

# Ryan's Story

Father of two children, was a bricklayer and is now studying nursing in second year.

## **Introduction**

So where do I start? My name is Ryan and I am 35 years old and have two daughters. I had a tricky start to life and when I was a teenager I actually had to leave school at fourteen, not by my choosing. I had nowhere to live. I did try to continue school by working at a cafe, you know Thursday nights and Saturdays but then financially, it wasn't enough money to eat and do everything. So, I left school and went and worked full time. I'd always resented my mates that got to finish school so it was always on my 'tick list' when I was old enough and big enough, to finish Year 12 and then go to university. However, I was lucky enough to get an apprenticeship and that led to bricklaying and laboring for just over ten years. But I realised that I can't be a labourer all my life and decided that nursing would be a good choice for me. I think in about 2011, I just said *"I want to become a nurse"* and that's what I intend to do. I guess no-one really took me seriously and I didn't really verbally talk about it much like the *"gunna's"* – I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that ...I just went about it in my own way

So I enrolled in a TAFE Bridging course, the TPC course, Tertiary Preparation Course just to brush up on, hone up all my skills because I've just been so long between drinks. That was going to set me in good stead. I'm very thankful that I took that avenue ....I knew that it' would be pretty diverse here and everything so I knew that I would... it's not like school; I had a fair few difficult and tumultuous years at school. Yes, so I came with the intentions of heads down, bums up, you know, have the blinkers on. It wasn't about coming to university and socialising, I also didn't have the



expectation, family expectations of my mum and dad telling me, you know, *"You need to go to uni because you need to get a life or you need a career"*.

## **Reactions**

All my mates from the building trade, they can't believe that I'm back at school but the few people that I probably associate most with now are a little bit older than me, you know, they've pretty much just taken their hats off. They can't believe that I'm taking on something as strenuous and with the load that it carries, like, they're pretty sympathetic, they're just glad that it's me and not them I suppose. But again, it's not something that's deterred me. Yes, it makes you feel good. Obviously, you know, you tell people what you're doing or the direction that you're going in and yes, I haven't had any one that's turned around and said *"Oh what are you doing? You're an idiot"* or *"You're stupid. Stick with what you're doing"*, you know, because they know that... I guess the people that are around me know that I'll make decisions that are only going to be beneficial to me or to my family.

I chose whatever my surroundings offered me or threw at me, it would have had to be pretty good to knock me down because, yes, I guess the school of hard

knocks or being knocked down in the past, it sort of makes you more resilient sort of thing and I know that half the stuff that I'd probably dealt with when I was younger I wouldn't have to deal with here because people are pretty focused and pretty driven here, like the majority of people are anyway and they're all here for the main reason of studying, I guess, yes. With the HECS fees as big as what you get, you don't want to be mucking around too much.

Basically by the end of this year I want to be fully off the tools in a sense because I know my workload will increase here and for me to maintain the workload here I realise that I'm going to have to eradicate other things and I can't eradicate the family! I wouldn't want to eradicate the family but full-time work is what I'm walking away from to focus full-time in passing here or being able to graduate from here.

### ***Why now...?***

I had no direction, no goals set when I was young, you know. That's why I'm back here now so to speak. So, when I see these young ones here and not the ones that have been forced into it or expected but when I see these young ones here that want to be here and they've chosen a career and then they tell me what they've chosen, I go away and think *"What compelled them to go in that direction?"*

But I just take my hat off to them because... and anyone that's young and goes through the discipline that universities put you through or the wringer that the university puts you through and you make it out the other side, I take my hat off. I was a very spiteful, resentful person of other people's successes growing up probably because I didn't have half of those things growing up but now I just appreciate, I'm just in awe of it. I really do appreciate driven people or people that are goal-

orientated and driven, you know, and maybe in the past I would have gone *"I wish I was like them"* but now, I just take my hat off and think *"Good on you"* and now I have my own goals to achieve so that's... even like if I have a bad day or feel sick or if it's raining or something I'll always find something positive.

I've grown up where, you know, growing up on the streets and crying yourself to sleep. If the sun was shining, you know, even the times when I got suicidal trying to overdose and do silly things in life and then crying out for help, you know, I'd wake up and just say *"The sun's shining"* or I heard the birds and seen a kookaburra, that's enough to get me through the day, you know, whereas now I've got a lot of good positive things in my life so it's very hard for people to make me become negative.

### ***Managing work, life and study***

I don't have much of a social life now because I don't choose to. I like it under my rock; underneath my rock is quite comfortable and quite good and, you know, I'm becoming a night person. I'm on the cusp of what they do call the grumpy old man but I'm enjoying it, I'm embracing it. Definitely the subject content is just really enlightening and I'm just really enjoying being opened up and being given these different perspectives because you grow up... or the old saying *"You think you know everything or you think you're always right"*, you know?

I haven't come across arrogant people that think they're too smart and know they're too smart. I've found that people are very humble here and, you know, particularly in my own subject like everyone's on the same boat, you know, we're all tired, we're all overwhelmed in the sense of... all over-worked so to speak but in that sense I'm not really overworked, I'm not really that overtired and I'm not really that overwhelmed, you know what I mean. It's about readjusting

and I've had worse stuff in my life I guess and that just comes with age I suppose. I don't know. Yes, I'm enjoying the experience still.

I also work in a club during the week but because I'm a supervisor I can kind of have a bit of influence on my shifts so I make sure I've got door shifts the day before uni. That means I can do all my readings whilst at the door at the club because after 8:00 o'clock I'm just sort of sat there doing nothing so it means I can get through maybe 10 journals in a night.... reading and just highlight ready for the next day. I guess you can just be a bit creative in how you manage your time; start everything early.

### ***Final Thoughts...***

Another reason for coming to university was I really wanted to have a generational change; I wanted to show my kids by example, that you really can do anything if you put your mind to it. And I'm really grateful I did because it has been fantastic to actually show my children what they can do with effort.

For my girls I just know that there's a big, wide, ugly world – isn't always pretty and I want my girls to get an education or go as far as they can with their education. As long as they do something that they're happy to do and what they're enjoying and yes, the only way they can do that is by: *"Monkey see, monkey do"* type attitude I guess. I bring them on campus, you know, I love my kids seeing what I'm doing, I have taken them onto the building sites too, so yes, I bring them here. It's about showing them what you do...I know that there's only positive outcomes by me bringing my children into a place like this and yes, I'll probably continue bringing them here.

So I'm gonna make sure I can do it. I suppose a little bit is also, if it's not too personal to share, I always had my father in the back of my head going *"You're a stupid boy, you'll never get anywhere."* And there's that little child past that just wants to go *"Nah nah, got there."*