. The whole morning it had been sunny and dry, but as soon as we arrived at the turn off, it started raining. Lynda started laughing --- thanks Lynda, the more I told her to stop, the louder she became (apparently there was something funny about me walking in the rain). As I jumped out of the car, I put on my poncho and whacked a few plastic bags over my feet --- yes, even in plastic bags I still ooze awesomeness, it's true. Anyway off I went down the road on my jolly way to Mt. Larcom. Lynda, being the lovely person she was, had also contacted the Mt. Larcom Pub and organized for me to stay there for the night. Dan (the manager) was a really polite guy who was happy to help (absolute legend Dan). The walk to Mt. Larcom was a very boring one although it did give me time to work out a new routine. I would walk for an hour then stop for 5 minutes for a quick break. I found by doing this it gave my shoulders a rest, my blisters a break, and it also gave me short term goals to achieve, which made the whole day seem very achievable. At the 4 hour mark, I would stop and take an extended break and usually have a bite to eat; a can of sardines, a spoonful of Nutella and a spoonful of natural honey Carl gave me --- sounds gross but it's better than eating road kill!

I reached Mt. Larcom by early evening and spoke to Dan who showed me to my room, seeing a bed and a shower never gets old when you're on the road and taking your shoes off feels like heaven! I went for a walk around the pub and then ordered some dinner. As per usual, Alex Petrou over ordered, I do it all the time but I never learn! When I looked at the menu everything sounded good so I decided I would have a bowl of pasta carbonara, a bacon and egg roll and some chips and salad. While I sat around waiting, I planned how I would eat it and I wanted to make sure that the roll was last --- the best flavour always needed to go last!!! The problem was when the meals came out they were huge (Dan your meals are now legendary) and I got through half the bowl of pasta and the chips and salad... I needed help so I went to the bar ordered a coke, drank it real quick and burped a few times to make some space --- yeah, I know a few of you out there have done that before! Then I went on to destroy my bacon and egg roll. I was the fattest kid in the room and I knew it, but it felt soooooooo good.

After I got back to my room, I grabbed my camera and my shirt (which I am trying to have signed at each location I stop at) and I took it to the bar to have Dan sign it. The poor guy was a little embarrassed so I had him take a photo with me and the locals. They tried to give me money but as I explained, I do not accept cash donations. One slightly older bloke thought this was great and began telling the whole pub that I was legitimate and he knew it because I didn't accept anyone's money, I simply redirected them to my website (thanks old guy in the blue shirt for the

compliment). Anyway, after 10 minutes of pats on the back and being wished good luck from the cool crew at Mt. Larcom, I retired to bed. I knew I had a long day ahead of me tomorrow --- a huge mission to Rockhampton.

DAY 12

Before I kick the day off, has anyone got a hold of Oprah yet? I will be in between Rocky and Mackay if she wants to come for a walk, but she needs to bring her own tent... back to business.

I had a slightly different alarm this morning. At 4am, a guy staying in the room next to me obviously had too much to drink and was throwing up in such a violent way that at first, I was worried, then I laughed (I know how that feels) and then I knocked to see if he was ok. When I received the thumbs up (via a grunt and a moan), I started to pack my bag so I could get on the road --- the smell was an extra motivator.

To my surprise, when I walked outside it was sunny, fantastic! --- or so I thought, until about 2 hours in to the trip when I started getting baked! I spent so much time complaining about the rain and now it was sunny, I was yelling at the heavens demanding the rain come back and cooled me off. Seriously, weather plays with your emotions, and it was totally messing with mine.

Nevertheless, I arrived at Raglan mid-morning pretty sore and hot. I sat down and had a glass of coke and a glass of water and got talking to a bloke sitting at the table next to me, his name was Wayne. When I say I got talking, basically I mean I talked a lot and Wayne listened --- he was a great listener and was interested in what I had to say, ha! Imagine that! Whilst I unleashed a barrage of opinions about world banks, global society and the state of our youth of today, Wayne looked as if he was in deep thought. When I paused for a breath, sneaky little Wayne tried to get a word in --- I am on to you Wayne --- what Wayne said made me think. He told me that 22 years ago he played for a football team and on the back of the jersey's his team wore read the slogan "the strength of our nation lies in our youth". He said in the 22 years since, he had not seen the slogan again. What a powerful statement I thought, but like all powerful statements they must be followed and advocated for in such a way that people believe in them. Today, the strength of our global society still lies in our youth, but I fear that they do not have the right frame of mind to carry humanity forward in a positive way. With an emphasis on materialism, money, wealth and success, the future of our global society rests more in the hands of those willing and capable to stand up and fight for social justice and take responsibility of educating our youth, those who have the courage to lead by example against the tides of injustice. After a few more minutes of speaking with Wayne, I gave him my details and he said he would also pass them on to his step daughter who he said needed some guidance and inspiration.

Around half an hour later, a bikey pulled up on his Triumph motorcycle. It was an awesome looking piece of work and although most people are usually intimidated by the guy that gets off the bike (usually a heavy tattooed guy, with a crazy beard who looks ready and waiting to kick ass), this didn't really bother me. I was up for another chat after speaking with Wayne, so I said giddy to this guy and introduced myself, his name was Craig and after he grabbed a beer, he came outside for a chat.

Craig and I got talking and he asked about my backpack, so I gave Craig the usual story and told him about my journey to date. Craig was a top guy and well-educated. We began speaking about society and how our youth of today lacked a fundamental respect for themselves, others and life in general. At first we spoke about the blame, steering towards the parents; however, I pointed out to Craig all parents are accountable to some point, but they cannot be blamed entirely. Let me explain --- if you educate your child and engrain in them morals and ethics that guide them to a humanitarian approach to life, whilst also encouraging them to be the best they can be you are doing the best you can. If that child then goes to school and is surrounded by a class room full of other kids who are not being educated along similar lines, unfortunately, that child will still grow and adapt to his/her environment. Often, parents are incapable of altering this culture no matter how hard they try. To add to such matters, the media plays a vital role in educating our youth. Too often, our younger generations are turning to fictional characters as role models, or celebrities who are used as a gateway to promote branded products --- this applies further pressure to our younger generations to maintain a particular social lifestyle and fit in with their surroundings. So for all you parents out there, many of you are doing the best you can and instead of giving up, you should continue to provide the best possible example to your kids no matter what. After Craig and I reached an agreement, our conversation was directed towards minorities and stereotyping. Craig then went on to tell me about how he often felt alienated due to his appearance (the fact he had tattoos and resembled a biker member). I listened intently as Craig told me how others crossed the road as they walked towards him or frowned upon his appearance. I had never thought that much about stereotyping and often when I did, my thoughts often circled around racism. It was a real eye opener for me to listen to Craig, this tough looking guy who was happy to share his thoughts. Anyone who took the time to speak to Craig would have a fantastic conversation and I am sure they would learn a few things --- the guy had travelled around Australia two and a half times on his bike, he has worked at a few mine sites and is now a landscaper. His insight was invaluable to me and again made me think of how I judged and treated people based on appearance alone. It also made me mindful of how those that are alienated or mistreated must feel. I think we all need to assess ourselves when it comes to meeting new people or judging them --- a more objective approach is necessary. Craig jumped on his bike shortly after, but before he did, we exchanged numbers and grabbed a photo. I then looked up at the sun and realised it was time to get walking. It was hot, damn hot! But I had a while to go!

The rest of the walk to Rockhampton was again a road of boringness. I passed through a few small towns but nothing made me want to stop. Thank you to Brad and David who both stopped on the side of the road and offered me a lift. I hope you arrived at your destination safely. Late in the evening, I was on the outskirts of Rocky when Jodie, a friend of mine, called me to see how far I was from town. I passed a sign around 3 hours earlier that told me Rocky was approximately 35k away, so by my calculations the city centre was about 20kms. Jodie was around an hour away and said she would meet me on the road, which would save me walking in to the centre of town for no reason. When she finally arrived, I was exhausted and although 15k's only takes 10 minutes by car, Jodie had just saved me 3 hours of walking. As a result I got to her place around 8:30pm as opposed to midnight. Jodie cooked me up an awesome dish of pasta which was gone in record time, and from there, I went to cuddle all the pillows she left for me in her spare bedroom --- lights out!

DAY 13

Well, today I kicked off nice and easy. I was now ahead of schedule again after some hard yakka, and as a result, I decided to put my feet up for the day. Well, it really wasn't a choice as I was struggling to walk.

In the morning, I did an interview with ABC radio --- thank you Megan, you were a pleasure to speak with <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/12/07/3086525.htm> and from there, it was go time.

The most important duty of the day was finding an electric razor to shave my face (I really do look terrible with my pathetic attempt at a beard). On a serious note, I also spent some time going over and over the map to see where I could stop during the nightmare stretch I was about to come up against. If I can elaborate, the stretch between Rocky and Mackay (approx 336km) is empty, there are minimal stops to fill up with water, may be one or two camping areas and the road is thinner than a Victoria's Secret model. This makes it difficult to walk on flat ground with trucks constantly behind you, on top of being on snake watch --- which is a priority. In the afternoon, I purchased what I thought I needed for the trip and then went to dinner with Jodie and a friend of mine --- Liam from the air force. In fact, it is that very friend that lent me the backpack I am using on my journey --- needless to say, there are now significant strains on our friendship! Anyway, after eating possibly the best meal I have had in a while (not hard when you're walking on the highway), it was back to Jodie's place for an early night.

DAY 14

We should just call this day 13 continued because I didn't really sleep at all last night. Half the reason was the unsettling feeling about the upcoming challenge the next few days would bring and the other part was just late night thinking about life --- we've all been there!

Jodie and I left her place bright and early and she dropped me just outside of Rocky at the caves. At 5am, it is pretty hard to walk and when I walked past an advertisement that said "tired drivers die", I laughed in a fashionable way, and then I got a little annoyed --- what about us tired walkers, I thought, where are our signs? I quietly noted to myself that I would have to call the state government to chat about that. Ahh! The things you think about in the early hours of the morning.

Just before lunch time, I had passed through Yaamba and made it to the driver reviver stop but I was not in a good way. My feet were sore but my main concern was water. It was so hot. I was storming through my supplies although I knew there was nothing in range for at least another 20k's. I timed out my break and started walking around 15k in to the next leg disaster struck, water? Oh no! I was out and I was becoming a little bit frantic. I jumped on Google maps and then my GPS to find the next stop and apparently it was 4k up the road. Well, how does that help me when there are that many bends in the road, I can't see 4k up the road and I am thirsty? So I

did what a normal person would do. I got out my empty water bottle and waved it in front of everyone that went past. One guy (Dave - you da man!) was happy to stop. Apparently, he heard me on the radio and wanted to begin with a chat. "Hey! You're the guy walking from Brisbane to Cairns?" "Yup, that's me brother, can you take me to the servo? I am out of water." was my relieved response. I wanted to talk more but man, I have never wanted to drink a glass of water so bad in my life. Funny that when I don't have to drink water, it tastes ordinary, but when dying of thirst, it tastes like heaven!

Dave dropped me at the servo which was only around the next bend and by that time, it was midday. Now this little store was no servo, apparently that closed down a few years back. It was now an antique/ fruit stall. Imagine that, driving down the highway on a family trip, you turn to your partner and say "hey, what a scorching hot day, the kids are a pain in the arse, and this drive is really getting to me, how about we go antique shopping and get some fruit,? I know a great place --- seriously!! I was a little creeped out but I guess that is part of the journey. When I got inside, I purchased enough water to keep me going for a while and then went and filled the rest of my bottles up at the rain water tank, after discussing with the store owner of course. I then sat down and ate 7 bananas, because I can. Then I wrapped my head in my shirt, for no other reason than I saw one of the actors in the A-Team do it, and I thought it looked pretty cool. Anyway, I was out of action, it was far too hot to keep walking and Marlborough was still at least 35k away. I sat around for an hour rethinking my game plan and I decided there and then I needed to email Camp Quality and Sunrise Children's Village when I got to Marlborough, after all neither charity had been in contact with me since I began my journey which I felt was a little slack.

In the distance, a storm was coming so after an hour, I got bored anyway and decided to get going, thinking that the storm would hit shortly and I would be "singing in the rain". Well, turns out I was wrong. I was chasing these rain clouds for at least 2 hours and by this time, I had been forced off the road by the truckies and I had a wicked rash on my legs from the grass and I mean wicked. It was burning and my legs were as red as ever. When it finally started raining, I was again near the end of the road. For the second time on my journey, I had run in to a wall, accompanied by a number of demons that I was struggling to throw off my back. I was dehydrated, had sore feet, a bad leg rash and so I opted to sit in the rain like a worthless little walker and let it hammer down on my legs --- which, by the way, felt awesome. I took my shoes off and put them under my poncho and just decided it was time to have a little sad moment and feel sorry for myself. I wanted to call someone but I didn't know who. This then got me thinking about an email I sent 2 months earlier to channel 9 trying to get a hold of Shane Crawford to chat to him about his experiences while he walked. I wasn't chasing media coverage or exposure; quite simply, I just wanted to chat to someone who had recently completed a similar event. The response I got from the channel 9 crew was polite and supportive; however, they advised me Shane was un-contactable because he was on holidays for a few months... yeah a few months.

One thing I don't appreciate in society is the social hierarchy --- the level of status one has which in turn empowers them to choose who they talk to, when and for what reason. At the end of the day, we are all human beings; we may not have been born with equal minds or equal ability, but that does not mean that one person should hold a more superior position over another. When I say it out aloud, it sounds shallow and pathetic. If there is one thing I will always stand by, it is my willingness to be contactable by anyone in the general public, for whatever reason. These so

called elite clicks in society serve no other purpose but to fuel the ego's of the many that are a part of them. How are people (particularly our youth) meant to be inspired by those that they can only view on television or in a magazine? Anyway, about 15 minutes in to my little freak-out, a good friend of mine (Gabby) called and we laughed about my worthless attitude as I yelled at trucks for spraying water on me and argued with a few ants for trying to hide under my poncho. In the end, I got chirpy again and just decided to walk at a pace that suited me, I thought of a quote I read by Obama, "If you're walking down the right path and you're willing to keep walking, eventually you'll make progress." so I got up and marched.. and marched.. and marched until about 6:30pm when I reached the outskirts of Marlborough --- what a day. As I got closer, a young guy had stopped on the side of the road to attend to his horse. He asked me where I was going and I told him --- I must have looked pretty funny dragging my feet humming Tupac because I didn't know the words to the song. I asked him how far Marlborough was and he pointed and told me just about 8's, so when he asked me if I needed a lift I said yes, I had covered close to 70km's for the day and I was done.

About 10 minutes later, we arrived at the turn off to Marlborough, which amused me; 10 minutes in a car is close to 2 hours by foot ha! I thanked Nathan and went in to the Caravan Park to chat to another Nathan who I had spoken to earlier. Nathan was very enthusiastic about my journey so far and offered to accommodate me for the night free of charge (thanks to Nathan and the crew, you are lifesavers <http://www.marlborough.net.au/>) which I was extremely thankful for. I had three things I needed to do urgently. Firstly, I needed to get a cool towel on my legs and some aloe vera. Secondly, I needed to get hydrated as I was feeling quite sick and I had a real bad headache and thirdly, I needed to email Camp Quality and Sunrise Children's Village. Perhaps point three is the most important and I will explain why. While sitting on the side of the road, I started again going over my map and I came to the conclusion that without a support vehicle, the stretch between Rocky and Mackay was far too long to carry a sufficient amount of water and food plus camping gear. My pack would have weighed close to 55kgs. and if I did run out again, there were minimal places to refill. What did this mean? Well, it meant I needed to ask for help. Today was a humbling experience and really put things in to perspective. If I ran out of water again with 40 or 50k's to go, I may be in serious trouble and if mobile reception was out of range and no traffic went by, things could turn fatal. It took me a long while to email both NFP's because I sat and contemplated my situation. I did not want to let anyone down, or for people to think I was taking the easy road. I was also mindful that when I completed this walk (yes, when) that critics would only remember the time I asked for assistance. I think also that this is the perception we have in our society, to ask for help is sometimes considered weak, and more often than not, many of us fail to squeal before we go under --- we let our pride and ego get the better of us. It is quite silly really because at some stage in our life, we all need a hand, whether it be physically or emotionally; one cannot do everything by him/herself, like my dad frequently tells me --- Al, you're only human. Repeating it back to myself I just thought, "far out Alex, listen to yourself", you need help, ask and get on with the job. So I emailed both NFP's and explained the situation. Both responded favourably and advised that I should look at using a 100km buffer between Rockhampton and Ayr (meaning, I still had around 600kms. to do on foot) which I accepted but would only use if needed --- it was just nice to know the option was there. With things looking a bit better, I downed a litre of water and went to bed.

DAY 15

I woke early (4am) and was ready to go. When I looked outside, the rain was beating down so I decided to wait around to see if it was going to let up. I pulled out my map and planned a route. I decided if I could get a lift to the truck stop about 10k before St. Lawrence and walk to Clairview (a 45k day), that would mean I would make significant ground. I would then walk to Carmila and stay the night. From there, I would get a lift the morning after to another truck stop before Sarina and walk to Mackay. If I was successful, that would mean I would be out of trouble (no more long distances without water stops) in Mackay and I would have only used approx 70k's worth of lifts which is 30k's short of my allowance. I ate breakfast at the Marlborough Caltex and shortly after, I ran in to a truck driver by the name of Dave who was heading North.

Dave was a top guy and slightly reserved at first, but he agreed to take me where I needed to go and after a while, we got talking. He had been in the trucking business for some years and owned his own company (DJ Freight); while we spoke, Dave was constantly on the radio to other truckies. There was something worth admiring about the trucking industry which was refreshing. The truckies all looked out for each other and constantly helped each other out with info or overtaking or speed cameras. Basically the whole 40k, Dave was getting radio messages and hello's, etc. If our community was to provide the same level of assistance and support to one another, I am certain it would make a difference in people's lives. Dave and I also got talking about his family and he was an extremely proud father. He spoke of his daughter who was in the travel industry and his two sons, one who was in bio-chemistry and the other in the trucking industry. The drive went relatively quick and when Dave dropped me off, he gave me his business card and I promised I would stay in touch.

Once I jumped out of the truck, I had a quick bite to eat and started walking. Clairview was about 45k's away and it was relatively hot (not as hot as the day before). I knew there was one stop on the way which was about 20k's and that was it. Around 3 hours in to my walk, I was on snake watch when I heard a noise behind me. At first, I thought I was hearing things but after the third time, I turned to see a magpie swooping at me! Far out! Not only was I on snake watch but I was now on aerial watch as it was nesting season! After 8 or 9 swoops I had enough and this time my machete came out in a legitimate way. To passing traffic, I must have looked like a lunatic as I waved my machete at these birds (I am actually laughing to myself now!). I had no intention of hitting them but they were getting too close for comfort! Having wasted about 20 minutes playing Conan, I then sat down for 5 minutes to cool off and pat myself on the back for a solid job at getting the upper hand over a couple of small protective birds --- yeah you go, Al, you big brave hunter! I was on my bag texting away when what I thought was an ant crawling on my leg which turned out to be a massive spider. In under 45 seconds, I was up again and pacing down the road palming off the Goosebumps I had from the little creepy crawly --- spiders really aren't cool!

I made it in to Clairview by early evening and Ken and his posy were happy to provide me with a caravan for the night (thanks big Ken!!). I threw my bag on the floor (I hate that bag), went and had a shower, took a photo with Ken and then went to go and lay down. When I pulled back my

bed sheet, there was another huge spider on my pillow. I just looked at it, you know that feeling where you have just had enough so you pause for a moment and reflect --- that was me. I thought "ok, no worries, what a bullsh*t day. You had a spider on your leg, you got attacked by a flock of magpies, you still have a rash on your legs and some fresh new blisters and now you probably won't sleep because there is a massive spider on your pillow, and even if you do put it outside what's to say there isn't another couple hanging around waiting to crawl in to bed with you when the lights go out". Long story short, I put the spider outside gently. Locked the door (in case he tried to come back in) and curled up in a ball in bed, tucking all the sheet corners under me so no spiders could get in the sides, I only had my face to worry about which I threw the sheet over as well. Man, this trip is taking me to some places I never dreamed about. What a drag life is going to be when this journey ends!

DAY 16

Another sleepless night worrying about spiders; I had plenty more time to think and reflect (because I needed more time! ha!). I packed my bag and left early in the morning as I only had a 30k walk to Carmila. After chatting with Ian Frazer from the Townsville Bulletin for around 30 minutes, I was off. The walk still felt like an eternity and along the way, I had a few friends call me which prompted me to say a few thank you's so bear with me. To all my family and friends who have stayed in regular contact to date particularly Mum, Dad, Nick, Carlz, Greg, Gab, Mel (thanks for the photos!) Lamar, Sarah, Danny, Mercer, Alex, Burkey, Jodie, Sio, Karen, Heath, Chris, Clare & Charley and Lyndall, I appreciate it. On many occasions, your support has helped me through difficult stages on the road. Also, for those interested, my Facebook fan page is up and running, please support it. You can find my Facebook page under "Unite For A Change".

Back to business; along the way to Carmila, one thing I did notice a lot more of, and it is an issue I had been meaning to raise earlier, is the amount of pollution and rubbish on the sides of our roads and in our creeks. Now, I have never been one to get all Captain Non-Pollution, but I guess that is because I never really took notice of the amount of rubbish on the ground or at least I have seen it but didn't care to say much, another "what can I do, I am just one person" moment. So here I am again in a trail of thought that we, as human beings, not only take life for granted, but we also take our planet for granted. Now in 20 years time, I want my kids to see the same environment, with the same wildlife and country side. For all you out there rolling your eyes --- bite me, seriously! There is all sorts of junk lying around, things people have thrown out their window out of sheer laziness, or because they think "what will one bottle do, it's only one". Well, news flash people, if 500,000 people think the same way that is a lot of bottles. All I am saying is be conscious of what you do with your rubbish, and for all the strength it entails to hang on to that plastic bag for an extra 5 minutes, it will be worth it in the long run. I mean, let's get real here. Just as the responsibility to seek out social justice falls upon us all, so too does the responsibility to look after our environment before it is too late.

I arrived in at Carmila in the mid-afternoon and sat at the servo for a while and had a bite to eat. I then headed down to the Carmila pub where a few locals had told me they may be willing to put me up for the night to support my cause. I arrived at the door, limped inside and approached the lady at the bar. I told of about what I was doing and where I had come from, and well to be

frank, she just stared at me with a blank face. "Sooo," I said "if you have any spare rooms, would you mind donating one to me and supporting my current fundraiser?" I used my puppy dog eyes, my cutest voice and the sweetest smile. Her response was far from inspiring. "I don't think so! We still have to have someone to clean the room in the morning." Well, I thought to myself, I am quite the cleaner when I want to be, perhaps I could clean my room and save them all the trouble! I just couldn't be bothered. I paid my \$30.00 for the night and walked to my room laughing --- some people really just don't care. I was getting used to the idea because my journey so far has proved that there are far more people out there that do care and want to see change and who are willing to fight for a better world. The odd couple who aren't interested kept me in my job.

Anyway, I don't know why I was so exhausted when I got there but I went straight to bed. I knew I had a big day tomorrow, particularly if I couldn't find someone to assist me with my travel plans. Plus, I was the only one staying at the Carmila Hotel that night, and before I drifted off to sleep I was pleased; at least that lovely lady at the bar wouldn't have to do any extra cleaning in the morning!

DAY 17

Drum roll! Once I made it through today, I was over halfway so I was going to do it in style. I got out of bed early, cleaned up my gear, had a quiet moment with my blisters. I gave them the heads up that today was it and then they could have a rest, and I was off. I walked down to the Caltex and spoke to the lovely ladies there about what I had to achieve. I was looking for someone to take me 40k's up the road so I could then walk another 50 or so kilometres to Mackay. Well, these ladies were full on; they were as tenacious as ever. They approached everyone and 20 minutes later, I had a lift. A mature-aged truck driver called Bob. Bob had some work to do on the truck so we would be leaving in an hour which gave me time to eat a nice fatty breakfast (one good thing about walking everyday is you can eat what you want!).

Bob came back and we jumped in the truck and began talking straight away. Bob asked me why I was doing the walk and I explained my trail of thought to him "global society and, in particular, our youth of today need to change Bob," I said. "You're telling me Alex, but how can they with CEO's and national corporations leading the way?" Bob was badass; I liked him already. For the rest of the drive, I listened intently to what Bob had to say. He was an inspirational type of character who encouraged my quest of global change, but also told me about society over the past 20 or so years and we discussed politics, religion, also Australia's indigenous and our country's identity. While listening, I tweeted Kevin Rudd a few times as he was apparently out with Bono discussing global poverty. I decided to let him know that throwing money in a pot out of guilt and then trying to say you are making a difference isn't a solution, and that such elite's need to start walking amongst the working class if he is ever to make a significant difference in this world --- still no reply but I will hang on! I guess one thing that is hard for those that are born into families of wealth is the fact that often, they do not experience social and economic hardships such as the ones many of us do on a day-to-day basis. Because of this, they have no idea what it is like to feel beaten and down or helpless with nowhere to turn. If our voice is loud enough, hopefully we can change this.

When Bob dropped me off, I grabbed his details and told him I would call when I got to Cardwell. He gave me a smile and said, "Alex, I am too old now at 64 to keep trying to make a difference so I will leave it up to you and your team" --- appreciate it Bob. I then proceeded to walk through Sarina and on my way to Mackay. To all those who stopped and offered me lifts, thank you (there must have been at least 5 cars that pulled over). A short while into my trip, I also text Charley and Clare from Gladstone and they were good enough to arrange accommodation for me in Mackay with an old friend, Jack, at the Palace Hotel. When I arrived in Mackay at around 7pm, I was spent, but I found the energy to shower and come downstairs to have a few beers with the locals. They were good value and listened with interest as I explained to them my plans for the future. One bloke (Gaz) kept asking questions; he was wondering how I would be any different to anyone else. I explained to Gaz that most people wait until a ripe old age to try to change things. Our youth of today are too disrespectful to listen to the "veterans" but perhaps, they may listen to one of their own --- that is my theory, and whilst many of our youth are still in school and have not been corrupted by real society, now was the time to promote and inspire many of them to be more aware of their rights and the paths we can take to improve the current standard of global society. Gaz was pretty impressed as he downed his beer and I was out of breath! So I clung to the railings and went up stairs for a good night's sleep, again in another random bed, in another random town.

DAY 18

The morning kicked off in a very unorthodox way for me whilst I have been on this journey. I actually slept in! Why? Because the night before, I received a phone call from Gabby, who is a very close friend of mine. He advised me that he had booked himself a flight to Mackay and was going to meet me on Sunday evening. I was pretty excited for two reasons. The first is, Gab is always great company and knows how to lift one's spirit. Walking with him, I was certain, would be productive as well as entertaining and inspiring. Second, although it meant that I was going to again be behind on the trip, I could have a day off to let my feet rest --- I have been playing catch up for most of the trip so I now wasn't fazed by it. When I got up, I picked up a great meal at Jamaica Blue, and decided to take it easy for the day. I did some blogging while I had the chance and made a few phone calls, and by the evening, I decided to go to another pub and see who was about.

Now, I must admit, I didn't really pack any clothes to go out in, so when I walked in to an Irish bar with my running shoes on and my Gorilla Gear I am sure I looked a bit strange, but I didn't care. I noticed one of the bartenders (Krystal) from the Palace Hotel where I was staying and went over to chat to her. We got talking about the funniest things including why there is not another gender --- weird I know. Anyway, after around two hours, we decided to go to another bar where there was a live band playing. I went to the bar and ordered a drink (I was pretty sure just one was going to get me drunk after such a dry spell) and then listened to the band. The music rocked this band (offshore) were playing all sorts of old tunes. I have always appreciated good music and beats that were created throughout the 70's and 80's. Probably because on the long road trips my family and I used to take, Dad would insist on playing his music --- Rodriguez, Pink Floyd + some. When I was growing up, I thought it was torture to have to listen to such artists. But now I was a little older, I appreciated the music for what it was --- a reflection

on life. In today's society, a great deal of the music many of our youth listen to promotes a very materialistic society. Anyway, the band rocked and I grabbed their card afterwards to stay in touch. By about midnight, I was in a very slow zone so I walked back to the Palace Hotel (about 100 metres but I still contemplated catching a cab) and went to bed.

DAY 19

Today was the day. I bounced up, went to coffee with a few people I met out the night before and arrived back at the Palace Hotel at around 2pm. I had an afternoon nap and when I woke, it was just about time for Gab to arrive. At 6:45pm, he was out the front of the Palace Hotel. It was great to see him as he was his usual chirpy self, I was also thankful for his actions. As a retail shop owner at the busy end of the year, I was aware how much of a sacrifice it was for Gab to leave his store to come and walk with me for a few days. It is a sacrifice --- a selfless act in order to help a friend in need, knowing that at some point he was going to experience some physical and possibly emotional pain that was out of his control. We went upstairs, I packed my gear and after a quick photo with the staff at the Palace Hotel, we were off. There was nothing reasonable open for dinner so we caught a taxi to the Mobil on the outskirts of Mackay and force fed ourselves until we could not fit in anymore. We planned our night and following day (we needed to catch up so we wanted to be in Proserpine by the next evening --- around 100k's) and with that done, off we went.

The first few hours seemed to fly. Gab was in good spirits as was I. We talked about life, business and our plans to create a more just society. It was refreshing for me to have company and it urged me to push past the pain I was experiencing. What I realized earlier on (after about 2 hours of walking) is the power that can be created through working as a team. I had spent so much time on the road by myself, pushing through barriers and thinking it was me against the world that I now valued teamwork more than ever. I think I can often be drawn in to thinking that if I don't do things myself, they will never get done --- I mean, who doesn't think that on occasion. This attitude has come after disappointing stages in my life with friends and colleagues that I now know were happy to settle for a mediocre lifestyle, and were unwilling to challenge themselves or the world around them out of fear of failure. I am now more confident than ever that with the right people around you --- the right team, that has similar goals and desires and are willing to put others before themselves. With an understanding that true leaders give first and place emphasis on inspiring and promoting the best in people as opposed to criticizing and critiquing, then goals that seem unachievable as an individual are easily achievable through honesty, trust, belief and teamwork.

By approximately 2am, Gab and I had hiked close to 35km's so we pulled up for a 1-hour break. We were pretty exhausted when the alarm went off but got up and started marching. In the coming hours, we experienced a number of walls. The thing I have always enjoyed about Gabby's friendship is that although at times we can annoy each other, most of the time, we bounce off each other's energy. Whether it is on the soccer field, or in the night clubs, I know I can count on him to be honest and pick me up if I am down; equally, I am happy to do the same for him. So, as 4am came around and my feet felt absolutely shredded, Gab came in to help me out, encouraging me and talking to me about those back home who had been asking about my

journey, those who wanted to wish me luck and those who were thankful for what I was trying to achieve. When we stopped for a quick break at 5:30am, Gab also offered to carry my pack, which after around 9 hours, was getting extremely heavy. When he picked it up to put it on, I couldn't stop laughing. His face said it all, "how the hell are you carrying this" he asked! I felt a little happier, for two weeks I was questioning myself, calling myself all kinds of names and telling myself that I was weak, that others could carry this pack easily --- apparently, I was wrong. After 15 minutes, Gab was done and decided to negotiate with me when I could take it back --- his poor little shoulders hurt. We exchanged packs again immediately and kept walking, or at least kept laughing, because although I was hoping to get an hour out of him, we were up for a well overdue laugh --- it was great.

What wasn't so great was watching Gab walk in to his first emotional wall. I was about 20 metres ahead of him and I hadn't heard him say anything for about 25 minutes so I turned around to see if he was ok and as he caught up I asked. His response went along these lines "when I see the next appropriate place to pitch a tent, I am done, I am wrecked --- that's it" I responded and told him that he needed to push through, that this was one obstacle he had to overcome and in order to grow, he had to break his personal perimeters. To his credit, Gab pushed forward but advised me that he shouldn't speak for a while --- this made me laugh more, I knew it would have been like watching me two weeks ago.

We pulled up on a side street at around 8am and the pair of us just about died. We were exhausted and had been walking for almost 12 hours. Gab was lying on the road and I am not kidding this guy can sleep anywhere. With gravel jamming in to his back and the sun on his face, he was out like a light in less than 2 minutes. When I yelled, "Gab, there is a car coming" his response was "they have breaks, they can see me" oh my god, I laughed so hard I couldn't breathe; we were absolutely worthless. Gab finally got off the road but I was in pain watching him. In a sick kind of way, it was great to see someone else experience what I had been experiencing (sorry Gab, ha!). After 30 minutes, we got back up and a car pulled over to see if we were ok. We asked for the nearest service station and the guy in the driver's seat told us it was about 5k's down the road so after discussing bacon and eggs, Gab and I jumped up and hit a ridiculous pace --- we wanted bacon and eggs bad... REAL BAD! What we didn't account for was the heat of the sun. It pounded us and after covering close to 6.5k's the servo was in sight, but it was like torture getting there. 500m felt like an eternity and once we finally arrived, all we could do was run straight to the fridges and grab the first available cold drink.

Once we had time to pat ourselves on the back for a solid night's walking, we decided to order bacon and eggs (which always tastes awesome). We sat down and laughed about the previous night and started planning our trip. The lovely lady that served us decided to bring our meals over to the table --- well that was just too sweet, at least that is what I thought up until the point that as she put my meal on the table she stood on my foot --- ok, let's be frank, she stood right on my blisters!! I held in the scream, internally I was a mess yelling all sorts of abuse, externally I was calm. She apologized and giggled a bit much to my horror, now here is where it gets interesting... she then proceeded to lean over and give Gab his breakfast as well, WHILE CONTINUING TO STAND ON MY FOOT! I mean seriously GET OFF!! As her feet squashed my blisters, I saw Gab watching me... waiting for something to come out of my mouth... it never did. While this lovely old lady walked off smiling, thinking she did me a favour by cracking my

toes and making me realize how sensitive my feet were, I was in some serious pain. Anyway, I got over it... ha-ha, that is a lie; I am still annoyed, but I managed to put it in the back of my mind while I indulged in my meal. After Gab and I were finished, we got serious again. The day was stinking hot but there were also some rain clouds about. The decision we made was to walk the day as well and get to Proserpine in the early evening. In hindsight, this probably wasn't the best call to make but well, we are still alive to tell the story. It turned out to be another painful experience with the humidity and by the evening, we were on the outskirts of Proserpine, looking all confused on our phones and trying to find a place to stay when a young girl pulled over and offered us a lift in to Proserpine (you rock, Megan!).

We walked in to the backpacker hostel and spoke to a lovely young English girl (Stacey) and advised her of what we were doing. We also asked her to approach her boss and see if he was happy to put us up for the night. Stacey asked and it turns out news was not good, her boss wasn't interested, nor could he even be bothered coming out of his office to talk with us --- A good start which left both myself and Gab pretty stunned. Anyway, no big deal, we marched down the street and walked in to the Metropole. I approached a guy at the bar and asked for the manager (which turned out to be --- Goldie). After talking to Goldie about our journey and what we were doing, he agreed to put us up for the night, you're a legend Goldie!!! This did, however, take some convincing as he looked Gabby up and down trying to figure out whether or not we were bluffing. In fact, it was quite funny and awkward; Goldie had a blue steel kind of look about him and I guess he thought that Gab would crack if we were lying.

The room Goldie gave us was fantastic; I mean it even had a TV --- Ha! You appreciate the little things when you're walking, especially when I hadn't watched TV in a while. Gab and I cleaned up and ate a meal at the pub, we then went down and spoke to the English girls that we met earlier and we made plans to meet up for a drink later in the evening.

Come knock off time, Stacey, Bash and Emma came around and we had a few beers. What I thought would be a relatively stress-free night of harmless flirting turned out to be an interesting night of debate. Gab retired early to bed when he noticed our conversation heating up, so I was left to fend for myself. For the duration of the conversation, we discussed the term "love" in today's society and the meaning of it. We all agreed to a point that the term is nowadays more often than not thrown around loosely and that it is difficult to gain an understanding of its true definition. We then went on to discuss women's rights in the world and how, although they have improved immensely, Stacey, Bash and Emma still felt that women were undervalued in society and were not exposed to the same rights as men. What interested me most about this part of our conversation was here were three obviously well-educated girls, preparing to make their mark on the world, but they felt 'handicapped' in a way due to their gender. I was happy to point out the rise of some extremely powerful women in today's society, but while reiterating my belief of a more evenly distributed playing field, I recognized that I myself to a point felt women were slightly inferior --- now, this is not to say I believe they are less capable, that is not my opinion. My beliefs were based on what I had been cultured to believe. I am now very aware of the disadvantages that women can often be exposed to in society based on nothing more than gender, and having met some extremely intelligent women in my life who have taught me a lot, I am sure I will do what I can in the future to promote the capabilities of both genders --- men and women, on a more equal scale.

After being tied up in this debate for another hour or so, both I and the girls became tired and it was time to retire for the night. I walked them home, wished them good luck in their travels and went home to bed.

DAY 20

Gab and I woke at around 9am and the day was an absolute scorcher, so there was no way we were getting up anytime soon --- except for food, of course. We headed down to a local cafe and ordered the usual (bacon and eggs) and then decided to rest for the day. We did some washing and reading before planning our route for the evening --- our plan was to make Bowen by morning. Gab and I left early in the afternoon after wishing Goldie good luck and quickly dropping in to say bye to Stacey, Bash and Emma. We grabbed a lift to the highway and off we went. The walk kicked off in good spirits and Gab and I felt fresh and were chatting away. Each time we stopped, however, we became a little slower. After an extremely long distance achieved the day before, our legs were basically just worn out and my blisters were pretty sensitive. Gab was also beginning to feel stiff and sore. By around the 30k mark, we had slowed down even more as Gab fought off some internal demons and I dealt with the fact I still had a very big distance between me and the finish line. At 3am, we stopped for a longer period and Gab gave me a rundown of how he was feeling emotionally.

The thoughts he had and felt were similar to those I myself had 2 weeks earlier --- was what we were doing going to make a difference, could we make a difference, maybe the world can't change, maybe people weren't going to listen, was the pain worth it? All these random thoughts come in to your head when you think you don't have it in you to push through the pain barrier, even flirting with doubt can cause some intense internal disbelief. I gave Gab any advice I could without going overboard --- which I can sometimes do. He then took a moment to reflect and, all credit to him, he got up and started walking. Although our pace was not outstanding, we arrived at Bowen close to 5:30am. We pitched my tent next to the service station and got an hour or so sleep before Gab caught the bus to Townsville so he could catch his flight home. I was sad to see Gab go but I was appreciative he found the time to come and walk with me all the same.

After I packed the tent up and had a shower at the Caltex, I then went to Aussie Nomads Backpackers and spoke to Peter who was happy to let me sleep in one of his rooms free of charge for a few hours (Peter + Aussie Nomads = lifesaver!). I woke up in the early afternoon and couldn't get back to sleep so I decided to get walking for a few hours to give myself a head start. After saying goodbye to the crew at Aussie Nomads and grabbing a quick photo, I was off and walking. I ended up stopping after approx. three and a half hours for the simple reason that I was absolutely exhausted and hot. So I found a nice tree and pitched my tent for around 2 hours before I was woken by a call from my lovely mum, Anne, to see how I was doing (thanks mum.. kinda!). Once I spoke to mum, I was wide awake and it was time to tackle the rest of the trip. Ayr was my next target and it was close to 70kms. away. I still had around 30k of lifts to use within this period which, if I had the choice, I was going to use but as always, the opportunity needed to present itself. By about 9pm, I had been walking for close to 5 hours. I calculated that Ayr was now only around 40-45kms. away when a car pulled over to see if I was ok. The guys were really friendly (Mike and Denise) and we got talking.

When I told Mike what I was doing he insisted on taking me to Townsville which was a nice gesture. After some debate, we agreed Home Hill would be fine as it was 10kms. out of Ayr. The car ride was relatively short but Mike, Denise and I had a fantastic conversation. I found out they were highly regarded Tai Chi instructors (this was very random as I had been looking for a good Tai Chi class since I moved to Townsville --- how is my luck). We then went on to discuss how we could all help in creating a better community. Anyway, turns out Mike and Denise had very similar views to myself and were also able to provide me with some good advice on my future plans. When I jumped out of the car in Home Hill, I exchanged numbers with Mike and Denise so we could catch up in Townsville when I returned and also so I could begin Tai Chi with them in February.

The rest of the walk to Ayr was quite boring (something I have become use to with the roads up the coast) and when I arrived, it was near 11pm. I had no idea where I was going to stay. I stumbled across Delta Backpackers and while reading the operating hours, I was approached by a slightly more mature-aged man --- Keith. After explaining to Keith why I was looking at the sign and what I was doing, it turned out Keith owned Delta Backpackers and was happy to put me up for the night (Keith, I appreciate it!). He also asked me to catch up with his daughter Marree the next day as he said she had very similar interests to me. After Keith showed me to my room, I had a quick shower, threw my phone on silent, and blacked out.

DAY 21

Due to the soothing feeling of the A/C, when I woke up in the late morning, I decided I had no other option but to lay in bed and relax. I finally got up and went to have breakfast and then I gave Marree a call so we could catch up. Marree picked me up and we went to her place for lunch. Our conversation started off pretty basic but quickly turned in to a very motivational one. I was interested in Marree's current lifestyle --- she lived between Thailand, America and Australia and she was also very devoted to her yoga practices. As yoga and the spiritual side of life are of particular interest to me, I was fascinated when listening to Marree tell me about her travels and experiences, at one point she was almost in tears as she expressed a particular day at one of her camps --- I found this to be absolutely inspiring, to hear the passion in her voice; Marree's raw emotional state was touching and an absolute privilege. After discussing my views on society, the conversation became even more interesting as Marree and I related both our view points to society today. It was not difficult to agree that the pace of society; the constant rush against time, the need and desire to have more than what we have and need and the inability to appreciate what was around us was causing many of us to feel pressured, vulnerable and discontent. Now, it is easy to sit back and say such things but hopefully by just raising such an issue, people begin to recognize how chaotic life seems to be, and why there are so many out there who suffer from stress and depression. At 2:30pm, Marree and I headed back to Delta Backpackers, I packed my bag and took a quick photo and then it was time to get moving. This was my final super distance 80kms. to Townsville and I just wanted to get it over and done with!

An hour or so in to my journey, I received a phone call from a gentleman named Greg. Greg works in the corporate sector and holds a high position within an international accounting firm. He is a great guy, extremely well-educated and very rehearsed in the business world. After Greg

introduced himself, he explained that he had obtained my number through his niece who was a good friend of mine and had been following my blogs and fundraising page. Greg and I then went on to discuss the current state of society. What was really refreshing was not just the fact that Greg wanted to do as much as he could to assist me in the present moment and in the future, but also the fact that as Greg explained to me --- there were many, many corporate businesses out there who wanted to see society change for the better, who wanted to make a difference and who were willing to put the value of life above and beyond a dollar value.

Once I was off the phone to Greg, I started walking again and after a few hours, I walked in to a Choice service station. The customer service attendant was a nice young chap named Khalil. We got talking and when Khalil asked what I was doing, I gave him the full story. This guy was funny; he was amazed and walked around asking questions for the next 30 minutes. It turns out Khalil was from Kenya and had migrated to Australia a short while ago. He loved the country and was very proud of his own, but also believed that many of us in Western society do not appreciate what we have. Khalil told me about his childhood and the challenges he, his family and his community faced every day. The lack of resources --- including food, water and shelter was not strange to him and he told me he wished the world would change.

With that said, I cheered up a bit (I was feeling a little exhausted and down) and Khalil wanted a photo with my backpack on. He offered to put me up for the night and gave me another drink before I left the station. For the next 10 hours that I walked, I was in absolute hell, my hip was killing me, new blisters were forming and I again went through some very turbulent times. Although I have established a far stronger belief in society and people's desire to alter its course, I still find myself in limbo as to how we, as a global community, can implement the right strategies to create a positive result, against the corrupt intentions of some of our world leaders. When I finally arrived in Townsville, I was happy, relieved, sore, drained, optimistic but most importantly, TIRED! A friend of mine (Sio) picked me up from Wulguru and dropped me at my old residence where I immediately fell asleep!

DAY 22

Day 22 was a great day for me for two reasons. The first was, I had a day off due to the ground I had covered over the past three days (which my feet needed) and secondly, because a good friend of mine, Lyndall, phoned and told me she was meeting me in Townsville to walk the rest of the way with me.

I first met Lyndall at my soccer club (the unstoppable Marlin Coast Rangers) when I played with her partner, Ken, and her son, Cory. Lyndall competed in her first marathon last year and was planning to compete in a handful of events in 2011. Naturally, I was happy for Lyndall to join me so she could challenge herself and support me during my last leg.

For the rest of the day, I did nothing but rest and catch up with a few friends (Cheers Sappy for the coffee, Mayesy for the rum x 2 and Sio for dinner) and in the evening, I decided to have a quiet night out with a few mates. In hindsight, being on the road for so long and not having the amount of contact I would have liked didn't assist me when I went in to Townsville city to have a

few light drinks. Long story short, I was quite happy when I arrived home at 2am and I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

DAY 23

At 8:30am, it was rise and shine. I walked down the freakishly steep stairs of my grandmother's house feeling pretty optimistic about the final leg of my journey. I was also excited to be heading out to Toomulla Beach with my family for a few hours. With a bit of time up my sleeve, I decided to take the time to attempt to decrease the weight of my bag. After unpacking and repacking at least three times, I still only managed to get rid of a few weightless objects, much to my disappointment (looks like I was stuck with this load for the final leg to Cairns). At 10am, I jumped in the car with my dad (Tom) and my bro (Nick) and off to Toomulla Beach we went. It was an overcast day and by 1pm, I was ready to go. I had to meet Lyndall at Rollingsstone at 5pm so I thought I would head off early and get a bite to eat at the pub while I waited. I said goodbye to my dad and bro; they wished me luck and off I went. It took me just over two hours to get to Rollingsstone and I was nice and early. I approached the Rollingsstone pub and went to order a meal and much to my surprise, they had just closed the kitchen. With nothing else to do, I went and laid down on the grass to try to sleep until Lyndall arrived. After about 30 minutes, it was overwhelmingly humid and I began to feel extremely dehydrated and sick so I got up and walked to the BP service station down the road. As I walked through a line of trees, I heard a familiar voice --- Lyndall (it turns out she was waiting for quite a while only 50 metres away from my base camp).

It was great to see her as we walked in to BP planning our march for the evening (we were scheduled to leave at around 6pm). While the hours ticked over, I observed a storm coming which I wasn't looking forward to and while Lyndall was ready to go, I was ready to go back to sleep. Nevertheless, I got up, threw my bag on to my shoulders and Lyndall and I began walking towards Ingham. The plan was to make Ingham by the next morning where we had a place to stay and the first few hours, we kept a good solid pace. As usual though, my feet and blisters started to give me some grief, so after 2 hours, we stopped for our first break. I was all too happy to drop the weight off my shoulders and straighten the legs out. Within a minute, Lyndall and myself were fighting off mosquitoes --- Well, I was killing them, Lyndall was swinging at the air killing their flight path but that is about it. Now I do not say this lightly, it is so hard to relax when you are fighting an army of blood-sucking insects! Out of pure frustration, Lyndall and I got up and started walking again. About 30 metres in to our second shift, would you believe it, there was a small creek in front of us --- MOSQUITO CREEK! Ha! I mean, do you think I was surprised? Of course not, I concluded some time ago that if anything could go wrong on this trip, it would – the positive side, it gave Lyndall and I our first belly laugh for the night.

As time went on, my legs and feet decided to take a break and walk 20 metres behind me --- well, that is what it felt like anyway. I was also feeling worse than before (sick) and on top of that, Lyndall had her "first night adrenalin" pumping. She was storming down the road at a ridiculous pace and I had no choice but to keep up with her (there goes that competitive spirit). I think, for the first few hours, I daydreamed about pushing her off the next steep embankment we walked past. I was exhausted and expected an easier walk with more conversation to take my

mind off things and support me for the final 300kms. Well, this didn't seem to be happening and I started becoming slightly agitated. Then it became a game and I wasn't happy to be behind Lyndall at all! As much as I tried, I couldn't walk any faster so she led the way. Around 1am, I was ropeable --- I needed a rest, I felt real sick and I had a recurring rash on my legs. I told Lyndall we were stopping and she skipped over with a big smile on her face. I looked for something to throw at her, but my legs were too sore to bend down, how dare she be so happy, I thought.

After a few minutes, I began to feel some light rain drops and told Lyndall we were going to pitch the tent in case it poured down (Lyndall and I had been watching the lightning all night in the distance so we knew it was only a matter of time before we were hit by a storm). Within two minutes of us setting the tent up, it started absolutely bucketing down rain. I took a brief minute to let Lyndall know how awesome I was in predicting when the rain would hit. We then looked in horror as small drops of rain started coming through the tent cover (yes, it was that heavy). Lyndall became a bit frantic and told me not to touch the sides of the tent so the rain wouldn't come through --- great, I thought, how am I going to sleep! At least, we would both be awake, I thought, until I looked over at Lyndall with her super comfortable blow up mattress laid out, her shoes off and her towel covering her legs like a blanket. UNBELIEVABLE!! Not only was she forcing me to hurt, it was her first night and she was sleeping like a baby... For an hour and a half, I sat up and listened to the rain. I thought about all sorts of silly things. The rain hitting the tent was really annoying, which moved me on to thinking about those people out there who buy CD's of the rain to help relax them and help them get to sleep... Well, I thought, if you want an annoying alarm clock, record rain hitting a two-man tent, in the dark, on the side of the Bruce Highway, that will get you up and in a super pis*ed off mood for the day, no worries!

The rain subsided around 2:30am so once Lyndall had woken from her slumber, we got out of the tent and I started packing. Lyndall had just put her poncho on and what do you know, it starts bucketing rain again, did Alex get to put his poncho on? Don't be silly, he had to pack the tent up and watch his bag get saturated --- good stuff! (For the record, Lyndall helped with the tent). I was happy to see Lyndall start to develop some isolated walking traits as she cursed at the rain and the road --- well done, young apprentice, I thought, the force is strong in you. While we marched on in the pouring rain, the lightning got closer and closer and we both became slightly worried. I knew we were only 10kms. out from Ingham judging by the time and pace we were walking. At 4am, a police vehicle drove past us and then U-turned. On their way back, they pulled over to warn us that there was a very bad lightning storm up ahead and asked if we wanted a ride to Ingham. I explained we were walking for kids with cancer and an orphanage in Cambodia and that we were fine. One of the officers (Tom) basically told us to get in the car because it was not safe at all to walk through the storm --- far out Tom, why didn't you just say that at the start of the conversation! Anyway, long story, the female officer (Danielle) put us in the paddywagon --- Great marketing, I thought, two people walking for a good cause get locked up. Lyndall and I laughed hysterically up until a point that both officers looked at us like we were on serious drugs (we were tired, cold and miserable).

A few minutes later, we were in Ingham and Tom and Danielle dropped us at the community centre so we could wait for McDonald's to open. Lyndall and I took off our saturated shoes and spent a few minutes making fun of my feet then headed to Maccas. When we arrived, I ordered

the usual hot cakes, while Lyndall whinged about even being at Maccas. She ordered a bacon and egg muffin, which never ended up leaving the wrapper! Feeling quite content, I called Karen (the mother of a friend of mine in Townsville, Tennielle). Karen and Dean had volunteered their place to Lyndall and myself for the day so we could get some rest before we left for Cardwell the next night. When we arrived at their house, I was in heaven. I had a warm shower and whilst Karen and Dean were extremely hospitable, I just wanted to go to bed and rest. Karen showed me through to my room and it was lights out!!!!

DAY 24

I woke up when Lyndall decided that she needed to charge her mobile phone, and of course, the only power point in the whole house was in my room. When I got up, I went outside I sat down to have a chat to Dean, Karen and Lyndall. I was feeling refreshed and far better than the night before. Karen and Dean's dog was a real novelty, it walked around with its little tongue hanging out of its mouth and if you can just imagine it, every time I scratched it behind the ears, its tongue fell out even further it was hilarious! Apparently I was the coolest back scratcher ever and when this little pile of dog awesomeness ran off and returned to give me a gift I was on top of the world. There, at my feet, lay a small marriage proposal --- a dead, shrivelled up toad (what a sweetheart). I knew I couldn't commit to her, it was too soon and we had just met so I took the easy road out I just ignored her while Dean threw my gift back on to the grass (No good being jealous Dean!!). Anyway this seemed to amuse everyone, so we laughed all the way to the car. Dean, Lyndall, Karen and I had discussed the Cardwell range before we left and with Dean's experience in the region, the weather and the road works going on we agreed it was best to be dropped on the other side of the range to de-risk the possibility of an accident occurring. Karen and Dean dropped us off around 6:30pm and after thanking them, Lyndall and I got back in to it; Cardwell was the target by morning.

The walk to Cardwell was relatively quiet. In fact, the most excitement Lyndall and I had was a random guy who drove past us earlier in the night. He must have taken at least 20 minutes to turn around and then he came back and asked us if we wanted a lift to Cairns. Pretty random and we decided he was planning where to bury us before he turned around --- it explained such a delay. Plus, the guy looked like he was on some serious green! Our stops started to increase by about 2am, but we continued to make good time and about 6kms. out of Cardwell we took our last break. My blisters were sore and Lyndall was tired (She is a machine). The final kilometre in to Cardwell was absolute torture. It was now daybreak and we were both abusing anything we could out of frustration --- absolutely hilarious! Call it negative, call it whatever you want, but when you are on such a journey, let me tell you, positive Pete is not always welcome and it is negative Nancy that is the real saviour --- the worse it is, the more you want to laugh about it and the funnier everything becomes. Lyndall's trademark line (it could be worse) was abandoned and our new slogan was "it could be better" as we discussed how the situation could become far more fun and entertaining. Anyway, it worked and we arrived at the only open store in Cardwell at 6am. Once we ordered breakfast and sat down, it was time to get our shoes off, we looked worthless. When I removed my socks, Lyndall let out a wicked laugh --- I decided there and then I would never forgive her. She couldn't stop laughing at my blisters and how big they were; she even called Cory (her son) to tell him so they could both laugh (not to mention taking photos to send to her friends). After Lyndall wiped away her tears of joy, we headed down to the Cardwell

Caravan Park to see if we could get a room to stay. The one kilometre distance seemed like eternity so when we finally arrived, we were both in a very silly mood joking around and making fun of everything. We spoke to the young lady at the counter (Heidi) about what we were doing and the possibility of utilizing a room for the day. A turn out Heidi was more than happy to help us with our 7-hour break for a total of \$47.00. Really? I was too tired to barter with her so we just paid the fee. In fact, I wanted to tip Heidi just to see her smile --- I wasn't sure she even had teeth. Anyway, Lyndall and I amused ourselves all the way to our room. We turned the air conditioner on, showered, etc. Lyndall even managed to lock herself out of our room while I was away, which wouldn't have been a big deal if I didn't make a conscious effort to remind Lyndall not to lock herself out of the room! I was almost asleep when Lyndall started thrashing about on the other side of the room --- the air conditioner was too loud and she couldn't get to sleep. To save myself a painful situation, I traded her beds --- she spent all night calling me a little girl for complaining and then she cries about the aircon! Nice! The aircon did not pose a problem for my fragile little body and I was out like a light and so was Lyndall.

DAY 25

Day 25 kicked off late, really late! I woke up a little earlier than Lyndall and decided to let her keep sleeping because the previous night she did not get much rest. I went off and did some blogging and also went for a walk to test my feet and my new blisters to see how they would hold up. Upon my return to our cabin, I decided I also needed more rest and I was in no rush to get back to the road so I hit the sack for another two hours. Lyndall and I woke up to my alarm and we packed our gear and got ready to start our journey to Tully. We left around 11pm and after about 2 hours in, the strangest thing happened, while Lyndall and I were walking (she usually walked on one side of the road and I on the other) I heard a noise come from the bushes, it was louder than normal and I couldn't make out what it was. Lyndall had her iPod blaring so she didn't hear anything until I told her to stop for a minute and turned on my super bad headlight, using it to peer in to the darkness. I was certain I saw a person and after calling out a few times, 3 coloured guys came out of the bushes, one of them humouring himself saying "boo" WHAT THE!?! Who creeps around in the bushes at 2am in the morning --- needless to say my machete made a ripe old appearance to cement a bit of authority on the situation.

Lyndall was hilarious and quite spooked and I must admit it was quite bizarre. We rested for a few minutes until our new BFF's disappeared in to the darkness of the night and then continued on. I was in a bit of a mission that night for one reason, Lyndall had been throwing a bit of banter at me the day before about my blisters and I decided to walk as fast as I could for as long as I could. In all honesty, it was just a bit of "hey, want to see how far the kid with blisters can beat you by" kind of attitude. This humoured my tiny brain and gave me something to focus on. So for 3 hours, I powered ahead of Lyndall on the road (she wasn't that far behind). When we arrived at a driver reviver at 4am around 20k from Tully, I had had my fun and after Lyndall and I had a brief rest, we started walking together --- Finally. I say finally because it was just a competitive race for the past two days and the purpose of having someone join you is for the pair of you to overcome things together. By this time, I think both of us understood this a little better and although no words were exchanged, all fell in to place.

For the remainder of the walk, Lyndall and I found humour in making fun of the conditions we were marching through. In fact, we laughed most of the way --- including the brief moment when I dropped my full can of coke on the ground. I was talking about it for an hour and how good it would taste at our next break. No good, Alex decides to get too excited and rip it out of his bag dropping it on the ground and watching it explode on his feet. Top stuff Al, keep it up!! We arrived in Tully around 9am and I decided to start calling a few places for accommodation. I tried the Caravan Park first but they did not have any rooms available, so next on the list was the Hotel Tully --- The Top Pub. I spoke to one of the staff there about myself and Lyndall and our journey, she then advised the hotel owner --- Peter who did not hesitate to offer us a free room for the night. When the young receptionist advised me the Top Pub was called the Top Pub because it was at the top of the hill, I wasn't pleased --- another hill really wasn't what I was looking for but I was so excited I was going to get to sleep; Lyndall and I almost ran up the street. It was during this time Lyndall also dropped her wallet and forgot to pick it up! Which is hilarious now --- because she got it back and also proves how tired we were. She was actually holding on to it, dropped it on the ground and when we finally got to the Top Pub she said I think I dropped something but couldn't remember what --- ha-ha, it was classic. Anyway, when we arrived, Peter was an absolute gentleman, a great guy who really looked after us. He gave us a room to ourselves and before I could even make it to the shower, I was done --- sleeping in the clothes I walked in but happy to be on a comfortable surface.

DAY 26

Well, Day 26 was "unique". It was the day life got a hell of a lot harder, where Lyndall and I were pushed to our absolute limits and where I coined the phrase "miserability" --- one's extreme ability to feel miserable. When Lyndall and I woke up, Peter shouted us a free meal --- what a guy and also introduced us to Claudia, his Hostel Manager. Claudia was a tall, blonde attractive girl from Germany. After Lyndall and I spoke to Claudia for a short while, we found out she was not just a looker but also an extremely intelligent girl. She studied Economics in Germany and worked as a Financial Controller whilst in Europe. After we finished our meal, Lyndall and I knew it was time to go. It was pouring rain outside and we were not looking forward to getting wet feet again. Anyway, we packed up our gear and said goodbye to Claudia -- who was an absolute star and gave us some bananas to take on our trip. We then went to the Caravan Park where an extremely honest person had handed in Lyndall's wallet (inclusive of the cash she withdrew earlier in the day).

When we got to the Mobil service station on the highway, we bagged our feet and were off. I cannot describe the ridiculous conditions Lyndall and I experienced throughout the evening and into the early hours of the morning. From the moment we left Tully, I knew it was on, the rain hit us so hard that although we were wearing poncho's we could not keep dry, if we stopped to rest the rain would subside, when we got back up I kid you not, it would rain heavier. When trucks went by, Lyndall and I had to huddle up to show our vests and lights and hope that the trucks would see us. We could not find shelter for hours and when we finally arrived at a rest stop, there was no other option than to sit back and hope the rain died down. Lyndall and I both tried hard to get warm but it just wasn't happening. Against all odds, we managed to get a few hours sleep but we both woke up tired, annoyed, hungry and impatient. When we started walking again, we

knew we had around 25k's to go to Innisfail but it honestly felt helpless. Walking through the day just seems hard. You can see every stretch of the road, every incline, every bend. Each time you turn a corner, you hope to see some sort of structure, and each time there isn't anything there, it is infuriating. With about 20kms. to go, I was starving and I had to rest. As I sat and ate some of Lyndall's sesame bars, Lyndall stood up with some sort of inspired attitude and said "c'mon, let's go". In my head, I laughed, I thought are you serious Holmes, take a seat, relax and LET ME EAT! I looked up at Lyndall, pulled my poncho over my head and told her I was eating. I mean, c'mon people, we had been resting for 8 minutes, give me a break.

Anyway, Lyndall didn't take it so well and when she threw her toys out of the pram and went and sat on the gutter down the road, I giggled to myself --- sick, I know, but it helped all the same. I got up a few minutes later and asked Lyndall if she was waiting for the bus, she just looked at me and then we were off. During this time of frustration, my feet were wet, I was irritated, Lyndall had messed with my "me time" and I just wanted to get to Innisfail so I could smother her with a pillow while she slept, ha! On a serious note, I just wanted to make it to Innisfail. We walked for around an hour without talking to each other. I heard her on occasion ask me how I was doing; I just said ok, I wasn't in the mood. Around 12k out of Innisfail, I decided it was break time again and when I walked to a tin shed, Lyndall abruptly pointed out a wagon sitting on the grass. It was low to the ground and looked perfect for a break so we went over there and took refuge. In the 20 minutes we were under the wagon/trailer or whatever it was, we basically just laughed and felt sorry for ourselves. That is when "miserability" came in to the equation. I am not quite sure what I was thinking when I pitched the term at Lyndall.

We were talking about hell and I decided that where we were at that moment was where the bad people in hell went to --- call me dramatic, or whatever other words you can think of, but you had to be there. Anyway, I was amazed at my current level of ability to feel miserable so I linked the words in and there you have it --- miserability, it's catchy I know!! Lyndall and I both laughed for a good while and then we jumped up and got going again. The final few hours felt like forever but we were in no rush we just walked and talked and took our time. It was late morning before we made it to Mourilyan a few k's outside of Innisfail. We sat down at a café and ordered breakfast and while I spoke to JCU who had just agreed to donate \$5,000 to my fundraiser, Lyndall and I decided to head to Innisfail instead of catching a taxi a few kilometres so we could rest our feet. With that in mind, we started hobbling down the road until we arrived at a caravan park on the Bruce Highway. Lyndall and I stopped in there and spoke to the manager of the park who was nothing less than rude. We had been walking for almost 16 hours and just needed a few beds to stay in for a few hours. After advising the manager of the park what we were doing, she pleasantly provided us with a cabin to sleep in for 6 hours for \$65.

Although Lyndall and I were slightly horrified, we paid up and went to get some well overdue sleep. The night and day had been horrible, but the bottom line --- again, we faced adversity and smiled as we overcame it. We kept on walking, unwilling to give in to the harsh weather conditions, the physical pain or the emotional turmoil that I am certain would have forced many out there to submit.

DAY 27

At around 5pm, I woke up and looked over at Lyndall's bed only to find her gone and the room smelling of some serious wet clothes. I jumped up and gathered my clothes and as I walked outside, I noticed Lyndall talking to her son Cory and her best friend, Peta. At first, I thought, damn, she pulled the pin and is going home but then Cory gave me a wave and I figured they were just visiting --- it almost felt like jail and Lyndall had visitors but I didn't! As I walked over to the laundry, I realised I had to wash all my clothes, which was entertaining because all I had to wear was a towel, nice Al --- I was all class. Anyway, supporting a supreme bony figure, I walked across the caravan park showing off my new found collar bones and my apparent lack of calf muscles to talk to Cory, Peta and Lyndall. I could see Lyndall was excited as I know how much she adores Cory and how much she appreciates Peta as her friend and in a way, it made me happy to see her happy. Lyndall and I spoke to Peta and Cory about our growing concerns for a small stretch of road just outside of Innisfail which offered no lighting and minimal walking space. It was dangerous and we knew it. We made the decision to have Cory and Peta drop us on the other side of this stretch of road and thank god we did.

The rain was so heavy that even in a vehicle, Peta was struggling to see the road and as the three of us, Cory, Lyndall and I, observed the road, it became apparent how thin and dangerous that stretch of the highway was. Once we were in the safe zone, Lyndall and I exited the vehicle. As much as I would like to say we jumped out on the move and landed like I know Chuck Norris would have, it was nothing of the sort. Both Lyndall and I got out moaning and groaning like a pair of two twin four-year-olds. While I fixed my bag and Lyndall sadly waved goodbye to Cory and Peta, step by step we pursued on until finally, we reached Babinda at around 1am. With a maximum of 3 hours sleep, we were knackered and it seemed like a fabulous idea to sleep under the cover of a corner shop for a few more hours to try and re-energize before walking to Fishery Falls the next day.

DAY 28

At 5am, Lyndall and I kind of woke up. I say kind of because one can only get so comfortable on a concrete mattress and although you get some sleep, it is often broken sleep. We packed our bags, looked for my earring for about 20 minutes, which magically disappeared while I was sleeping --- weird, and then we were off. Today seemed like a good day and Lyndall and I conversed for the next two hours until we arrived at Bellenden Ker for breakfast. While we were there, we were met by a friend of mine in the JCU marketing division --- Angus, who was on his way down south. We had a coffee and spoke about the trip (Cheers for the company, Angus) and then came up with the idea that instead of walking to Fishery Falls for the night, we would walk all the way to Edmonton, sleep in our own beds for the night then get dropped back there in the morning for the final leg. I guess after 3 coffees each, it sounded like a brilliant plan. Just outside Fishery Falls, the Cairns Post called and did a quick interview with us (thanks again to the Cairns Post) and then Lyndall and I stopped at the Fishery Falls pub for quick bite to eat.

After 20 minutes, we changed our socks and that was it, we got going and didn't we just look pathetic. I don't know why but our feet were so sore, our shoulders were shot, we walked at a sad

pace but laughed the whole way. Between Fishery Falls and Gordonvale, I think we just made fun of each other, we even decided to run across the overpass bridge at Gordonvale to get one up on life! Oh yeah, cheeeccckkkk maaattteeeee, mother nature. When we finally reached Edmonton, Ken (Lyndall's other half) was waiting for us with Ashley (Lyndall's daughter) and we were so excited. This was it. Ken dropped me home where I was greeted by a worried, happy and relieved mum (thanks mumma) and fed a huge home-cooked meal. As I sat on the couch at my mum's place, I just recapped the whole experience and I couldn't believe it was nearly over --- 1 more day! I hit the sack early as I had an ABC interview organized bright and early the next morning and with 12km's left and a day to spare, I was ready to rock 'n roll!

DAY 29

Alarm goes off... Alex looks round and sees familiar things... bed side table --- check... pillows -- check... smell of coffee and breakfast --- check... I WAS AT HOME! It all seemed surreal. I had made it in under 30 days. Ken picked me up at 7am and then dropped Lyndall and I back out at Edmonton.

When we jumped out of the car, Lyndall and I laughed at how short a distance we had to walk, 2 hours, pfft --- easy stuff. While we walked in to Cairns City, Potts and Pacey called for a quick interview --- thanks guys for your support, ABC also called --- Cheers Richard, you rock!

As we approached the esplanade finish line, I became overwhelmed, nervous, excited, relieved and just happy! The closer I got, the easier it was to recognize all my friends and family waiting and the faster I wanted to walk --- Blisters, ha-ha, not today chiko, what blisters? With my final steps, I guess in a funny way, the whole trip flashed before me. I thought of when I started, the people I met along the way and the inspiration they gave me, restoring my faith in humanity.

As I shook the hands of my friends who were able to make it down and hugged my mum, dad and bro, it was time to put the final touches on a journey that had led me through an array of emotions and physical challenges. WIN TV was great enough to send a crew down (thanks Linden and Mark from JCU for the updated press release and a big thank you to Carly for the interview).

I then spent some time talking to an old friend, Deputy Mayor Margaret Cochrane, about my journey. It was great to be back in Cairns and to be sharing my experiences with everyone. By 11am, the curtains were down and it was time to go and relax, put my feet up and reflect on my journey --- plus, I wanted to sneak in a quick training session in the afternoon, ha!

REFLECTION

Well, here I am after a few days recovery reflecting on a journey that pushed me to my absolute limits, both physically and mentally. When I originally started planning this walk back in early May, I was extremely unsettled with global society. I thought that people were unwilling to change, to put up their hand and take responsibility for the state of our world, and do what they could to change it. By December 24th 2010 my opinion had changed drastically. I am now more

confident than ever in humanity as a force to overcome the injustices that the majority of our global population are exposed to daily. What it is going to take is courage and tenacity from us all. We cannot continue to be bullied by an elite class of dictators that are constantly deciding the fate of our global community. We have been backed in to a corner and it is time that we started to fight our way out.

The key lies in our youth of today --- we are the solution as much as we are currently the problem. We have been cultured in to believing that the superficial and materialistic society we live in today is the way the world should be and very rarely ask why? The basic fundamental principles of a community have been abandoned and replaced by an egotistical and individualistic viewpoint. It does not take a large amount of effort to reach out to those around you, to lead, inspire and help someone in need without expecting anything in return. Regardless of what environment you are born in, to compassion is something that is innate within all of us. If we are to unite against a common universal enemy, we must start by rebuilding a more altruistic society. One that focuses on morals, ethics and respect for one another, with an understanding that we are all unique in our own way and that regardless of race, gender, culture, or political and religious beliefs we all fall under the banner term of humanity.

For everyone out there who has supported me and believed in me along the way, I would like to say thank you. It was the strength of you all that helped me push through to the end. I hope by now, many of you who have been following my trip understand that a proactive approach to change is required. Our youth, our children --- our future will be the ones to inherit our legacy. Let's make sure we give them every opportunity to experience the world for all it is. Keep the faith in humanity and keep fighting the good fight.

LYNDALL GIBBS ON ALEX

Dear Blog Readers, I joined Alex for the last week of his journey from Brisbane to Cairns and I would like to share with you my thoughts and some of the history about Alex. He is far too humble to share some of his achievements and I feel this will give you a better insight into why I wanted to join Alex on this trip.

Alex and I have known each other for 5 years through our association with Marlin Coast Rangers Football Club. When I met Alex, I thought he was confident, charismatic and charming. He was also quite 'cocky'. However, in my opinion, it wasn't in a negative way. Many people over the years have mistaken these qualities for arrogant and conceited. This has never been the case and these people have only looked skin deep or judged him on the way he acts on and off the football field and they have not taken the time to talk with him or get to know him.

On the football field, he was an unpopular (and well-respected) opponent because he was difficult to stop when he had the ball and if you had the ball, you needed to be prepared for the worst. Everyone at MCRFC knew his game day ritual so you didn't talk to him when he was in this mode. He would put his headphones on and listen to his music, he would take his time to get ready (he was always one of the first players there), he would stretch, warm up and then at game time, he was ready to unleash his fury on the opposition. The discipline and focus Alex displayed was extraordinary and this always ensured he was ready to play the best he could under any

circumstances. He was his own worst critic and also acknowledged when he was having a good game or an ordinary game which he carefully dissected every aspect of the game with other players and the coaching staff. If you were Alex's friend, he stood by you no matter what and he looked out for you on and off the field. He helped my family through a very difficult year by befriending my son Corey and giving some friendly and thoughtful advice. I will remember this forever and am truly grateful he was there for us when Corey needed someone to talk to.

When he made the decision to do something, it was always done to the best of his ability. He didn't just give you 'lip service', he followed through with all tasks with conviction and commitment. When he said he wanted to pursue a football career, it came as no surprise to anyone who knew him well. It was a sad day for his family and friends who had to let him go and follow his dreams of being a professional footballer. Alex and I kept in touch via email while he relocated to Norway and later, America. This is where I believe I saw a 'change' in Alex.

Alex was doing very well in America (despite having a re-occurring injury which caused him a great deal of pain after every training session and game) and he was voted captain of the team and played very well throughout the season, only missing out on player of the year by a couple of points. His emails were funny and he had many stories to share with his friends regarding his adventures in the BIG U.S. of A. He also sent many emails that displayed his professional side, i.e., through his job he developed some interesting proposals of how he thought things should be and how to achieve excellence no matter what you do. This is definitely a regular theme in all emails I received from Alex. He was changing the way they did things and ensuring he was working in an environment that supported these ethics and beliefs to be a profitable and successful business. This is when I thought he was developing a different outlook on life and started to change his priorities.

When Alex returned from America, we were all very glad to see him home and happy, that he gave it his 'best shot', but the injuries he sustained over the years from playing football had taken its toll on his body and he was unable to pursue his dream of being a professional footballer. I have no doubt that if this had not occurred, we would have been watching him on telly, week in and week out and possibly watching him play in the World Cup. He accepted his dreams were shattered and moved on with his life with extraordinary strength by enrolling at JCU to focus on a career.

It was no surprise to me that Alex was going to attempt to walk from Brisbane to Cairns in such a short amount of time, so I was only too happy to promote this cause and do anything I could to help him raise the money for these worthy charities. I also wanted to do more for him so when I made the decision to ask Alex if he minded me 'tagging along' with him from Townsville to Cairns to help him get home for Christmas, I was ecstatic that he welcomed my company. I'm sure my family thought I had finally and completely lost my mind but they never said anything and just supported my decision. Obviously, they knew that it didn't matter what they thought; I would do it anyway. I also didn't think I was going to help Alex in any way as I knew he would make it with or without me but at least, he would have some company in the final week of his journey. I figured being so close to home (and yet so far), Alex would need someone to encourage him when he was feeling low or tired. I also put myself in his position and thought I

would like someone to be there to do the hard yards with me in the final leg home to share some of these experiences.

As I was waiting for Alex in Townsville, there were a million thoughts and emotions running through my head. I was scared I would slow Alex down and we wouldn't make it home before Christmas Day. I was worried I wouldn't be able to make it despite me training for marathons; walking was completely different and running is actually much easier for me. I was nervous about walking of a night time because I didn't like the dark and the fear of the unknown was worrying me. And finally, the traffic that we would encounter on the way, walking on those roads when so many traffic accidents occur on that stretch was a definite concern. The trucks and semis that utilise that road were huge and this was a constant worry.

When Alex and I met just outside of Townsville, all those concerns were wiped and I was really happy to see him looking so well (except for his feet). As I was reading his Blog from the comfort of my home each day, Alex constantly discussed his blisters. When you think of a blister, you think --- I've had a blister before, how bad can it be? Nothing could prepare me for the horror when I saw the state of his feet. I can't begin to describe how disgusting they were (sorry Alex). I had never seen anything like it. We chatted for a while and waited for it to cool down so we could start our trek from Townsville to Cairns. I watched the pain on Alex's face when he put his shoes on and took his first steps --- it was not a pretty sight. I couldn't believe that he had put his shoes on each day (as you know the blisters developed in the first week of his journey), knowing that it wasn't going to get any better (in fact, making it worse each day he slipped on his walking shoes to cover the kilometres he needed to make it home on time). I knew then that the strength that he had (emotionally, mentally and physically) exceeded anything I have ever seen before in any one person. I thought "You are incredible!!"

With each passing day, my respect and awe of (and for) Alex grew. My opinion of him was already high but I cannot begin to tell you or find the right words to tell everyone what I think of him after spending a week with him on the road under such appalling conditions. Every day, he got up and put those shoes on, wincing from the pain as he dragged them over his blisters to complete his journey. Each day was harder than the last the closer we became to Cairns because we were close but not close enough. The weather was absolutely hideous and the only thing we could do was keep walking. Alex and I had many laughs on the way. I actually think I laughed 3/4 of the trip which made it a great and rewarding experience. One of the things I laughed about the most was his blisters. I know that sounds very cruel but there was nothing either of us could do to ease this pain or no amount of band-aids or medical supplies was going to make it better. If he had have covered these, it would have torn the skin off for the next walk which would make it raw skin and very susceptible to fresh blisters. As it was, he had blisters - in blisters - on blisters. He made constant jokes and named each new blister that developed from each walk. Alex was just willing me to get a blister or 10 and he was disgusted each day that I didn't get any. His wish was granted on the last day when we only had 10km to go (the walk from Edmonton to the Esplanade) that I got two blisters, a cut on my heel from my feet being wet and soft, and a manky rash. Alex was absolutely ecstatic and it was the happiest I had seen him. Alex has a great sense of humour and his one-liners had me in stitches the whole way home.

I had a saying at the start of the trip, "It could have been worse" and said this every time Alex said anything negative. The day I gave this saying up was on our walk from Tully to Innisfail. As we had not been exposed to any T.V. or media coverage in any way, from day to day, we didn't know what was happening in the world and certainly didn't worry too much about the weather. We got up each day and took it as it came without being too phased by what Mother Nature had in store for us that day. We started our evening off with a beautiful meal at the Tully Top End Pub where Claudia and Peter looked after us very well. These two people were incredibly generous supplying us with a free room and meal and anything else we required for our day of travelling. Something Alex and I were really grateful for as Alex funded the whole trip using his own funds to support himself while he was away. Claudia and Peter restored my faith in humanity and I was very excited that there are still people out there who have consideration and kindness towards others. After this, we packed our belongings and hoped that the weather would get better. Unfortunately, this was not the case and we prepared for our wet weather walk. We then went to the local caravan park where a very kind lady had handed my wallet in as I had dropped it between the service station and the pub. I was pleasantly surprised that my money was still there which reinforced the fact there are very decent people in the world, you just have to take the time to find them. We kept walking to the service station where Alex had more to eat and we bagged our feet, put on our ponchos and put on our pack to begin the long walk ahead.

The weather was ridiculous. We were being hammered by the rain. It was relentless, constant and extremely heavy. We could barely see two feet in front of us. The ponchos barely provided any protection from the rain and the bags on our feet were useless. We made very minimal stops that night because when we stopped we just became more wet (if that was even possible) and cold. At least, when we walked, the exercise was keeping us warm. We came across a small stop that had shelter beside a raging creek with the water rising with every drop of rain. We made the decision to stop here and have a rest as we had walked 15km already. I got a towel out of my pack and wrapped it around my legs. At that stage they were the coldest part of me and it provided some warmth. The shelter (and I use that word loosely) was barely of any use. The roof was high and the rain was coming in from all directions. We laid down on our packs on the picnic table bench and I fell asleep from being physically exhausted. I am not sure how much time passed but I woke up and I was freezing. I got out my mattress and wrapped this around me to try and stay warm. I looked over and saw Alex wrapped up in the tent cover and this is where it became very difficult. He looked so warm and dry. I pulled my phone from my bag and sent a text to Corey as I knew he would be getting up to get ready to go to work. It went something like this "F\$%#. Now I know where hell is. Between Tully and Innisfail. We got absolutely hammered by the rain. We had 2 stop + still 25+ks 2 go. F\$%# I'm cold. I've wrapped the mattress around me 2 keep me warm. Alex looks so warm wrapped in the tent. I am contemplating killing him + burning his body 2 keep warm + have a hot brekky." At this point, Alex awoke and I was relieved in a way because it stopped me from committing murder. I couldn't do it with him looking at me. I was also very happy to hear he was just as wet and cold. We talked about Ken coming to pick us up and I knew he would come and get us if I rang. I put those thoughts aside and we began to walk again at 6.00am.

The rain didn't let up and it was very depressing. It was very difficult to stay positive and we knew we had so much still to go. Alex and I talked and this took our mind off being wet and miserable. We had to stop on the side of the road because Alex was hurting and hungry. I was

just soaked to the bone which is a very unpleasant feeling to say the least. We stopped and as Alex was eating, I was becoming colder by the minute. Although I had two ponchos on, they weren't as thick, long or as much protection as Alex's and when we stopped, my legs, hands and feet went numb from being wet and cold. I asked Alex to eat up so we could keep going and this is when it became 'ugly'. Alex snapped back at me and continued to eat. I walked away and sat on the gutter on the side of the road so I could pull the poncho over my legs to capture some body warmth. Alex continued to eat and when he saw me sitting there he yelled to me, "What are you waiting for, the bus?" It was funny but I couldn't laugh as I was wallowing in self-pity at that time and just grunted and looked away. Alex finished and we were on our way again. We didn't speak for an hour even after I asked a couple of times if he was OK. His answer was always the same a very short, sharp "Yes".

We were due for another break and Alex turned back to me and said in an abrupt tone, "We're stopping here". At that time, we were still 12km out of Innisfail and there was a banana shed and a turn-off from the main road. Alex was walking towards the shed to sit near. I saw a trailer/wagon type contraption and said in an equally abrupt tone, "What are you doing there's a trailer there, we can keep dry under there." We sat down under the trailer and it felt so good to be dry for a couple of minutes. My mother rang to tell me some news about a family member in hospital. I spoke to her for a couple of minutes and it was really good to hear her voice since Alex and I weren't on speaking terms at the time. I got off the phone and told Alex what had happened and we began to talk again. It didn't take long for us to be back to normal and this is my favourite part of the trip (except for laughing at his blisters). Alex was describing how miserable he was and felt. He then said "This is "miserability". I started laughing. "Is that even a word?" Alex asked. By this time, we were both laughing hysterically and I asked what is "miserability". He said, "It is the extreme ability to be miserable". This made me laugh even more. Even writing this now, I can't help but laugh at this very stupid word but I am quite sure it will catch on and others will be using it in no time. It was the lowest point of the trip for me not speaking with Alex, but it was the wagon that brought us together. We had a short break and we were on our way again, laughing and talking and being back to normal. This felt really good even with another 2 1/2 hours of walking ahead of us.

After 16 hours of walking in the most miserable conditions, I have ever been in or seen, we finally made it to the outskirts of Innisfail in a place called Mourilyan, and Alex and I decided that when we got there, we would catch a taxi to where we would rest our weary bones and body. We were sitting down eating the best breakfast I have ever, EVER had and he looked at me and said, "It's not going to beat us, we're walking to Innisfail." I am just as stubborn and determined as Alex so I agreed without any argument. We continued to eat our breakfast and talk some more until we had to get ready again to drag our battered bodies into Innisfail. I can safely say, this was the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life and quite possible, one of the worst days I have ever experienced. The human spirit is an amazing thing though, and under extreme conditions, people everyday manage to keep going and find the strength to continue no matter what. I discovered things about myself too that I didn't realise before and although I will never forget how I felt that day, I am grateful I was able to keep going and make it the rest of the way.

During the whole trip, we talked a lot of the time and I listened intently to what he had to say about his plans for the future and how he is going to change the world. He makes me believe that

we will have a better world for the future generations if we make a conscious effort to change how, why and what we do each and every day. Our society has become very materialistic (a belief I had before this trip) and none of us really take the time to stop and 'smell the roses' as we are so busy surviving that we are forgetting to live. Humanity is becoming a word that we use without focusing on what that actually means. From this journey, Alex (and this experience) has taught me to appreciate my family and my friends most of all, but it has also taught me to appreciate the little things far more than I already did. I can walk, I can talk, I have the basic essentials I need to live a fulfilling life. There are people all over the world that would give their right arm to have my life and I will certainly take the time to appreciate this more often.

The trip has been inspirational and I know that I can make changes in my life not only to make my life better but all the people I come in contact with as well. Alex's enthusiasm for life is infectious and he is able to bring the best out in others as I witnessed this on a number of occasions. I didn't meet half as many people as Alex on the trip or listened to as many stories, but I did meet some great people on the way who were willing to give us a lift or a bed for the night. Their generosity has given me a different outlook on life and I hope that I can be as generous to those less fortunate than myself or when they need a helping hand.

I would like to thank Alex for letting me share a small part of this experience with him and hope that he is able to count on the support from all of you who have read his blog for his future projects and that you are able to be advocates for the messages he wishes to convey to the world. I know he is truly grateful to all of you who have joined him on this journey by reading his blog (or texting and tweeting) and supporting his every step. He is humbled by this support. After spending the week with him, I am confident when I say he is one of the finest, most intelligent and generous human beings I have ever met and I am honoured to call him my friend. His motivation and dedication to everything he does is inspiring and contagious. I have used the word extraordinary a couple of times in this blog entry and I know Alex will be embarrassed by the use of this word. He believes he is an ordinary person leading an ordinary life, but I am sure none of his friends think this. Good Luck, Alex, in your future endeavours and I can't wait to support and join you on any and all projects in the future.

Lyndall Gibbs
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