

# Talking his way to a better life!

## Rhett Brown



Earlier this year we heard that Rhett, a client of Mclsaac Caregiving since 2005 was about to embark on a new challenge in his life after four years in a wheelchair. We thought his story might interest a number of you, so, in a relatively condensed manner, here it is...

Rhett fell from a 2 meter balcony in July of 2004 and suffered a C6-7 Complete Asia A break to his spine. After the usual rehabilitation period, he ended up living at Oakhaven Private Hospital, a residential facility in Whangarei. In his own words, he says "I wallowed along, angry and in self pity through until April 2006, when on waking up to a blinding light one morning, I decided to change my life from that point on!" And he sure has done that.

The last time Rhett and I talked, he had just moved into a purpose built home for himself, and was looking forward to the next challenge in his life. He knew back in April 2006 that he had a desire to do something fulfilling, but didn't quite know what. He also knew that studying wasn't for him. As fate and a good friendship would have it, his next challenge came from a casual conversation with a friend involved in OSH over a cup of coffee. The friend, an OSH Inspector ran seminars on Health and Safety. Rhett made an offer to talk to a group about his accident. For several months nothing happened, then, he was asked to relate his story to groups of people who could easily suffer the same fate. Rhett spoke to a group undergoing training for scaffolding. He was then asked to speak again to a similar group in KeriKeri. After three talks in a month, Rhett thought he had found his new vocation.

At around the same time, Rhett went back to Burwood Hospital for hand surgery. While he was there he talked to the people at Kaleidoscope (part of the NZ Spinal Trust) about assistance with getting him into a speaker's role. They helped develop some structure, and brokered an arrangement with ACC to assist Rhett with Training for Independence. By this stage, he had given another two talks on Health and Safety for Fonterra, and through the Articles written on him on the Department of Labour Website, was asked by Site Safe to assist them in developing a Promotional DVD. This gave him "exposure", and he now has speaking engagements with Hawkins Construction throughout the North Island, and with a private H & S company in Southland.

ACC have funded Rhett to attend a Professional Speaker's Boot camp. "It was the most inspirational, motivating three days of my life" he says. Additional computer training, again assisted by ACC has help Rhett build his own web site, and to promote his speakers opportunities. He says ACC have been very encouraging towards his efforts, have been more than fair about the way his "work" impacts on his ACC funding. His first after dinner speech is about his own life: Deerstalker, Policeman, and the four near death experiences he has experienced in his 53 years.....

His goals for the next year centre on small but achievable steps. He wants to deliver at least 20 keynote speeches (Did I mention that he's now well paid for them) and to do a little bit of travel to Australia. Those keynote speeches will take him all over New Zealand, so his care staff has to be able to travel with him. As you would expect, some have family commitments so can't travel, and others are able to. When Rhett's away, Mclsaac Caregiving assists him to keep his team together by covering for the days they aren't working due to his travelling. Rhett's initial offer to speak to a group about his accident has turned into a new vocation.

One that he's really keen to develop and take to the next level. Rhett told us that by being able to focus on his goals it has made him a better person. "I've become a better person, and by being a better person, I engender more support for myself and I know I will get, and retain better carers. After hearing those words, I asked Rhett what he does to ensure he retains his caregivers. His initial response was" I get my builders hammer and a six inch nail, and when I get a good one, I nail their feet to the floor! More seriously though I've learned to create an environment where caregiver's enjoy and want to come to work. It's my attitude towards caregivers that makes the difference; I try to remain courteous and to use my manners. It's amazing how far a Please and Thank you will take you. – If I didn't have my caregivers, I'd be back in an institution!"

Rhett – our congratulations on your achievement. Well done and good luck for the future.