

Pixie and the Wheelie Bin Walk

Who: Alex Petrou

What: A 77km walk from Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital to Geelong Hospital in 24 hours.

When: August 25th, 2012 – August 26th, 2012

Why: To raise funds for Pixie Fitzgerald and her family, so that they can build an extension on to their house, so Pixie can spend more time at home.

Day 1 – No talking rubbish.

I woke up at 7:30AM and I was surprisingly calm and collected. Lying in bed, I tried to peer out the window to see if it was a sunny day or if Mother Nature decided it was purely unacceptable for things to be remotely normal for me --- turns out she was relatively happy.

Once I was out of bed, it was straight across the Queen Victoria Markets for breakfast and a coffee, and then off to Seddon, where I would begin my walk. On my way to Seddon, I reflected on the previous day and the hour I spent with Pixie. She was in a wonderful mood and we were arm wrestling and joking around. It was the perfect motivation for me --- for all the hardships this little girl had been through, it seems as though nothing can bring her down.

When I arrived in Seddon, I was greeted by a fantastic group of supporters, and I spent just over an hour going through the motions. The TV crew from Channel 10 were great, and it was inspiring to see the amount of kids running around the streets raising donations for Pixie. As time ticked on, however, I began to get slightly concerned; originally, I was scheduled to leave at 9am and by 10:30am, I hadn't yet hit the road. It was going to be a wild afternoon of a familiar game called "catch up".

Around 11am, the gun went bang. I powered my way through a few pink ribbons and off I went. The first few kilometres were spent laughing to myself about the uncomfortable pain in the front of my calves --- probably the only muscle I have never trained in my life. It amused me so much that I was feeling sore in a spot that appeared to be pure bone; nevertheless, I was delighted at another muscle group to challenge (NOT!!).

Once I had crossed an unnecessary railway that I had absolutely no idea was on my route, I looked down at my watch and tried to figure out exactly what kind of distance I had done and how much distance I needed to make up. After 5 minutes... and another 5 minutes, I figured that if I could cover at least 15kms in the next 2 hours, I was back on track to be finished by lunchtime the next day, that means I had to be in Werribee by 3pm. With that in mind, I started jogging. Now jogging behind a bright 240ltr Pink Wheelie Bin is not exactly what I had in mind, but the fact of the matter is that I committed to finishing this challenge by lunch time on Sunday, and bin or no bin, I had to put my money where my mouth is --- or more so, I had to make sure people knew I wasn't talking rubbish!

As I jogged my way through Melbourne and on to the Federation Trail, I kind of just drifted around, thinking about everything and anything and enjoying the fact I was back in a headspace that I absolutely love being in. 14 kilometres in this changed as I pushed my little 3-wheeled bright pink friend down a hill, I felt a nice 'pop' in my right calf --- just what I needed, and just at the right time, and just when I wanted to push a little harder, and just... (I am sure you get the drift).

The next 5 kilometres in to Werribee went slow... real slow. What an annoying thing to happen so early on in the day, and on top of that, I was HUNGRY!! Yeah, you guessed it, I forgot to pack any real food, oh and what's that? I also forgot my water bottle. What a bright spark I am! For those who know me, you won't be surprised; for those who don't, it's not the first time I've just taken off thinking I was invincible only to find I need food and water to keep going! ☺

When I arrived in Werribee, my calf was stiff and I couldn't wait to have a feed. I stopped in at a café and ordered a chicken parmigiana --- Heaven! Kat arrived a short time after and we had a quick chat. She filled me in on the day's fundraising and told me how hard everyone was working; it made me real proud to be a part of this campaign.

Shortly after I hit the road again, pushing a wheelie bin is really quite uncomfortable! And when I finally got over the overpass at Werribee in order to get on the highway, I asked Kat to text me when she arrived at my pit stop (BP), where I would sleep for a few hours. Half an hour passed and I received her message --- 15.5kms. --- WHAT! I thought I was so much closer; I shook my head and looked at the time, it was 4pm. I figured I had at least until 5:30pm before it got dark and Vic Roads had specifically stated that I needed to be off the road at dusk.

As I made my way down the road, I was lucky enough to have a few people stop and donate to our campaign. I met a wonderful lady called Kellie who donated and also drove all the way back from Geelong to give me a collectible doll for Pixie; another gentleman named Dave asked me to take a photo with his dog which was hilarious.

As the sun went down and I contemplated stopping, the rain began to fall, which kept me so warm and fuzzy. I abandoned my commitment to follow the Vic Roads Guidelines (surprise, surprise) and at 7:30pm, I finally walked in to the BP service station --- my stop for the night. Apart from the shock my legs were in, I was in high spirits and I couldn't wait to eat and have a hot shower!

After a solid meal, I went to the shower and turned the water on... I waited... and waited... and waited... and oh, what's that BP you have no hot water? That is amazing!! What a night this was going to be, I must have smelt horrible (sorry to all those who had to smell me!) and I was freezing. I had to laugh all the way to the van I was sleeping in for the night.

My accommodation was a pretty sweet set up. Kat's friends, Duane and Damo, had come to the rescue late in the day when it was discovered that the room she had originally requested at the Little River Hotel had been given to some shearers in town for a conference. The camper van had just been kitted out and I was going to

be the first to sleep in it. They parked it for me for the night and left me a few beers in the fridge, which was a really kind gesture, but I just couldn't stomach them as I was so cold! The next few hours, I tried to get rugged up and relax and finally, at around 2am, I fell asleep... noooooiiiiice.....

Day 2 – I will never take out the trash again!

I woke up at 7am and peered out the van window. It was a clear day and, believe it or not, I was motivated to get going --- until I tried to get up! ☺

With my stiff legs, I walked down to the BP and ordered two donuts and bacon and eggs for breakfast... oh yeah... healthy AI was back! On a serious note, I don't know why I eat so poorly when I am on these challenges... comfort food, maybe? On a regular day, you would have to force bacon and donuts down my throat, but when I am feeling overwhelmed, give me fatty and unhealthy foods and I am a happy camper.

Once I was done placing personal bets with myself on how far I would make it before I started becoming impatient, I got up, grabbed my bright pink friend and off we marched in to the morning sun.

The morning was going well and I was making good time. At 8:30am, Kat called me and we had a chat. She told me she was on her way to Geelong and that her and a team of Pixie Power Rangers would be setting up a base near Geelong Footy Ground to continue our fundraising campaign. It really got me motivated, and with 20 kilometres to go, I picked up that pace. After another hour, I realised the road to Geelong was really not that flat at all; just another thing I didn't really check out when planning for this challenge!

Nevertheless, I continued on my merry way, enjoying the sun on my face and the blisters on my heels --- such joy! At 11am, Kat called me again and I was sitting at a service station just inside Geelong, stuffing my face with a sausage roll. After another brief chat, I was back on the road, with 11kms left, I estimated I would be at Geelong Hospital at around 1pm. As I walked down the road, I started remembering why I disliked walking so much. I mean, everything seems so god damn slow! You try to look in as many places as possible, play eye spy with yourself, count cars, find shapes in the clouds, maybe skip a little bit... and by the time you're done, 5 minutes has passed. Now tell me, am I really that impatient? And seriously, to all those clouds up there, MAKE BETTER SHAPES!!!

Coming in to Geelong over the final few small rolling hills was tough on the legs, a huge thank you to the little punks who decided to throw money at me at 80kms an hour. Guess what, I used that \$3.00 to buy myself a coffee, so the joke is on you... it was the best coffee ever! With around 4kms to go, I felt like the bin I was pushing had secretly turned into a train that everyone else could see except me. I managed to roll my ankle, I don't even know how I did it --- but I do know it was probably a result of me being or trying something stupid to entertain my small little brain and keep me from getting bored. Anyway, after this happened, I sat down for 20 minutes and played a quick game of who wants to quit early? Seems I lost out to team

fortitude, so I got up and kept walking, ignoring calls and verbally abusing anything I felt like until the throbbing subsided.

Finally at 1:20pm, after a total of 14 hours on the road, I strolled to the entrance of Geelong Hospital, tired and sore. I sat down on a chair at the main entrance and not long after, Kat, Pixie and the rest of the crew arrived. It was absolutely great to see everyone, and equally as great to know that I was now one step closer to having a hot shower and a good night's sleep. Kat told me that our campaign had raised somewhere in the vicinity of \$17,000, which was absolutely mind blowing. It was amazing to see Pixie in high spirits as she sat in her bright pink wheelie bin, while the other kids around her made quite a fuss. One thing in life that you never get sick of seeing is other people happy, and today, as I finally had time to observe and reflect, I could see that it wasn't just Pixie who was inspired and happy, it was the group of people who volunteered their time, and found not just a pleasurable self-fulfilling experience, but a restored faith in the power of people and the capacity we have to achieve things when we all work together for a cause greater than ourselves. It was a nice way to end my shortest challenge to date, and it was great to know that for the rest of my life, I will never, ever, put the rubbish out again. I feel as though I have done my lifetime quota!

Reflection

Due to the fact this was such a short challenge, this time around, instead of reflecting on the things I learnt, I would like to simply thank everyone who was a part of this campaign. A project such as the Pixie Fitzgerald Fundraiser is not an easy one to organise; it takes time, commitment and the ability to pick yourself back up and keep pushing forward when things are not going so well.

To everyone who donated to the Pixie Fitzgerald Fundraiser, I would like to say thank you. Please also remember to join the Pixie Fitzgerald Fundraiser support page on Facebook in order to see how your generosity has helped. To Channel 10 and the Herald Sun, thank you for all your assistance in exposing Pixie's story and our campaign.

A huge personal thank you to Lizzie Joyce, Mietta and Vanessa Gornall, Nicole Slater, and Katie Fraser for your motivating texts throughout the day, and a larger than life thank you to Shannon VanMatre, sweetheart, your calls and your willingness to redirect me in to a positive frame of mind when I probably didn't sound so positive helped more than you know.

To the following people, thank you so much for all your hard work and efforts throughout the duration of this campaign:

Yvonne McCormick and her son Aaron, Lutfiye Ozalkim and her son Dilan and daughter Kaylan, Andy Prowse and her daughter Peppa, Michael, Matilda, Ruby and baby William Neighbour, Sarah Carter, Rachel Brown, Georgie Penfold Webb, Jas and his kids Tiffani and Bohn, Liz and Anthony Trumble and their sons Hunter and Jasper, Tiffany Trickey of Ti-Tree Village who have been wonderful supporters and raised \$900 through their own online auction and guest donations, Tez Slater, Kathleen

Exell (who also let me finally have a shower at her place), Sophie van der Klooster, Ali Barnes, Kezia Holbery-Morgan, Lily Dunn, Marti Haste, Abby Claridge, Zoe Perkins and her mum and the many citizens and shopkeepers of Victoria Street Seddon.

To Pixie, Kylyn, John, Max, and Tora, thank you for allowing me to be a part of your life even though it has been for such a short period. I wish you all the best in your journey and I can't wait to visit and see Pixie's new room!

Finally, to the ever so wonderful Katherine Brandenberger, what an amazing campaign you have put together and managed. You did one heck of a job and it must be said that without your hard work and dedication, none of this would have happened. It seems so long ago when we first sat down to talk about the concept of pushing a bright pink wheelie bin from Melbourne to Geelong, yet here we are --- planned and executed with style! Thank you for all your support and for making this challenge possible.