

# The Recycled Man ....

.... who had two lives.

By Ken Aitken ...

... When he was in hospital in February 1996

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On the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1995 (Eighteen and a half years ago from 2014), I had a life-changing experience. In December 1995 I had a very severe brain injury falling off a boogie-board in shallow water in the surf at Peregian Beach on the Sunshine Coast off Queensland, Australia. I was:

- In a coma for four weeks from early December 1995 to early January 1996.
- I felt like a three year old child in the first week after I woke up from the coma with no control over my actions
- In hospital for six months
- Had to learn everything all over again including walking, talking and eating solid food again
- Get my brain back together from a very scrambled state since December 1995
- I lost a lot of intuitive ability to feel what other people are saying ..... although that has come back now
- I am not the same man as before my accident. However I have learnt to work from what you have and not from what you have lost. It is new season in life.

At the moment these are my continuing problems:

- I cannot drive eighteen years out from my accident .... but I have learnt to drive on the Internet .... to go around the world in few minutes and see hundreds of people at the same time.
- My balance is still a bit out at the moment
- I cannot ride a bicycle now ..... Used to ride for kilometres when I had one when I was younger. I would now fall off a bicycle from a lack of balance
- I have to be careful in walking up narrow paths
- I have to come down backwards still on steep steps at home whilst holding onto the banister
- My mind has slowed right down .... It is hard to take initiative for one's life and make clear decisions. The result of this for me, is that my wife Harriet now manages all the finances on a day to day basis. Prior to my accident, we ran a small landscape design and construction business and I did most of that.

## The Context Of My Brain-injury:

For twenty years, I ran a small Landscape Design and Construction Company undertaking very creative, individual designer gardens for wealthy residential clients around Brisbane. I was an artistic person, a lateral thinker ..... more artist than businessman. I thought of a landscape as a three-dimensional piece of space that people walked through. This space changed with time as it grew and changed with the time of day. Shadows vs. sun patterns, boulders, colour, plants, trees, earth-forms, solid structures and water. These were the ingredients I used. Unknowingly, I was a landscape sculptor. Rather an intangible product to sell and run a business with!! I built a structure for my life: my marriage, family and business from this base.

Harriet and I are into simplicity and recycling. We live in this amazing house built out of rejected materials for \$32,000.00 in 1981 (33 years ago in 2014). We spent another \$20,000.00 on it that the builder hadn't allowed for. See the house and garden on my personal experiences website at <http://www.kenaitken.net/> (If you have problems in opening up the website, it is suggested you place your cursor on the very end of the website and it should open up. This was originally a PDF file). Look for the page **OUR HOUSE** and see the posts: Our House and The Actual Garden.

The business situation all changed overnight when I had a simple accident which resulted in severe consequences. I went through a real transformation of life. Before my accident, another significant incident occurred. Through my business connections, I had held an insurance Income Protection Policy for several years. One night in July 1995, (four months before my accident I didn't know I was going to have), a man phoned me out of the Yellow Pages and said he wanted to talk to me about an Income and Protection Policy he was promoting.

I said, 'I've already got one of those. I don't need to talk to you'. We talked about rates and benefits for a while. They were far better than the policy I had. As a result, I went ahead with a different but small company at the time. If it had been my wife, she would have said 'No' as she would never talk to someone like that on the phone but fortunately it was me. This policy was for life and was CPI indexed. Four months later, I had my accident. This policy was for life and was CPI indexed. Four months later, I had my accident.

In many ways this accident and its consequences, has been the best thing that has happened to myself and the family and even though it has been a difficult experience. I have now been provided with an income much better than a Government Pension. I think there is irony and humour in this. I had worked hard all my life for very little, whereas now I don't have to work at all. I am now on a permanent holiday for life and yet I still get paid for it. It is quite adequate for our needs and Harriet could work as well which she has done for the last 18.50 years till she retired late last year. We own our house well, so we do not have mortgage payments to make every month.

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## Photographs of me after the accident:

One day two of my friends, Colin and Julianne had come to see me with their little baby. Even though I was in a coma, I heard them talking. When you are in coma you can hear people but cannot respond. Colin said to his wife 'Ken will not be doing this in hurry'. Colin put the baby in my arms and I felt it lying there. The photograph is of that occasion.

Ken in a comatose state December 1995

Colin my friend



# Ken Home, Seven Months after the Accident .... June 1996

Ken with his wife Harriet at their house at Chambers Flat



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It is now over eighteen years and a half years from this period of time in my life to 2014. In this time I have called myself the 'Recycled Man'. I still cannot drive but my wife can drive me around or I frequently use public transport. Our two children have left home or have been overseas. One major consequence of this new life is that I now have a passion to build inner community with many people.

As part of that passion, I have come to value people. I have developed a passion to build inner community with many people around the world especially by e-mail. As I am on a permanently paid holiday through my lifelong Income Protection, I have time to spend with people in a way I never could do in my busy business. I now have three websites, all free through Word Press:

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## TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE DIRECTION:

With my brain injury, I went from being:

**1. Physical Gardener  
(Outer Sustainability).**

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**2. Life Gardener (Inner  
Sustainability)**

1. Outer Sustainability: In a gardening and agriculture sense ..... can certain practices be maintained..... is what you doing now preparing the way ahead for new life? It was a very difficult business in which to make money, mainly due to the very non-standard and the seasonal nature of the work. My former life was not sustainable ..... my creativity in my business couldn't be standardised vs. a successful business needs to be like a biscuit cutter .... Making a few \$\$ off large numbers of component

**2. Inner Sustainability:** In an ongoing personal sense .... Can your life be maintained to? ..... is what you doing now preparing the way ahead for new life? I have also discovered the significance of the Inner and Outer Life. Sustainability I have come to see, has to be a wholistic view on life of Inner, Middle and Outer Persons. Problems come because things do not change from the Outside to Inside but from the Inside to the Outside.

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With the passion to build inner community with many people around the world especially by e-mail, I have developed this on three fronts:

- **My personal experiences website:** [www.kenaitken.net](http://www.kenaitken.net) This website is used to personally stay in touch with hundreds friends and associates around the world. I frequently send out our personal experiences photos and then links to the website posts.
  - **New Earth Community.** This is a global Christian Cyberspace Community: <http://www.newearthcommunity.org/>
  - This community is meant to bring a new sense of belonging with the real discovery or affirmation of identity through the Sustainable Life.
  - **Brain Injury Community Brain Injury Community (BIC):** <http://www.braininjurycommunity.wordpress.com/> is for Brain Injury People. I help facilitate this community as an international website. It initially started in late 2001 as a Google blog site. The dominant theme of the Brain Injury Community is: 'Becoming a Brain Injury Thriver and not just Survivor'. This is in contrast to the motto, "Victim, Survivor, Over Achiever".
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**MY STORY:** My full story is told at my Brain Injury community website on this post:

<http://braininjurycommunity.wordpress.com/personal-stories/ken-aitken-my-personal-story-the-hidden-disability/>

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## **TRAVEL: An International Perspective**

Harriet and I love to travel. With the freedom of life we have and having no mortgage on our five acres of land plus house we built from recycled materials in 1981 for minimal money, Harriet and I have been travelling overseas every two years to see the world. In between we have been seeing parts of Australia which is a very large country. We are also a member of [Wyndham Vacation Resorts Asia Pacific](#) holiday share organisation we have available free accommodation in 3 star apartments around Australia.

We both love history and it is very profound to us. People express their ideas on life in the way they build and arrange their living spaces. See our International Perspectives posts on <http://www.kenaitken.net/travel/> under the Travel Page on the top browser bar or the many posts under Travel on the right-hand side of the website.



Ken and Harriet on their July 2013 holiday trip to EUROPE with Scenic Tours .... going down the Rhine River and into the Danube River.

See the Miltenberg section (started in the 1300's) of their trip on their website at:

<http://www.kenaitken.net/travel/2013-europe-july-scenic-tours-cologne-in-germany/2013-europe-july-scenic->

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Even though I had a very severe brain injury eighteen and a half years ago, I do not look at what I have lost but what I have and build on that. I am a Thriver and not a Survivor.

Regards,

Ken Aitken

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