

RESILIENCE

'Resilient in the face of adversity.'
What does this really mean?

Resilient:

1. springing back; rebounding.
2. returning to the original form or position after being bent, compressed, or stretched.
3. readily recovering, as from sickness, depression, or the like.

Adversity:

1. adverse fortune or fate; a condition marked by misfortune, calamity, or distress.
2. an unfortunate event or circumstance. (Macquarie Dictionary)

'Resilient in the face of adversity' means that you are capable of recovering from misfortune. Being resilient is different for everyone. It doesn't mean that you have to overcome the type of adversity I have had, but you can get through whatever tough times you are faced with in your life. You may not know it yet, and it may be hard to see right now, but believe me when I say that you are capable of getting through these times. In this book you will discover what I have learnt along my journey and perhaps you can use some of these tools in your own life, when you need them. I have spent nine years learning from

the masters in this field: my therapists. Some of my therapists have been helping others overcome adversity for forty-plus years, so when they talk, I listen.

In 2008, I started the most amazing journey of my life, a journey to re-engage with society and with my own body and brain. For twenty-three years I had been full of life; enjoying the freedom of the world I lived in; and waking up every morning with an able body.

Until one day when everything changed and I no longer lived in a world that could give me this kind of flexibility. The tattoo on my back reads 15.11.2008. This marks the day I was involved in an accident that nearly took my life. This accident made me who I am today and I would not change it for the world. I don't believe that everything happens for a reason; instead, I believe that everything in life is about the reasons we give to these happenings. I write about the reasons I have given to the happenings in my life in the pages of this book.

This journey has seen me go from the very top of what I could hope for in life, when I was having so much fun, to the very bottom, which had me fighting my way through depression as the result of a traumatic event. I've had days that I did not want to end and I've had days where ending it all would have been the easiest way out. Throughout this time, I have learnt a lot about myself, a lot about my own capabilities and a lot about the way in which humans realise their greatest achievements.

I believe this all comes down to the goals we set and the goals that we achieve. I was forced to set myself goals when I was at the bottom; the magic that has come from this has been incredible. Goals have been the backbone of my successful recovery and I owe a lot to the people who brought them into my life. Goals have essentially been the roadmap to my recovery; they have given me a path to follow for the last nine years.

Part One of this book is about what happened to me from the day of the accident on. You will journey with me through all of the turmoil that my life has thrown at me. You will see what I went through and

the struggles I've faced, only to come out the other side with a greater appreciation for life and the people around me.

Part Two will show you, through my own experience, what you can do when you believe in yourself. If you come to the end of this book and find yourself looking at the brighter side of a once darkened existence, I would love to connect with you. You will find my details at the front of the book.

I don't want this book to be just a story; I want it to be a book of inspiration. I want you to go out and achieve great things in your own life because I believe that we are all capable of doing this. Remember, as someone wise once said, 'Falling down is an accident, staying down is a choice.'

#IAmCapable

PART ONE

**MEETING
ADVERSITY
HEAD ON**

THE ACCIDENT

Shit happens. HARRIS FAMILY

I had a great childhood. Some would say I was an active kid; I spent a lot of time outside running around. Any sport I played, I loved, until I wasn't the best and then I would quit.

At one point I was kayaking, which I really enjoyed because this was something I was good at. My brother, Brett, and I would be up at 6 am in the middle of winter, out on the river paddling. We both loved it.

When I went to the Australian Championships, I won one gold, two silver and a bronze medal. After that I took six months off due to injury and bad health. When I came back to the sport I was no longer winning. This was the late 1990s and by the naughties, I had given up. I had quit because I wasn't the best anymore. Now some of the guys who I paddled with me then have competed in the Olympics.

It's easy to look back on your life and think, What if? This question has crossed my mind so many times in the last decade and I have spent hours thinking about it. The conclusion I always come to is that I can't do anything about it, so just move on. I can't change the past, so I must move on.

I got my first job when I was fifteen, flipping burgers and making coffee at the local McDonald's. In my opinion, this was the best job around because not only did I get to work with 120 other kids my age,

I also made some lifelong friends. OK, granted, the work was hot and greasy and I hated getting up at 4.30 am when I had to set up in the morning. But it taught me what real work was and that in itself looks unbelievable on a résumé.

After five years, it was time to move on. But when I finished my tertiary education, I was jobless and I had no direction. I had done an Advanced Diploma in Digital Graphics at JMC Academy in Melbourne. My big dream was to work at the marvellous Pixar Studios in California. I could imagine being a part of the next big *Toy Story* flick. That was until I discovered this was a dream shared by literally thousands and thousands of other people. With a 'fixed' mindset, I believed that the competition was too great, so gave up. I lost interest.

Being lost, I was starting to wonder where my life was going to go from here.

I found a job working at a cafe serving ice cream at Melbourne's Federation Square, but when winter came around I had no real income because winter in Melbourne is cold, miserable and no one is on the search for ice cream.

After six months I was jobless again until my brother came to the rescue. He is an electrician and his boss was on holidays. They were in need of hands and any hands would do, so I put one up and helped out.

I fell in love with it. I worked for three weeks and earned more money than I had ever seen in one paycheck. So when the boss returned, I asked him if I could do an apprenticeship.

I started working full-time all over Melbourne: from high-rises to industrial estates to private homes. We worked in many of the manholes on the side of the road, connecting fibre networks across the city of Melbourne, sometimes Sydney and even Perth. We did a lot of work in new and old buildings, including old schools from the 1860s. You can imagine how fascinated a young man like myself was climbing through roofs and under buildings that were over 150 years old.

My job was so diverse that I could be working in an old building on Monday, building a new factory on Tuesday, and then every Wednesday I'd head off to trade school with an awesome group of

boys. We would put our feet up and have some fun. Our classroom was jam packed with young men all full of testosterone having a day off work together; it wasn't all that productive but I loved it.

Thursday we'd be under the city working and Friday we'd knock off early. Knocking off required going back to the factory in Eltham and having a beer to recap the week. My life consisted of no responsibility, no worries and all the freedom in the world. At the time, I liked the idea of working for 'the man' and not taking life too seriously. Oh, did I mention the RDOs? Yes, every second Monday we got a rostered day off, just because it was fair; that is what the trade union argued, anyway.

This was in 2006 and by 2008 I was loving what I did every day of the week. I loved my work because I made some great mates, I made some great money and I had the weekend to do what I wanted. At that stage, I started to think a bit about what would happen after I finished my apprenticeship, which was the first grown-up thought of my life. I considered travelling overseas and working abroad for a year, as my sister had done years before.

It was coming up to the Spring Racing Carnival - Melbourne's premier horseracing event - which I had attended for the past two years. That year I went along with a great group of people. We had been mates for years and I had the best time I had ever had at the carnival. I remember that day so clearly.

I got up super early, just as I had on the first day of the carnival in the past. I woke up before my alarm and felt great from the early night I'd had to prepare myself. If the day turned out to be anything like the previous years, it was going to be a big event. I jumped out of the shower as quick as I had jumped in. Grabbing my race attire, I got in the car ready to go, all in the space of about ten minutes. I had a tendency to get overexcited about things I knew would be fun; that's just who I was.

I was the first to arrive at my brother's house and he had a beer waiting for me. Brett was already dressed in his suit and was just as excited as I was. I changed into my costume, a perfectly tailored grey suit from Thailand. I put on my new Prada sunglasses and a few sprays of cologne, looked in the mirror and quietly thought, it's going

to be a good day; you're looking OK today, mate. I went out to the kitchen and said to everyone, 'Let the games begin.'

While I'd been self-obsessing in the mirror, Ange and Celeste had arrived to join the party. Shortly after, Dave, Chris, Trav, Oki and Kate walked in and really got the ball rolling. It was about 7.30 am at this stage, which was rather early to be starting the antics, but to get a good spot on the grass, smack-bang in the middle of the riffraff, you had to be early. On top of that we still had to find a cab and make our way there. Really, the reason we started so early was because we all knew what was in store for us that day. And this was the first time in three years I was going there as a single man, with no one looking over my shoulder and no one to answer to. I was prepared to get loose.

Beep, beep, 'Everyone, the cabs are here,' was the call to head off to Flemington Racecourse. We got there just after the gates opened and made our way to the 300-metre mark at the end of General Admission on the home straight. The grass looked so fresh and the people looked so clean, but you knew that in just six hours time the bomb would go off and everyone would leave the venue looking like there'd been a meltdown. It did every other year - what would have changed? Nothing. To our delighted surprise, solid tables had been installed on the grass that year and we were lucky enough to snag one and enough chairs. It was still a few hours until the first race, but we didn't really care because we were there in our position, ready to take on the day.

Once the bar had opened, things became very blurry in my mind as to what actually followed. My only memories of that day were the photos that were taken and the fact that I knew I had fun, I knew I was with my friends, and I knew that my wallet was crying due to weight loss. I was hoping for another box trifecta like I'd won the previous year. In my total gambling career I was definitely up, as I had won \$1000 the year before and I'd never spent that much on gambling in my life. I really wasn't a big gambler; the Spring Carnival was the only time that my wallet came out to gamble. I knew that it was dead money as soon as it touched the bookie's hand. On top of the gambling, which wasn't all that much in the end,

there was the cost of drinks that seemed to go up and up and up each year. I guess that's just the price you pay when participating in one of Melbourne's great festivals.

In what seemed like less than a microsecond, I was in a hospital bed, a month later, looking up at Jaclyn, who was my brother's girlfriend at the time, who was playing 'Here comes the aeroplane' with a spoonful of slop. Confused? So was I.

A couple of weeks after the Spring Carnival Derby Day, I had a motorbike accident that resulted in the worst day of my life. This was the absolute hardest time for everyone in my family too. They are forever haunted by the sixteen days I was in a coma, unsure whether I would wake up, let alone be able to live a normal life again. For my part, I was not consciously present and had no memory of it at all.

I was with my mates on Saturday, 15 November 2008, riding my dirt bike on a property in Smiths Gully in Melbourne's outer northeast. It was at the very end of the day when I decided to go down for one last lap of the paddock before heading back to the house. I was going to meet another group of mates there for some springtime fun in the sun around the pool.

I got to the end of the paddock, turned around and rode back up the hill. It was not a tricky hill at all, but it had a little bend in the track before opening up to a landing about 100 metres long. I was going fast. If you've ever ridden a motorbike you will know the rush I would have been feeling at the time. The best way to start that hill was to give it full throttle and keep it pinned all the way to the top, because the top was my best chance to pop onto the back wheel and nearly wet my pants with excitement.

We had touched on the idea of riding down another track on that hill to avoid having an accident, but this wasn't a rule and it wasn't set in stone. I chose the one with the bend. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time on the wrong day of my life. I ran right into my mate who was riding down the same track at the same second that I was. Boom.

Lights out. Hindsight's a bitch when it wants to be.

The carnage looked like two angry wildebeests had fought in the wild, except our wildebeest were two KTM 450cc dirt bikes. Another mate was following behind me and saw everything happen. He said it was like watching a finishing move in *Mortal Kombat* in slow motion. He could see what was happening but was helpless to stop it. We hit each other head-on and when I say 'head-on', I mean 'HEAD-ON'. Our front wheels were aligned perfectly and you could see the imprint of his wheel in mine. The mate following threw his bike down and ran to help.

He knew that both of us were in serious trouble. He was shouting in my face, 'SCOTT, SCOTT, SCOTT ...' No response. He ran over to our mate and did the same thing, like a sequel to a horror movie. Neither of us was responsive. Another two mates, brothers who lived at the property, finally caught up with us. The first guy to arrive felt his heart sink because for a split second he thought it was his own brother who was in trouble on the ground and not moving.

From the time of the accident until the air ambulance flew me away, everything ran like clockwork. One mate, Dave, rode off straight to the house to ring 000, his brother, Ryan, rode to the front gate and our other mate stayed with the two of us to make sure we were still breathing. There were five of us riding that day, and two of our lives depended on the teamwork of the other three. I am so grateful that I had the mates I had with me, and I am really proud of the teamwork that they put in that day.

Sam, the mate I hit, stood up at one point, took one step and then hit the deck. He was extremely lucky because, unknown to anyone, he had broken his neck. A few more steps could have left him bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his existence on earth. I, contrary to popular belief, was the luckiest at the time because I was knocked out cold and didn't budge. With the state my neck was in, any slight movement could have left me writing this book through a voice-activated dictaphone.

The ambulance arrived within fifteen minutes, only to find that there was no way to drive down through the goat tracks from where they were to the other end of the property. Right then another star

moved into alignment. Out of four air ambulance helicopters that operate in the whole state of Victoria, the two that were close enough were told to turn around and come to our aid. This was perfect because time was definitely not on our side. It took them only twenty minutes to get there, which, if you think about it, is amazing because there are only four helicopters covering 237,629 square kilometres of land in Victoria. To put that into perspective, that's nearly England, Ireland and Switzerland combined.

Once they had landed, it was time to remove my helmet, which was the only thing holding my skull together and stopping it from exploding. I still have that helmet, with a coating of crusty blood on the inside. It's a token from God on a day in history that could easily have resulted in many lives destroyed.

There were many, many people that saved my life that day. Four paramedics, four police, many doctors, many nurses, dental surgeons, neurosurgeons, neurologists, radiologists, a whole plastics team; the list goes on. But the guys that I truly owe my life to on that dark but sunny, spring day are my mates. The three boys that were there with Sam and me came together and put in some pretty amazing teamwork, and for that I am truly grateful.

The accident wasn't just brutal on me; Sam had intense damage to his body too. His injuries included several fractured vertebrae and bones, a punctured lung, lacerations and a dislocated knee. He experienced severe blood loss, resulting in seven blood transfusions. Sam has also been recovering both mentally and physically from this accident and has since changed his career path. This accident made him realise how vulnerable and fragile life is and he no longer wanted to waste his time doing anything that didn't make him happy. He decided his passion was flying aircraft so he got his pilot's licence and now flies planes for a living. How cool's that?

LANDING IN HOSPITAL

'Scott does what he wants, when he wants.' HARRIS FAMILY

Off I fly, straight to Royal Melbourne Hospital to have a spontaneous encounter with some of the best surgeons in the world. Meanwhile, back at the site, everything was surreal. The nightmare quickly became reality for everyone involved. Before the police did their report, they gave my mother a call, informing her that her son had been involved in a motorbike accident and that he was in a coma being flown to the hospital. This is the call that no one wants to get, especially not the world's most caring mum. Her kids are everything to her and this just added to the cobweb of horror-movie scenes that happened that day.

Mum, otherwise known as Debra, rang my brother-in-law, Cliff, in a panic. She rang him because there was no way she could keep it together long enough to speak with my sister, Nicole. The best chance she had was to talk to anyone other than her own blood. She knew that talking to Nicole would open the waterworks for both of them. To tell her oldest child that her youngest son was fighting for his life would have been too much.

Nicole and Cliff raced over to Mum's house to find out what was wrong, and then they took Mum straight to the hospital. This was on a sunny Saturday afternoon and my brother, Brett, and father, Vic, were out playing golf. I would sometimes go with them, but not that day.

On the way to the hospital my sister rang Brett to tell him the news. My brother and my dad raced off the golf course mid-round and they too went to the hospital. The Intensive Care Unit, to be more specific. At this point, the family did not know what to think as they didn't know what state I was in at the time. All they were told was to go to the hospital as soon as possible. When they arrived, the first question they asked was, 'Is he alive?'

'Yes,' was the perfect response they received. Like a great partnership, we arrived at the hospital at the same time. I had just been flown in and they wheeled me off the heli-pad, straight in to see the professionals. This was, of course, in plain view, giving my family their first, and possibly last, glimpse of me alive. Everyone knew I was in a serious way but no one was prepared to see me like that. 'Unrecognisable' is the only way they can describe it when they tell me about it now.

Mixed emotions were flying around in that moment. The consensus was that my chances of survival were pretty slim.

The family were put into a private room. They knew that a private room meant business. Things were not looking so good. While they were waiting, the doctors were doing all the tests necessary to establish a good report for them of this bad situation. Bleeding from my skull and bleeding on my brain were the biggest threats because until both stabilised the outcome would not be known. The most knowledgeable and skilled people in the medical profession could not give my family the answers they were so desperately longing for, because they simply didn't know.

This left my family with so many unanswered questions lingering in the corridors of hell. The likelihood of my brother's best man not even lasting the night was a hard reality to cope with.

What they did know was that my face was hanging off my skull because it had been severely damaged. Damaged to the point that my own mother couldn't even picture that cheeky grin she'd become accustomed to for the past twenty-three years. Her initial thoughts when I was wheeled in from the heli-pad were, OH. MY. GOD... that guy looks horrific... I hope Scott's looking better than that. I think that says it all, really. I'm just glad I wasn't there to witness my family having to deal with the pain that hit them at that time.

A face reconstruction was required to piece my face back together. The orthopaedic surgeon would have to insert ten titanium plates onto my skull. They also knew that I had severe ligament damage at the base of my neck, but my spinal cord was OK. As stupid as this sounds, I'm grateful that I was hit as hard as I was because that stopped me from standing up and risking further damage. The movement of a millimetre may have been enough to leave me a quadriplegic. From the moment of impact until this point, my neck had not moved. This reduced the chance of any further spinal cord damage to less than 1 per cent.

Back at the property another group of mates from school had arrived to find everyone in a state of disbelief. As the night went on, the reality of what had happened that day sank further and further in.

The first obstacle my family faced was spreading the word. How were they going to hold it together well enough to tell family and friends? While fighting back tears, Mum made phone call after phone call no mother would want to make. With our family and friends scattered all the way up the east coast of Australia, it was her job to spread the word on the ground. The initial calls were like a nightmare and every one produced a sickening feeling of anxiety that struck Mum from head to toe. But she knew that, as a mother, it was up to her to make sure our closest tribe members – that is, our family and friends – were up to speed. This she did, all the time – she didn't stop. With every minor change in my state, Mum would make more calls, keeping everyone informed. 'Scott moved his index finger today'; 'Scott's brain stopped swelling'; or 'It swelled again, but now it's slowly reducing.' These were insignificant changes to the outside world, but in Mum's mind they were the difference between, 'Scott may walk out of here one day' and 'Scott may be wheeled out of here in a body bag.' I can feel a lump in the back of my throat even as I write this; I can't begin to imagine how she did it.

While Mum was crying down the phone, Dad was crying over the keyboard. My father set up a group email to inform friends and family of what had happened and of my progress. Although not everyone was

able to visit me in hospital, there were many people around the world who really cared about my wellbeing.

MONDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi guys,

I'm not sure who has and who hasn't been informed of our Scott's motorbike accident. Saturday afternoon he was airlifted to Royal Melbourne Hospital and he was put into an induced coma. His face is a mess and will need rebuilding and as a consequence he needs a tube to allow breathing until his face is repaired. They think his neck and back are ok, but we do not know what injury there is to the brain until he wakes and can respond accordingly. He is stable and the pressure inside his head is normal for now. There is bruising and shearing on the brain but to what extent, we don't know.

He has twice been scheduled for surgery to repair his face but cancelled due to other helicopter trauma arrivals. Tonight he was slightly less sedated and he responded by moving his arm. They cannot fully bring him out because he tries to remove the breathing tube. I guess that's a good sign in itself. We are putting together an email group list and will provide updates when news is available. Feel free to call, but as you would realise, mobiles are off in the ICU, so we don't get them sometimes until later on.

*Regards,
Harris family*

Once Dad started writing, we would get the occasional response, but the truth was that a lot of people did not know what to say and didn't want to say the wrong thing. From my point of view, that's totally understandable because it is only the very unlucky people in this world that have to deal with such things, and not everyone is equipped with the skills to handle tragic or terrible events.

The following day I went in for surgery. Being in surgery for the day gave Vic time for some email therapy. Not only was it a help to everyone on the outside, it was also a massive help to the man weeping on the inside.

TUESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

Scott went to surgery at 12.30 today to repair his broken face. On his return later today to ICU they intend to slowly withdraw the medication that has him in a state of coma. This morning they played around with this and he moved arms and legs slightly. His first reaction was to reach for the ventilation tube, which was gagging him. These are all positive signs at this stage. It is hoped that the surgery will repair the nasal area, which is currently preventing him from breathing on his own

*Regards,
Harris family*

PS: We have a bike for sale if there is any interest.

As one moment would pass by, there was new hope. Following that moment, though, would come another that wasn't as good, which was then followed by a positive evaluation of my state. This gives an insight to the tension that was in the air in those first few days of uncertainty.

Four days in and the actual physical damage I had done to my body was still not known, which only meant one thing: more tests.

WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

All a bit slow and I guess I'm getting a little impatient. However, this morning the medication that was keeping him sedated was due for change and he started moving his hand around. He could obviously hear us because he responded to the nurse's instruction. This was only for a couple of minutes as he was put back under in readiness for a scan of his face at 2.00 pm

This is to check that what was done in the operation yesterday is in keeping with that expected. He needs an MRI as well but that was cancelled due to another emergency. This all adds to the wait and thus the impatience. The positives today have us on a bit of a high. I'm sure they will be balanced out over the journey but we'll enjoy them while we can.

We are back to the hospital this evening so I'll leave it at that for now.

*Regards,
Harris family*

The first response came from one of Vic's old colleagues, Annie Russell, who hadn't been in touch with Dad for a long time but she had a caring heart. Maybe it had to do with the thirty years of service they both gave to Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE.

WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2008

Thanks so much for the update. It is considerate of you.

Thinking of you and your family a lot. Wish I could do something useful! Have everything crossed.

*Love to you,
Annie*

My family was five days into the nightmare at this stage and the emails kept rolling in from far and wide.

THURSDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2008

Dear Vic, Deb, Nicole and Brett,

I am so terribly sorry about Scott's accident and its ongoing distress for you all. I can only imagine how horrific it is. You have all (and Scott too of course) been much on my mind and I am sending you all my best wishes and hopes that soon you can have the news you so want to hear; that he is going to be just fine.

May it be so.

*Lots of love,
Cath*

After a gruelling week my family was told that my state had stabilised and that the doctors were thinking of reducing the medication that was keeping me in a vegetative state. The first battle in this war was almost half over; the next unknown was whether or not I would actually wake up.

As a kid, I was always the last one at the kitchen table to finish my dinner. While Brett and Nicole were watching TV, or fighting, or having fun, I was still eating my meal. I wasn't fussy, in fact there

wasn't a food I wouldn't eat, but, to put it simply, I was painfully slow. So, knowing I was naturally a slow kid, my family just applied that to my waking up. A week later I began to come to the party – fashionably late, but I was getting there.

SATURDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

It's been a very long and, at times, a very slow-moving week. Firstly, thank you all for your kind wishes and offers of help etc. I can assure you that it is greatly appreciated. Friends and family are very important at this stage. We have received many calls and I apologise if we have either gotten back to you late or in some cases missed you in the net.

The week has been a contradiction of sorts. Nothing much to report but lots of small forward and promising moves.

The situation in ICU is that if your condition is stable and another emergency arises your needs move down the list. So this week has seen Scott's face reconstructed with eleven metal plates inserted. He has remained on the ventilator and heavily (very) sedated with a tube down his throat delivering oxygen. Attempts were to be made during the week to remove this tube but to date this has still not happened. Why? Very complicated but briefly, this will not happen until the orthopaedic surgeon is happy with the condition of Scott's neck.

They wish to ascertain whether or not there is any ligament damage. Apparently, these ligaments are attached to the bone and, if damaged, present issues for the bone to move; it could possibly cause problems with the spinal cord.

So we have catch 22. Can't remove breathing tube until this is cleared, Scott can't have the tube in without being sedated because of the choking sensation etc., etc. Thus, he has been heavily sedated for what feels to us to be an eternity. Until he comes off sedation we are not in a position to assess his overall state of health. That will come when the doctors can ask Scott questions and assess his condition by responses given. Yes, we are frustrated but I guess the longer he is sedated the better chance of stabilising his condition. There have been moments throughout the week that give us hope that he will pull through in some way. How well? Nobody can say, so we can only hope

and pray for the best possible. When sedation has been reduced there has been movement (strong on his left side, which is his dominant, and not so strong on the right). He tries to remove the tube at times and he has squeezed hands in recognition of us being there with him. So where are we at the end of week one?

1. *Scott's still with us.*
2. *He is moving slightly.*
3. *His face is looking good. Surgeons have done a marvellous job.*
4. *Getting ourselves ready for week 2++++??*

Our routine is basically get up and go in around 9.30–10.00 am for a couple of hours. Come home, answer calls etc., have a rest and then go back in around 6.00 pm and stay until whenever depending on Scott's state of awareness. While in the hospital it's mobiles off, so if you wish to get through to us the best times would be mid-afternoon and around 9–9.30 pm, if you want more than I can give via this email. Feel free to pass this info on to any other interested party not currently on my email group list. Drop me an email address of anyone who wishes to be added to the mailing list. This way I feel as though there is a consistent message feeding out to all rather than having it interpreted differently along the way then passed on to others incorrectly.

*Regards,
Harris family*

The return of the test results were bad enough to cause worry in the Harris camp, but the positive news was that the doctors knew more about the damage that had been done and felt they could fix it. I had sustained two broken neck vertebrae and major ligament damage to the base of my skull, which was enough to warrant panic – they decided a serious procedure was in order.

SUNDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

We spoke to the orthopaedic surgeon tonight and she confirmed from the MRI that there was ligament damage at the base of Scott's skull.

The ligament has torn away from the bone and has left a fracture in C5 and C6 vertebrae. The way forward now is to place a 'halo' around

his head attaching it to his skull and this will in turn be attached to a body harness of sorts to hold his head and neck secure until the damage repairs. This procedure will be done tomorrow morning and the halo will stay on for some six to twelve weeks. In the event that the damage does not heal, then fusion will be the next option. Fusion would require the joining of a couple of vertebrae close to his skull which would in turn cause some restricted movement but not severe. At this stage once this has been done they will then turn their attention to gradually waking him up and hopefully removing the breathing tube. What they don't want to do is remove it and then find that they have to reinsert it. I guess we are now buckled in for the long haul. Goodnight all.

*Regards,
Harris family*

Everyone wanted updates, but it was very hard to provide them when not much was happening. Vic didn't want to just put down verbal diarrhoea in his emails, so until anything happened, there was not much he could say.

WEDNESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

Guess you have been wondering where the updates have gone. Sorry, but sometimes it's a little hard to keep upbeat when there's not a lot happening. For the past few days Scott has been a little stubborn. Not wanting to do the things that we want in the time frame that would suit us. He has appeared to be well and truly in a world of his own, doing as he wants when he wants. Today we were greeted with a nurse that told us that she had not witnessed any responses during her shift and that left us a little despondent. She then indicated that the neurosurgeon was thinking of doing an MRI but would need to take the halo off because the metal frame would interfere with the X-ray machine etc. Another set back.

Well, tonight Deb and I decided to treat ourselves to crayfish at the Old England Hotel and let Nicole and Cliff do the visiting. Well, it's as though he doesn't want us there because he decided in our absence to do his little tricks. That's right. Scott does what he wants when he wants. The neurosurgeon came in coincidentally at the time of Nicole's

visit and asked her to give Scott a few commands. Scott accordingly responded in a way that gave the surgeon encouragement, who then stated that we just need to give him more time. So tonight we are back on the positive pills and looking forward to the coming days in a different light to earlier on. Fingers crossed we'll experience a little more of these encouraging signs in the days ahead.

*Regards,
Harris family*

The hardest thing about being in a stable position at that point was that if another trauma patient came in, *BOOM*, straight down the list you went. In some cases, this was a blessing in disguise. In my case, it definitely was because it meant that a tracheotomy was delayed and eventually called off. If it wasn't for the trauma that was going on in the world that day, I would be sporting a memorable scar on my throat that would remind me of something I wouldn't even remember.

SUNDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2008

Hi all,

Today has been our best to date. When we arrived Scott was propped up in bed with the breathing tube removed. His eyes opened today for the first time and his responses were most promising e.g. he was asked to show us two fingers and he gave us the bird. To be serious though, the fact that the tracheotomy was put off on Friday has turned out to be a bit of a godsend. Without the tube, he is breathing unaided and we hope that this will be sustained. We have now jumped the first hurdle and with any sort of luck, three to four days might see him out of ICU and off to a ward to commence rehabilitation. I guess tomorrow will confirm if his progress can be sustained. The stars are now beginning to align.

*Regards,
Harris family*

With the first seventeen days behind us, the next challenge for me was to start living again. The first step back into the game of life was to get me out of the ICU and down to a ward. At this time, the one thing that gave my family a positive vibe was the support from all around

the world. First from my uncle, who was in the Philippines, and then my mate, who was travelling abroad in Mexico.

TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2008

Hi guys,

It is so good to read of Scott's continued progress. It will be a hard time for all. But you know he's a fighter, I'm so happy that he knows what's going on around him, all great signs. Rehab will work wonders.

Love to all,
Uncle John

TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2008

Hi all,

Housekeeping for you first. Scott has moved house. ICU decided that they did not want him any more and have packed him off to a ward. For those who have visited him at The Royal Melbourne ICU on Level 2, South West, you now stay in the lift and continue to the 7th floor. He now lives at Level 7, South West, bed 52. Visiting hours are different to that of ICU where we could all come and go at times that were most flexible. Now his visiting hours are 2-8 pm (strict).

Now for the update: He was moved today and is in a ward for orthopaedic patients. He was placed in a chair for the first time and this will become a four-hourly daily routine from now on. He has strong movement on his left side but at this stage minimal on his right. There is definite feeling in his right leg so we hope that this will repair over time. Tonight we asked him many questions and he responded with hand/finger movements. We asked him to smile and to our shock and amazement he responded accordingly. Tough cookie is this boy/man. His eyes open but at this stage not fully. He can see us and has indicated this fact to us. Today he received a card from some friends. Deb told him and went to describe the card and read it to him. Deb described the front of the card as having an attractive nurse to which he responded by grabbing the card from her and holding it up in front of his face. What progress, eh?! All of this sounds great but it will continue to be a very slow journey.

When his condition improves a little more, he will be shifted to rehab but I'm thinking this is some way off yet. However, given his progress to date, perhaps sooner than later. If you have any questions, please feel free to email them to me and I'll answer individually. At this stage these updates are travelling to all parts of the globe, with his mate Daniel Sneddon in Mexico and his Uncle John in the Philippines.

Regards,
Harris family

By this stage, the news of my accident had spread as far as England. Another two mates from school were enjoying a year abroad when they got wind of the trauma in Melbourne. They had heard about the group email and they wanted in.

TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2008

Hi Vic,

This is Scott Clark, I'm not sure if you know me. I went to school with Scotty and have always been mates with him since our skateboarding days at Research Primary School. I had been seeing a bit of Scotty Harris in the lead up to me heading overseas indefinitely in June this year and when Daniel got on to me the other week I just couldn't believe it, I was in absolute shock. I'm stepbrother with Daniel Sneddon and he's been forwarding me your updates as I've been trying to keep as much up to date as I can with the situation. I have just started to live in London for the next year with another mate, Andrew Hughes, who went to school with Scotty also. We've both been really concerned about Scotty, I was just wondering if you would be kind enough to add Andrew and I to the updates if that was possible?

It must be such a hard time for all of you and its good news to read that he is gradually coming along ok. I'm thinking of Scotty everyday over here and hoping he is going to pull through all right - he's a strong kid.

I hope everything is coming along ok Vic and our wishes to the family.

Kind Regards,
Scott Clark & Andrew Hughes

END OF SAMPLE