

The Rose Water Story

By Ken Aitken ...

... When he was in hospital in February 1996

.... As at July 2009

Summary Page:

In December 1995 I had a severe brain injury falling off a boogie-board in shallow water in the surf at Peregian Beach on the Sunshine Coast of 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 thirteen 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 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 doing 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 in a subtle flow of landscape design and construction. Rather an intangible product to sell and run a business with!! Out of this stage I built a structure for my life: my marriage with Harriet, business and the house plus we had a family.

Harriet and I are into simplicity and recycling. We live in this amazing house built out of trash for \$32,000.00 in 1981 (28 years ago). See the house and garden on my new personal experiences website www.kenaitken.net

- [OUR HOUSE an Overview](#)
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That all changed overnight when I had a simple accident which resulted in severe consequences. I went through a real transformation of life whereby:

TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE DIRECTION: I went through a real transformation of life whereby I went from being:

1. Physical Gardener (Outer Sustainability) >>>>
2. Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability)

1. Outer Sustainability: can certain practices be maintained is what you doing now preparing the way ahead for a new garden which will growing successfully in twenty years time. I ran a small business in upmarket landscape design and construction for wealthy clients around Brisbane. It was called '**New Earth Systems P/L**'. It was a very difficult business in which to make a profit which depended on whether I had costed it properly. Each project was very non-standard and there was a seasonal nature of the work. Every project was a "one off". My former life was not sustainable my creativity in my business couldn't be standardised.

Since my accident, 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 life-long Income Protection, I have time to spend with people in a way I never could do in my busy business.

2. Inner Sustainability: Can your life be maintained? is what you doing now preparing the way ahead for new life? Inner sustainability flows from having a wholistic way of life where problems are dealt with by personal accountability. Inner determination then flows outwards.

Inner Life Gardens Everyone of us has a private space in our lives that we carefully guard. I call it '**The Garden of Life**'. A garden is a personal space you can go out into and to enjoy the peace, the cool air, the shadows of trees, the sun shining with translucent light through tree leaves and palm fronds, the perfume of beautiful blossoms.

No one else comes there except yourself and your family and close friends. They are invited out there with you after you have let them into your house. Strangers who come are intruders and will be dwelt with by the police.

It is the same with relationships. You have enter someone's inner life with their consent. You do this by understanding the persons inherent value and by listening intently to what they say. You are as it were gently knocking on the door of their inner house. If that person trusts you, they will then invite you into the inner garden of their life demonstrating that they accept the value you offer them. Then you can talk with them. They will open their door of their inner life at a later time if you knock. To keep that process going is a Sustainable Relationship. If I act suspiciously or try and crash the door with a sledge hammer, I will not be let in. That is what I call an Unsustainable Relationship.

Some Inner Life Gardens are very ordered whereas others are very weedy as people do not understand their value so anything goes. There are definite values and principles of life which really work. I say 'Go through open doors, not closed doors Otherwise you will get a very sore forehead. Look not at closed doors of the past but look to find new doors of opportunity. That is why I have become an Inner Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability) to hundreds of people around the world to encourage them.

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.

'**The Rose Water Story**' is my story from where I have come from and where I am going to.

The Rose Water Story

By Ken Aitken ...

... When he was in hospital in February 1996

I was up working on a landscape construction site at Noosa Heads on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland in Australia for a friend of mine called John. This was early December 1995. We were staying down the coast further at Peregian Beach with one of John's relatives. We had only been there two days and several of us went boogie-boarding in the surf after work. As a consequence I came off my board in the shallow surf, hitting the sand with my forehead and apparently John had to virtually carrying me out of the water with blood running from my nose. He eventually got an ambulance to Nambour Hospital about half an hour away. This radical, life changing day was on the 4th of December 1995.



Peregian Beach where I had my accident on the 4th of December 1995 a quiet long beach of sand and small waves

I stayed in Nambour till 6th December when I was flown by the medical helicopter to the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane. Unbeknown to the doctors, I had multiple skull fractures. These could not be seen on the x-rays because of air running around in my brain. This resulted in the main cerebral artery being pinched off to the frontal part of my brain (This is the executive section of the brain).

On 8th Dec as a consequence of this clipping off of the blood vessel, I had a big bleed on the brain and I had to have an urgent brain operation.

Because of the bleed, I completely lost my ability to walk, talk and eat solid food. **I had severe ABI (Acquired Brain Injury).**

Ken in a comatose state

December 1995



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.

After coming out of Intensive Care Unit (ICU), I was placed in the Critical Care Section of **M7**, the ward for brain injured people. While I was in **Ward M7**, the doctors believed I had damaged my thirst mechanism. I apparently did not know when to stop drinking. The doctors called this disease, Polydipsia. It was as if I had been in the Sahara Desert for two weeks with insufficient to drink. I had such an insatiable thirst that I dreamed of drinking all the water from the end of a running garden hose. I believed at the time the nurses were

just being difficult when they forcibly limited my water intake to three litres of water a day.

I have since found out from a nursing relative that in such a case as mine, it has been reported that if you drink too much water, your kidneys can fail from water overload. The doctors had to ascertain whether my problem was physical or psychological so everything I drank was recorded on a chart at the foot of my bed. How to get a 230ml - hospital cup of water became the whole goal

of my day. When the nurses came on ward rounds with torches at about four in the morning, I would be awake for the morning round, I would be awake for that welcome light. 'Could I have some water, please?' If I was within the three litres per day, which I was allowed to drink, I could have some.

Polydipsia was such an acute problem that I felt on the edge of insanity. In **M7**, I desperately wanted the doctors to change their minds on the quantity of water I could have. In protest I began throwing anything from cutlery to boxes of tissues out the window. Fortunately, there was a metre wide shelf outside the window, which prevented things from hurtling down from the 7th floor to the pavement below.

Eventually in Feb 1996, I was transferred to the Head Injuries Unit (**HIU** for short) in the same hospital. I still had this major thirst problem. I was so discouraged with this problem of how to get enough water to drink; I almost quit on rehabilitation. It was here that I had a very funny experience. They still had me on water restrictions. I guess they were trying to get to the bottom of the problem.

The nurses suddenly announced to me one night that I was to have a test. I had to fast from 9.00 o'clock that night to 7.00am in the morning. It was never explained to me the reasons for this test and as a result I saw it as the doctor's test, not mine.

I was awake at 11.00 p.m. at night and absolutely dying of thirst. What could I do? I could get into my wheelchair or walk around by hanging onto the walls. I then saw the vase of roses in fresh water, which Harriet my wife, had brought in for St. Valentines Day, the previous day. This night would have been February 15th. Grabbing onto the cupboard doors, I got out of bed. I took the roses and threw them into my wardrobe. I drank the vase of fresh water and said to myself 'That is the best St. Valentines Day present Harriet could have given me!!'.

In the morning, at about 6.30 a.m., I was concerned for the wilted roses. I took the empty vase to the bathroom in my wheelchair. I was busily rinsing out the vase when **Sister Clare** who ran the ward came upon me and asked me 'Did you drink the

water from the vase?' 'Oh no', I lied. 'I'm just getting new water for my roses'.

A week later, my conscience was really nagging me about lying when she was showering me. I said to Sister Clare, 'I have something to say to you. I **DID** drink the water from the vase. I am sorry I lied to you the other week'. Out of that confession came a lot of trust. I began to obtain water for myself and the problem of my thirst quickly went away.

If it was Polydipsia as I now believe it was, I don't know how this event corresponded with my physical thirst. Somehow, the water restrictions were lifted, as the doctors never came back to check on my final outcome. I just know that period of my hospitalisation was **extremely difficult**. I only came to this understanding it was Polydipsia in late 1997. I believed the nursing staff were just being negligent with my water. I have perused the details of all this through my Medical File as I had permission from the Freedom of Information Officer at the PAH but I am none the wiser. (I can drink only two litres / day and not feel thirsty as I did in Hospital).

In **HIU**, therapists taught me to walk again and talk properly. My speech was **very slurred and slow** from what was called dysarthria, which comes from the muscles in your throat being affected. The therapists helped get my scrambled head back together again. In April 1996, I was just beginning to walk again instead of using a wheelchair. I also had to learn to write again. In March 1996, my level of comprehension was such that my speech pathologist had me doing simple definitions of words. My writing was so bad, she had me begin to type them on the computer so she could read it.

From there she had me begin to write a speech in preparation for my homecoming party when I came out of hospital in May. About 100 ++ people had come to see me in hospital over six months. From having to learn to write again I progressed: It began as 'symbolic pictograms' (almost childlike drawings), in **M7**, to very scratchy writing in **HIU**, to readable hand writing and to the use of my computer all over again when I got out of hospital.

Eventually I was able to leave hospital. I had been in hospital six long months. The day I was able to leave **HIU** was a day of intense elation. As Harriet, my wife, drove me down the driveway of **HIU**, I will remember the sense of accomplishment. I had made it! I had been in hospital for six long months from 4th December 1995 to 24th May 1996.

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' but fortunately it was me. 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 can work as well. We own our house well, so we do not have mortgage payments to make every month.

As I have a 'Christian Spirituality', God supplied freely and worked things out for good for us long before I could think it out. As I am on a permanently paid holiday through my life-long Income Protection, I have time to spend with people in a way I never could do in my busy business.

Through this 'Christian Spirituality', there has been an ongoing connection with a Personal Higher Power (God), and has brought healing, restoration and transformation of life purpose.

Ken and Harriet his wife after seven months after the accident

Ken with his wife Harriet at their house at Chambers Flat



In 1981, we built a unique natural house out of recycled timber for a fraction of the price of a new house. People often come out to see this house. I had run an environmental landscape design and construction business for twenty years so I had the skills to put things together like this. This is on our five acres of light open eucalypt bush at Chambers Flat, Brisbane.

The house is largely of glass set into a post and lintel construction of 100 ++ year old broadaxed timbers and sandstone walls. The total concept of indoor-outdoor flow, has a nice ambience to it and the design is unique and lends itself well to future development. See the house and garden on my new personal experiences website:

www.kenaitken.net

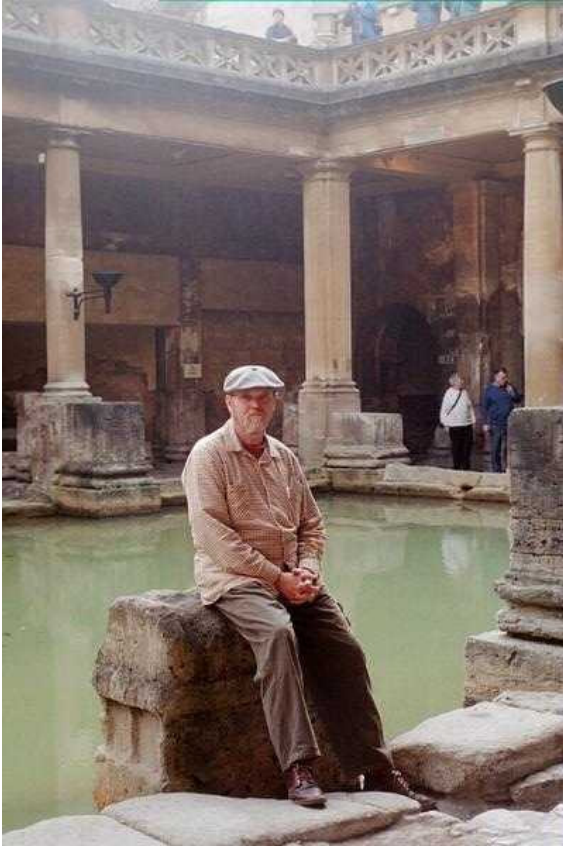
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The house is called '**Ken & Harriet House**' ... it is a great place to live as I largely look after the large garden and acreage. We have a real sense of close community, starting with the family and spreading to many others.

I still do not drive thirteen ++ years 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. It is the main centre for '**New Earth Community**', an international Cyberspace Community.

March 2003: Ken eight years after the accident

A photograph from March 2003 at the ancient Roman town of Bath in England when Harriet, my wife and I went on a four week holiday. See website www.romanbaths.co.uk we had an amazing time for a whole day in the ancient city of Bath ...The Baths are from the first and second



Century from Imperial Rome.

[See the website posts on this trip to England in 2003](#)

The Recycled Man

It is now over thirteen years from this period of time in my life. 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 I said before, for twenty years, I had run my own business in Landscape Design and Construction, doing very creative individual designer gardens for wealthy residential

clients. I was more an artist than businessman. I thought of a landscape as would a sculptor in a solid medium, but I saw it as a three-dimensional piece of space which 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 in a subtle flow of landscape design and construction. Rather an intangible product to sell and run a business with!!

Two specific posts of my past gardens are these:

- [Greenmount Beach Resort](#) ... 28 years on from when I did the garden in 1980
- [Sheehan's Garden](#) in October 2007 House and Garden in West End, Brisbane ... 23 years on from when I did the garden in 1984

I wanted to be successful in making money but the creative side and the financial success of the business were in constant tension. With the landscape business I was in, there always had a severe downturn in winter.

The year of the accident, I had very little work and money was very short as a result. It was the worst year for business I have been through in twenty odd years. I felt under incredible stress and my wife Harriet and two teenage children were really feeling the pressure as well.

I was under such extreme pressure from the lack of work and at a point of desperation. I was ready to give it all away. I didn't know which way to turn as I had invested years of study and resources into my chosen career and now it seemed fruitless. I had finished a B.Sc. at University of Queensland in the early 1970's and had completed most of a Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture at QUT in the late 1980's. I found it impossible to have business and exam deadlines running together and on one very important project, I had let an important exam assignment pass by.

I was more an ideas, admin and marketing sort of person, good at the design side but not so good at the practical implementation side of the business. Because of the fluid nature of a garden, it was very difficult to be involved in just design, without having to get fully involved in the production side.

Give me any site, no matter how difficult and I would come up with a range of possibilities which were practical. I had a very sharp awareness of what I wanted to achieve but not

always the best to make a profit even though I always planned to make one! However, I loved doing what I did.

Unknowingly, I was a landscape sculptor. 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 in a subtle flow of landscape design and construction. Rather an intangible product to sell and run a business with!! Out of this stage however, I built a structure for my life: my marriage with Harriet, business and the our house plus we had a family of two children. I was more an artist than businessman which caused STRESS.

In 1981, we built a unique natural house out of recycled timber which people often come out to see. It was for a fraction of the price of a new house. As I had run an environmental landscape design and construction business for twenty years, I had the skills to put things together like this. This is on our five acres of light open eucalypt bush at Chambers Flat, Brisbane.

The house is largely of glass set into a post and lintel construction of 100 ++ year old broadaxed timbers and sandstone walls. The total concept of indoor-outdoor flow, has a nice ambience to it and the design is unique and lends itself well to future development.

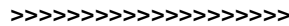
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TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE DIRECTION:

With my brain injury, I went from being:

1. Physical Gardener (Outer Sustainability)..



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 components

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.

Inner and Outer Life:

Everyone of us has a private space in our lives that we carefully guard. I call it '**The Garden of Life**' A garden is a personal space you can go out into and to enjoy the peace, the cool air, the shadows of trees, the sun shining with translucent light through tree leaves and palm fronds, the perfume of beautiful blossoms.

No one else comes there except yourself and your family. Even friends do not just drop in. They are invited out there with you after you have let them into your house. Strangers who come are intruders and will be dwelt with by the police.

It is the same with relationships. You have enter someone's inner life with their consent. You do this by valuing the person with great value and listening intently to what they say, as though it absolutely important. By listening intently (consciously in a rational way and unconsciously with your intuition), you are as

it were gently knocking on the door of their inner house. If that person trusts you, they will then invite you into the garden of their life.

Then you can talk gently back and forth and then you have established a relationship with them. They will open their door of their inner life at a later time if you knock. To keep that process going is a Sustainable Relationship. If I act suspiciously or try and crash the door with a sledge hammer, I will not be let in. That is what I call an Unsustainable Relationship.

Some Inner Life Gardens are very ordered whereas other are very weedy. Some people do not know where they are. There are definite values and principles of life which really work in everyday life. I say 'Go through open doors, not closed doors Otherwise you will get a very sore forehead. Look not at closed doors of the past but expect to find new doors of opportunity in Life in the future which will open up for you'. That is why I have become an Inner Life Gardener (Inner Sustainability) to hundreds of people around the world.

Spirituality:

Spirituality is the unseen dimension of life. This unseen dimension of life has a direct effect on our lives here and now, if we let it. It is a relationship with the universe and the personal higher power (God). We have an outer person (our physical body), middle person of mind, will and emotions, (our soul), inner person (our spirit). If our confidence and sense of identity is only in the first two areas, these can be taken from us in a moment but an ongoing personal relationship with a personal higher power (God) is a permanent restoring aspect of life (i.e.. this is our definition of a sustainable life).

More specifically then, our spirituality is implicit, i.e. is inward, self evident and undefined. It refers to how the individual lives meaningfully with the ultimate questions of life, his or her response to the deepest truths as he or she comprehends these. There is a very real invisible spiritual world. It answers such queries as:

- Who we are as people?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What values should I live by?

It is much deeper than being a rational experience of the mind, or just a belief in something, but is a dynamic quality of life with interacts with everything you do. It has very practical effects on such things as your self image, your work, family, social network and the whole of life.

We all have a spirituality of some kind to explain the world. A spirituality is very powerful in the way it integrates our lives and the lives of many others. In the end, spirituality leads to significance in life. There is initially a Horizontal Spirituality which links us with each other, of me to you and you to me. Then it links us further to the physical world and it gives us directions on our relationship with the Earth and all other living creatures.

Then there is a Vertical Spirituality which gives our relationship with a Personal Higher

Power who is the infinite - personal God. Another way of describing this spirituality is in this way:

The Internal Spirituality: The Interconnectedness of all life: The Spirituality of the Interconnectedness of all things between the living and non living This leads to a horizontal spirituality with the purpose to aid others to a better quality of life and belief system

The External Spirituality: The infinite-personal God Transcendent outside the Created Cosmos This is a vertical spirituality Any healing and restoration has to come here then spread out horizontally to the spirituality detailed below.

For me, I in having a Christian Spirituality, means that there are two parts to the world: An invisible Spiritual Realm and a very visible Created realm. The first part '**The Invisible Spiritual**' leads to a focus on the Presence of God through the Holy Spirit with what I call a Christian spirituality. It is a '**Spirituality from Jesus Christ**'. This is quite different to a Christian religious approach. See the differences below.

When I speak about Christianity, I mean a Christianity which is focused on the resurrected Jesus Christ. It is also focused on the Holy Spirit who He gave to be His personal representative to each person here on earth. It is a Spirit-filled Christianity and not a ritualised, hierarchal Christianity that has Corporation view of itself. Harriet (my wife) and I personally share in the life of this '**Spirituality from Jesus Christ**'. It is this life which has sustained us and our family of two children since my severe brain injury thirteen ++ years ago. It enabled us to go on four week holidays to England in 2003, Italy in 2005, and France in 2007 and Canada in 2008.

With having no mortgage, we are free to move around the world. See our travel posts at: www.kenaitken.net for the some of the places we have been to over the last few years.

Spirituality is quite different to Religion. Spirituality is implicit (inwardly self evident and undefined). It refers to how an individual lives meaningfully with the ultimate questions of life, his or her response to the deepest truths of the universe as he or she apprehends these. It answers such queries as:

- Who are we as a people?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What values should I live by?

Religion is explicit (outwardly evident and defined) and is marked by four things: a cult, creed, code (ethics) and community (which is more inward looking).

My concern and passion now is to make a major difference in the world. This is to connect and share with other survivors as well everyone around the world and share some of my hope and love for life.

As at July 2009