



**BOUNCING BACK**

Insight has called tonight's show Bouncing Back but it's really about much more than that. We're going to talk about resilience - why some people emerge from the toughest of times often enhanced, while others struggle to cope at all.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Resilience isn't just about getting back to where you were. It's often about gaining strength and wisdom from adversity. So, are you born with those skills or can you learn them? Tonight, some well known Australians share their stories and we talk to a scientist about the keys to resilience. Welcome, everybody. A big welcome to all of you and thanks for joining us. Jimmy Barnes, let me start with you. You've battled alcohol and drug addiction and you've just recently, I think, or relatively recently bounced back from a lifesaving heart operation. Do you think you're resilient?

*JIMMY BARNES:* Yeah, I think so. I'm, you know, from fairly tough stock. I think genetics has got a lot to do with it. Glaswegians, Scotsmen, you know, I just, you learn to, you know, survive and adapt really, to get used to change. Being an immigrant, I think, was part of it as well. My family, you know, picked up and moved to Australia at an early age so, you know, we learnt to change. And I think if you learn to change and grow from the experience, you know, you can, you can, you know, bounce pretty back easy from all sorts of things.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** How low did you go?

*JIMMY BARNES:* How long have you got? I mean, no, you know, I worked very hard and I sort of played very hard and it got to a point where, you know I must say, I've been sober and straight for five years now. Probably, just over five years ago I was pretty close to death, I would imagine. You know, if I hadn't of stopped doing what I was doing to myself, I probably wouldn't have been sitting around talking about it now, for sure, and I certainly wouldn't have survived the heart operation that I just went through, you know. So very low.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Ruth Ritchie, you're a newspaper columnist and your husband was a high-powered CEO in the advertising industry. Now, your life changed in a split second, didn't it, a few years ago? Tell us what happened?

*RUTH RITCHIE, AUTHOR, "WATERLEMON":* I was at home with my 3-month-old baby watching DVDs of 'Six Feet Under', ironically, and I got a call from a friend who was out cycling with my husband that he'd come off the bike, was in a coma and was being airlifted to Royal North Shore Hospital.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And that was the beginning of an extraordinary journey. Tell us what happened.

*RUTH RITCHIE:* Well, that was about 3.5 years ago. We were... on the spot we were given the 50% chance of survival, which I took as extremely good news. I thought they were great odds, like, you know, short odds on a race horse. I thought "Oh, that's marvellous, if half of the people in this situation would live, then my husband, Johnny, would be one of them."

**JENNY BROCKIE:** OK, so that's the first key to understanding how you bounced back. Keep going.

*RUTH RITCHIE:* Well, either... I mean, is that denial, am I completely stupid, or is that optimism? So, then as it



*unfolded, within about three or four days it was clear that Johnny was going to live and then they gave us very short odds of him ever leaving an institution.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: This is because of brain damage?**

*RUTH RITCHIE: Very severe brain injury. He was operated on that night. The doctor on the CareFlight helicopter who saved his life, without a doubt saved his life and certainly saved his quality of life regarding the severity of the brain damage, he had given us...he gave us the 50% survival chance. We became friends over a very unusual series of coincidence. We became friends. And when I was researching to write a book about this and I went back over it with him and he said, "Oh, did I say 50%?" It's much more like 20% to 30%." I thought "Wow!" 50% had seemed fantastic to me.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And would that have made a difference to you if he'd said 20%, 30%, do you think?**

*RUTH RITCHIE: Who knows? I really am a bit thick in the way I – in the way I absorb the information. I knew it was terrible.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Maybe you're just optimistic.**

*RUTH RITCHIE: Yeah, yeah. I think had I known, had I known the full extent of what it would be and what the journey would be and that it would be perhaps worse after 18 months than 18 days, I don't know that I could have been so... Pollyanna about it.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Walter Mikac, your life changed dramatically in an instant too, didn't it, 11 years ago, when your wife, Nanette, and your daughters Alannah and Madeline were killed at Port Arthur. I think we all looked at you during that time and wondered how on earth you were ever going to get through that experience. Can you share with us a little bit of how that journey has been for you?**

*WALTER MIKAC: Sure. Well, it's been – it's been a tough journey in many ways. It's... in those early... those first few weeks, it was...it was bit of a blur. I mean, I think... I personally think that the body is able to protect you quite well with the chemicals it releases to try and get you through that period. But, I mean, that was... that was really tough. And it became a case of just how do I get through each moment. And I suppose what really.. When it really started to be there's some point in going on was when I made two decisions. One, I said I really want to do something that was going to make their lives live on or for them to be remembered, so there was going to be some sort of a legacy to them, and also not to them but all those other people who lost their lives there. And secondly, to try and minimise the possibility of that happening again. Because, really, when you look at that situation, you've got one person who's been able to create that much carnage. It really came down to a question of "How did this happen?" and the whole issue of semiautomatic firearms. So for me, they became the burning issues, and these were the two powerful motivators that I sort of had to latch on to.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And when did you latch on to them? At what point did you...were you able to see and focus enough to realise that those two things would help you?**

*WALTER MIKAC: Well, I mean in the early days there was a period which was pretty toughWHERE You know, it was interesting what Jimmy was saying but for me I did seek refuge in alcohol because from that point in time from when you've had that drink where you don't remember any more, to when you wake up, there's this...there's relief.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Numbing.**

*WALTER MIKAC: You don't have to think about.. You're not conscious and you don't have to think about the*



*ramifications of what happened...of what's happened and what you're going to do in the future. So that was...that was certainly something that happened in the early days.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And were you aware that that could have become a problem for you? Was there a point where you thought, "Oh-oh, I'd better watch this"?

*WALTER MIKAC:* It did become a bit of a pattern and it was something that I was conscious about, definitely. The other thing I was conscious about was people wanting - because I'm a pharmacist, recommending that I should take medication to ease the situation. I had some bizarre phone calls from people saying, "Oh, look, I've got the perfect tablet that's going to help you get through this," and I just started laughing. I said, "Look, I've got a whole pharmacy, I can take my pick, I can make a cocktail." So it really came down to a point where I wanted to while it was tough, while it was not easy to deal with it, I wanted to experience the full gamut of emotion of it because I think my thought at the time was that by doing that, that I was going to be able to hopefully get insights and experience to share some of that down the track.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Marjorie Lindholm, I'd like to welcome you and your mum, Peggy, from Colorado. Thanks very much for joining us. Now, Marjorie, you were a 16-year-old high school student at Columbine High School in 1999 when two gunmen killed 13 people there. You spent four hours trapped in a science room and watched your teacher bleed to death. And I'm only going into this detail because I want people watching this to understand actually what you've been through. We do all look at these things in the news and we try to imagine what it would be like. How did you go on living after that experience as a 16-year-old?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* It was very difficult. It was very difficult. I didn't deal with it well at all. It took many, many years in order for me to live a normal life after that.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** When you say you didn't deal with it well at all initially, what do you mean?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Well, I had dropped out of high school and I had tried to go to college but I was too scared of the classroom at that point so I had failed out for a few years. I couldn't talk about that day, I couldn't talk about what I had seen that day. Even my mother didn't really know what happened to me that day until about five years later when I was finally able to talk about it with her. So it was very difficult.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And how did you get to the point, Marjorie WHERE you could talk about it with your mum, five years on?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Well, really it was because of her. She had told me to start journaling, because she's a counsellor and really deals with people who deal with PTSD, so I started journaling.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** PTSD, I should just point out to people, is post-traumatic stress disorder, in case they don't know. Yeah, go on.

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Well, writing about it made it so I could talk about it, and eventually talking about it made it so I could sit in a classroom again and I'm back in college now. You know, but really it was because of her, so..

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Peggy, what was it like for you watching, as a counsellor too, watching your daughter unable to speak about such an extraordinary event that she'd been through?

*PEGGY LINDHOLM:* It was very, very sad, very sad. Broke my heart.



**JENNY BROCKIE:** And how did you manage that with her? How did you get her to the point where she could write that journal?

*PEGGY LINDHOLM:* Well, it's a day at a time - you just get through one day at a time, one step at a time and you try and stay on track. I tried to listen to what she had to say but she didn't want to talk.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And Marjorie, looking back now, what, what was it – Do you remember the moment when you decided that you wanted to talk? And what did it feel like when you finally did talk about it?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Yeah, it felt, it felt amazing because it's like I had carried it on my shoulders this whole time and I kept it a secret and I never wanted anyone to know what happened to me that day. I never wanted to talk about it, I thought it was too horrible to say. And then when I could tell people about it then...then they could relate to me and they could help me with it and it wasn't any more a secret and it was really nice. And it was nice to have the support of my family and my friends at that point, you know. And just the consequences of talking, you know, it turned into a wonderful book that is now being used in high school curriculum in America. And so hopefully it really helps with these situations. I think so much good has come from, you know, the journaling and, you know, just taking the steps to heal.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** I was going to ask you about the other events and the impact that they have on you in terms of your capacity to cope with that journey, or that, I suppose, just moving on in your life, and particularly what happened when the Virginia Tech shootings happened recently. Did that have a big impact on you and did it affect you at some fundamental level, do you think, in terms of how you felt about yourself and how you felt about what had happened?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Yeah, it really did. Every time a school shooting happens it definitely brings back the memories of what happened to me that day. You relive that day like it's happening all over again and then when you see the pain in the victims' eyes and everything, you know what that's like because it was in yours once. With the Virginia Tech shootings it was especially difficult because right now I'm in college and the one thing that helped me go back to school is, knowing that these shootings do not happen at the university level here. With the Virginia Tech shooting that changed and, you know, I have to continue to go to school and continue with my education, and so it's very difficult to walk in those doors again. And, you know, knowing that this is happening all over now at any grade level is very difficult for me.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Walter, do you have a similar reaction when things happen, when you hear about other shootings, does it set you back in some sense in terms of your resilience or capacity to deal with things?

*WALTER MIKAC:* It automatically reignites those emotions just so strongly. And I actually had a question for Marjorie. I'm not sure if I can ask her. Of course you can.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Of course you can.

*WALTER MIKAC:* Marjorie, firstly I just wanted to say that I feel for you and I relate to you. And it's interesting since Virginia Tech has happened and you've had your had George Bush address people there and saying that the people were in the wrong place at the wrong time, which I was actually a little bit surprised at, and there was really no mention at all of the firearms issue. I'm just wondering whether... how you feel about that firearms issue.

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* I know that a lot of the world sees Americans as obsessive about guns and that we need to have tighter restrictions on guns. I, however, am not against owning a firearm. I think that, you know, there's a lot of good reasons to own a firearm. I think there's loopholes in gun shows and whatnot, and I think that the system is



*working on closing those. But in general I'm not against owning a weapon.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** OK, I'd like to talk to some of the people here about what you've heard. And Jane Barnes, I'd like to ask you about this because I think you're perceived very much in public as the stabiliser in your family. That's certainly... Look at Jimmy - he's drawing his eyes up, saying I don't quite know what you were saying there. I think it was "Of course," was it?

*JIMMY BARNES: Yeah, I don't know why they would think that about me.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** I just wonder, as somebody who is perceived that way, how do you think you would have coped if any of these things had happened to you?

*JANE BARNES: Oh. I'm a mentally resilient person more than a physically resilient person and I think that I probably would have sought out expert advice, help. I'm very much a problem-solver, I'm an optimist, like Ruth, and, I just think that's how I probably would have dealt with things.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Is being an optimist important for you?

*JANE BARNES: Yes, I think it's been, yeah, you know, an asset to me.*

*JIMMY BARNES: I think Jane's also a realist as well. She really likes to she doesn't let things sort of sit and fester, she approaches problems straightaway and sometimes pushes people around her to do the same, which has been a really good thing, you know.*

*JANE BARNES: I'm a believer in like delayed gratification. Like I teach my kids to do the most difficult thing first thing and then the rest of the day is easy, you know, just gets better.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** So face the challenge up-front.

*JANE BARNES: Face it as soon as you can and get on with it because life's too short.*

*JIMMY BARNES: I think it's in human nature to be resilient. I think people, you know, naturally bounce back. You know, you'd be surprised how what you can do under pressure and, you know, when something occurs, something horrible like has happened to a lot of people here, you know, you just have to... you don't have a choice. You lie down and die or you pick yourself up and do something about it. And I think most people would be surprised what they're capable of doing. You know, I just, you know, people deal with trauma or, you know, hardship every day, you know, and in all sorts of... in every walk of life, you know, in Australia as well. And they just...it's all relative. It could be life-threatening or it can be, you know, or just, you know, it always seems, you know, overwhelms you but you still get up and get over it.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Is that the case for you, Walter? I mean, if anyone had painted this scenario to you before it happened, how would you have imagined you'd cope?

*WALTER MIKAC: Um... I probably. Yeah, I probably would have thought, maybe would have taken that first option of just of removing myself out of the picture but it's...it's interesting because I think when there was definitely a strength sent to me - and you can you can interpret that in any way that you want - I mean, a higher power. But there's definitely moments where you think, "How did I get up there and do that? How did I get up at the funeral and speak and how did I make a good argument at that gun rally and make some sort of difference?" And it really did shock me sometimes that that was there. And I don't know the exact formula for it but I do think that each and every one of us does have that in them, it's just a case of how you go about finding it.*



**JENNY BROCKIE:** In a moment we'll hear another truly extraordinary story and we'll look at whether resilience is in our genes or whether we can learn it. And you're about to meet a man who's also been through one of the toughest experiences imaginable. I should warn some of you might find this story distressing, but it's inspiring too. Here's Amy Laging.

**BUSHFIRE STORY:**

**REPORTER:** Amy Laging

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Leave her alone.*

**There's always plenty of work to do on a farm and Wayne Griffith is always willing to lend a hand. This property near Port Lincoln in South Australia belongs to Wayne's daughter and son-in-law.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Come on.*

**Wayne often makes the long journey here from Adelaide to see family and help out. It was on one such visit in January 2005 that things went horribly wrong.**

*ANTON ENUS, SBS NEWS: At least eight people, including two children, have been killed in raging bushfires in South Australia.*

*T V REPORTER: Australia's first major bushfire of the summer, and from the air it's clearly a bad one.*

**Among the fatalities were Wayne's grandchildren who lived on the farm - 2-year-old Jack Borlase and his sister, 3-year-old Star. Also dead, Wayne's wife of 38 years, Judy. Wayne put the three of them in a car so they could escape the approaching blaze while he got in a ute and went in search of water.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: We started heading off, I followed them out. And we'd only probably come out the drive and got, oh, maybe probably 50m up the road, then instantly it was like somebody turning on the gas burner on a stove. We had instant fire around us and we just had flames, I'd say 20 feet high. These big embers the size of my fist flying around the car, you know, just glowing embers. The heat was so strong it just threw me back. There's no way I could get out, you know. And I.. So I couldn't help them.*

**All Wayne could do was huddle in a ball in his ute to protect himself from the reported 1,800-degree heat outside while watching the horror evolve in the other car just metres away.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: The windscreen started to melt in the car, it melted from the top and it just curled down like molten glass, just curled down on to the instrument panel of the car and the fire just raced in, went to the headlining of the Land Rover and then just engulfed all the interior of the car. And at that stage I just hung my head down, I didn't want to look, I just... I was just in tears, you know. Sorry. And so I just, I just stayed there and cried for a while and then the next time I looked up, Judy was there and then she just took on a skeletal form in front of me. Skin and everything just fell off her face, you know. I can't get that out of my head.*

**By the time the fire subsided, Wayne himself was nursing serious burns. Hours later, his daughter and a Good Samaritan found him on the road and took him to the local hospital where Wayne was later flown to Adelaide.**

*ROD MCREDMOND, ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE: We had him on the stretcher, we just picked the stretcher up from the ambulance and his hands were not... they were black, well, not really black but you could see they were burnt.*



**In the long weeks and months that followed, the physical and mental path to recovery was rocky.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: I'd actually written a list on ways to kill myself and I'd narrowed that down to two different ways, that I'd use one of those to do it. It was really lush and green and it was a beautiful area along here.*

**Today, Wayne takes us to see the memorial the family has built.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: This is the site where it all happened.*

**REPORTER: Their car was right here?**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Yep, right here, right in this spot. You can see some of the aluminium here where it.. They were all parts of the car. This is what's left of one of the alloyed wheels.*

**The memorial is a place for the family to reflect on the good things they remember about Judy, Star and Jack.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: She was an incredible woman, I think any of the family would tell you the same. And then little Star, she was, oh, she had a real bubbly personality. She... and she had long curly hair, really curly hair, it was natural, you know. And everybody used to be.. They'd envy her with this curly hair, all the women of course. And then Jack, he was a real little farmer's boy. He was in everything out on the farm. I used to carry him around on my shoulders and he'd sit up there and he'd grab the tops of my ears just like that, he'd just walk around holding them like this. Really nice little chap. He would have been a great little farmer but I come up the road and I see the trees still recovering and that, and then I look down the road and I see this memorial site, I think we lost three of our family here but they don't recover, you know. The trees regenerate, we don't.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Wayne, thanks so much for coming in and sharing your story with us. And I know... I'm getting really choked up actually. I know you find it really hard to talk about but I know you want to talk about it as well. And I wonder how important a part of your recovery that process is - of just being able to talk.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: I've found it's been very important. I found out after I got out of hospital, we had to go and have the funerals and then from the funerals we came back and we had to do a memorial service in Adelaide for mainly Judy, for everybody who knew her there. And then I had to get with the police and do a report on every minute of that day and what I'd done and what I'd been through, times. And they came around to my house and spent six hours one day there with me, going through it, and they were fantastic. I'd break down, they'd stop and let me recover and go on. And then I spent another three hours in Adelaide in their headquarters and after that I felt very drained and very emotional but by the same token I felt that has eased a bit of a load, you know.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: There's an echo of what Marjorie was saying about talking after five years and that.**

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Yes. I did go through a stage after that where I became introverted really, and didn't want to go out. If I had to go to the shops, I'd make sure I was the first one at the shops, first thing in the morning, and I'd be out before hardly anybody got in there. I'd go down really late at night, I just didn't want to see people. But in the back of my mind I knew talking about these things actually does help you. It takes a long time to Even now, I talk about it I still get upset but I know every time I do it I'm lifting a little bit of the load off of me. So, you know, I talk as much as I can, I try to talk to people who have been burns survivors and trying to tell them what to expect and what they'll be like at the end of it, type of thing. I've used my body, photos of myself, from photos in the hospital where I was burnt and what I'm like now. I strip off in the hospitals and show them. I show the photos what I was like and*



*what I am now.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Richie Poulton, you're a behavioural scientist and you're in charge of a really fascinating long-term scientific study in New Zealand. You and your team have been credited with discovering this so-called resilience gene. What is it? Tell us about it?

*RICHIE POULTON, DIRECTOR, DUNEDIN STUDY:* Well, we started And I must say before I explain the story about this gene, it's very humbling to hear these incredibly harrowing stories. We didn't start trying to understand these extremes, we just wanted to try and nut out that old puzzle of why is it when two people who experience the same sort of adversity, why is it that one person seems to sail on through pretty much unscathed and in some cases get stronger whereas another person succumbs very quickly. And in the past people had thought or posited psychological or cognitive explanations as the core of what's going on. We thought as non-biologists, as behaviourists, maybe it was something to do with individual differences in genetic endowment. So we went searching for some specific genes that may, in interaction with or working in concert with certain life experiences, explain why some people succumb and others do not. The first thing we focused on was the kiddies who grew up in very adverse environments, soaking up a lot of maltreatment, violence, sexual violence, lots of changes in the home environment, changes in primary caregiver and so forth. Why is it some of those kids grow up to maltreat others?

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And others don't.

*RICHIE POULSON:* And others do not. And we focused on a gene called the MOA-A gene and found that it, in combination with the life experiences, predicted who would end up being violent and aggressive to others. The gene - this is critical - the gene by itself told us nothing. OK, so the genes by themselves aren't the key. It's the genes working in concert with the certain life experiences. And people have said it's not until you get the challenge that you really know what you're made of.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** But are you saying that some people are predisposed to cope with the challenge better? Is that what your research shows?

*RICHIE POULSON:* Yes, yes. If this were a general population sample, two-thirds of this room would have the protective version, the resilience version of this gene, and one-third the risk or vulnerability version. If we move to a different outcome - depression and life stress, one-third of this room would have what they call the resilience or the protective version, two-thirds would have the vulnerability version, and that's just the way it is. You know, these things are allotted us in life. But it's important to note that the genes are not deterministic, OK. If you have the gene, the vulnerability version, it doesn't mean you're necessarily going to develop these problems. They only work... it's like a light switch. The environment or risk factor or life experience turns on the genes and then they come to the fore, whatever they are, whatever's latent in you will manifest, and then you'll learn things, you'll learn things in the real world. You'll learn to cope and you'll apply different strategies and you will get your way through, I mean, like these very courageous people are talking about tonight.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** So can you tell who's got it and who hasn't, this gene, this magic gene that we all want?

*RICHIE POULSON:* Not by looking at you. But I could ask everyone in this room who's above 25, they probably know whether they've got the vulnerability version for developing depression because most people would have had a sufficient number of life events by the age of 25 to know if they are susceptible to becoming sad in the face of life stress. You don't need to go and test folk often. They'll know from their life experiences.



**JENNY BROCKIE:** Judith, you run workshops in schools teaching children to be resilient. How do you do it?

*JUDITH PAPHAZY, CONSULTANT PSYCHOLOGIST:* Alright, well, we put children - say Grade 5, Year 5 children who may be 11 or 12, 10, 11, 12 - together and ask them to talk about some of the things that have happened into their lives and how they've coped with it and who have been the people who have been important to them. And you pull out the threads of what resilience is and how you see it and then you say, "Now how do we do this? What can you do? How can you help?" And in schools we're using the older children, or they're doing it themselves, to help the younger children to problem-solve, how to make friends, how to get on. Some of them helped younger children to learn to read. They do a little bit of extra with them at recess time.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** So is it about giving them a sense of control to some degree?

*JUDITH PAPHAZY:* To some extent. Some extent of the control of their environment. But the fact that they've got all these positive attributes that they can put to work to be... to feel better about themselves and to develop a sense of community, to develop a sense of caring for each other, and that's really what we want. We want to bring up children who are competent, caring and have a sense of community.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Well, what happens to the children who don't have those things, don't have people they can trust, for example, or find their lives going off the rails? We're talking about resilience - whether we're born with it, whether we can learn it and if we can learn it, how. We've heard about the importance of trust in a child's life but what happens when a young person doesn't have support and has started going off the rails? Amy Laging's been looking at one approach to teaching resilience.

**OPERATION NEWSTART STORY:**

**REPORTER:** Amy Laging

**Canoeing might look like fun but for Wade McGrath it's anything but.**

*WADE MCGRATH:* I don't like it because I don't like swimming, I can't swim. Just falling out just scares me.

**The rest of the camp is no picnic either.**

*WADE MCGRATH:* It's really hard walking like just ks with 15 kilo backpacks on. Like you struggle. On the first night I just wanted to go home.

**The 14-year-old is here with seven other young boys from Melbourne's west who are classed as being at risk. Put simply, they're not coping too well with their lives. Put bluntly, they act like troublemakers to varying degrees.**

*WADE MCGRATH:* I like to pick fights with teachers and some like older people, I like just arguing with them because they have to give up because they don't like taking it too far, so I feel like I always win so I just keep doing it.

*JAMES:* Disrupting the class, just being the class clown and that.

*BOY:* Mostly stealing cars, like just destroying stuff, lighting fires, charged for arson and stuff like that.

*MAN:* OK, come over and raft up again.

**This week-long hiking and canoeing camp in western Victoria is the first stage of a 2-month program aimed**



**to help get these guys back on track. It's called Operation Newstart.**

*LEADING SENIOR CONSTABLE MATT MUDIE, OPERATION NEWSTART WESTERN: A lot of these guys come to us and haven't had much success in their life and probably don't have A very high opinion of themselves and don't know what they're capable of achieving.*

*JAMES: My hook's in your back. I recently met my dad that I hadn't seen for, I think, about 10 years. And yeah, just me and my mum have been fighting a lot and just need a break from it all.*

*BOY: No, he's coming.*

**As you might expect, camping with a group like this has its moments.**

*MATT MUDIE: You know, there's been a bit of a fight and there's been some mucking around with some fire and so forth. Three of the students experienced a day of boot camp yesterday and we just imposed some physical penalties and that was in the way of push-ups or squats, all that sort of thing.*

*BOY 2: I was pretty naughty the first day but now I'm kicking in. The push-ups. Yeah.*

**The rest of the 2-month program will focus on building other skills like problem-solving and first aid, all designed to help these guys bounce back from their tough times.**

**REPORTER: What do you normally do in situations where someone's annoying you?**

*BOY: I usually give them three chances and then I kick their head in, honestly.*

**REPORTER: Mm-hm. And is that something you want to change about yourself?**

*BOY: Yeah.*

**REPORTER: Do you think you can?**

*BOY: Yeah. I've started to now.*

*BOY 2: I want to make a change as well.*

**REPORTER: Yeah?**

*BOY 2: Yeah, I do. Yeah? Yeah.*

**REPORTER: Yeah. When did you decide that?**

*BOY 2: Because I'm letting my family down and everything, making a bad name of my last name so I want to start doing good for it and that.*

*WADE MCGRATH: I want to change my attitude and the way I'm going about things but that's just what I want to do. I don't know if this will do it or not. It might, I hope it does, but if it doesn't, then, well, it doesn't.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Well, Matt, you're the Victorian police officer we saw in that story and you've been involved in this program for eight years now.**

*MATT MUDIE: That's right.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Does it last?**

*MATT MUDIE: It does for some students, yeah. We have a fairly good success rate. So we basically try to get them to move forward into school successfully, other education or employment, and we're probably running about an*



*80% to 90% success in achieving that.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: 80% to 90%, how do you measure it? How do you work out how resilient they become?**

*MATT MUDIE: We actually do some clinical evaluations pre- and post-program and we collate all that. We do a 3-year report, which just goes back and we follow up all the students to see where they're at and what they're doing. So it's fairly extensive and done independently.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Paul, I know you did a similar program to this a year ago, didn't you, in Victoria?**

*PAUL MOLLER: Yes, Typo Station.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And you've been expelled from five schools.**

*PAUL MOLLER: No, I've been to five high schools, I was expelled from two of them.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Oh, I'm sorry.**

*PAUL MOLLER: That's alright.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Terrible, terrible defamation, I'm terribly sorry. Are you more resilient now than you were when that happened?**

*PAUL MOLLER: I'd say I am, yes. It's not just resilience, it's more learning about yourself at the same time and learning what's acceptable and what's not and whether you want to be a good person in society and help the ones who are falling down, and whether you don't, and whether you choose to go down the spiral staircase into oblivion.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: So when you get knocks now, how you deal with them?**

*PAUL MOLLER: Much the same as most other people in this room, I'd guess. I just sort of try to soldier on and think of the long-term goals at the end and think of what I'm trying to attain rather than the small things that might set me back.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Blaize, I'd like to welcome you back to Insight. Now, we first met you in March last year when you were on our forum talking about when you were told you had cancer, the point where you were told you had cancer, when you were 12 years old. Here's a bit of what you said then.**

**BLAIZE – MARCH 21, 2006:**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Well, I was at home and we received a call from my doctor and he just said, "Oh, like can you come in with your mum and dad?" And I said, "Yeah, OK." I didn't really know what it was. And then we got in there and we went into like a private room and then he told me that I had like leukaemia and I was just... I was really shocked. I didn't know what it all meant or anything, so it was pretty scary.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: How did you react? What were you thinking when you heard that?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: I didn't think anything because I didn't know like what leukaemia was. And then I heard him say like when he found the cancer cells and then I realised it was cancer.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: It was cancer.**

*BLAIE TSAKISSIRIS: Yep, and then he like left the room and so that's I cried too and Mum and Dad were with me and they cried.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Now, you were in remission when we spoke to you then, and you relapsed after that**



**program, didn't you, and you had another cord blood transplant?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Yeah, I had a double cord blood transplant.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And chemo?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Chemotherapy and radiation.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: As well. And you're in remission again now?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Yeah.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: How have you coped with that emotional rollercoaster at your age?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Well, when I was told that I had relapsed, I said to my doctor, "Well, what's it...like, what's going to happen now?" And he said, "Oh, well, you can either choose to fight again and have the chemotherapy and radiation and the transplant or you can just leave it." I said "If I left it how long would I have?" and he said "probably around three months." And I just realised I didn't want to die then, like I just wanted to fight it. And I'm only a teenager, I've still got my whole life ahead of me.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: How old are you now?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: I'm 16. I wanted to fight it, I didn't want to die. And I thought, "Well, if I can fight it, then I can live the rest of my life, and I bounced back and here I am.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And here you are and it's good to have you here. How do you feel listening to all these other stories?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: Yeah, it's like I don't know how it would have felt for them to go through any of their stuff. Like I haven't been in their position, I don't know anything about what they're going through but it must have been really tough just from listening, from everything.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And how do you keep your spirit going? How have you managed to do that?**

*BLAIZE TSAKISSIRIS: I take one day at a time and just remember that I've got to keep fighting. I fight...like I've fought the cancer, I can fight anything now.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Yeah, Jimmy, do you relate to this? This physical challenge thing too, you went through.**

*JIMMY BARNES: Absolutely. I think, you know..*

**JENNY BROCKIE: The heart surgery.**

*JIMMY BARNES: Incredible strength for a young kid. I think there's a lot of.. Listening to everybody in the room, it's really when you look at resilience, to me it's a combination of everything here, you know. I think, faith has got a lot to do with it and faith in a lot of different ways. You know, just having a positive attitude, a prayer can be a positive affirmation for yourself, keeping your spirits up. Having, good role models I think is really important. I mean, I as a young kid, I was sort of, you know, not quite expelled, but I left before I was expelled, but I was in trouble a lot, fighting. I quite easily could have gone down the wrong track and it's just I remember points in my life, finding like one teacher or one person who was a role model who was like a shining beacon for me. The area we came from, there weren't a lot of those sort of people around and, and just having that quality time with one person who thought that you were worth looking at and talking to, made a difference. So I think there's a combination of a lot of the things. I think the gene's there and I think the faith, the role models, you know, the will to live all trigger that*



*gene into action, you know. I think it's really interesting to listen to everybody.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** I wonder if in all of this And I mean the term 'resilience' in itself is interesting because it sort of suggests an absolute. And I think all the stories we've heard tonight aren't about absolutes, they're about people finding paths all the way along through these situations. But Jeanette, you're a philosopher and an ethicist. And I wonder if we should be cautious, a bit cautious about overemphasising resilience?

*JEANETTE KENNETT, APPLIED PHILOSOPHY, ANU: Well, when you listen to the stories here tonight you think, "Wow, resilience is such a wonderful thing," and of course it is, but what we've seen is that a lot of different things are getting called resilience, a lot of different character traits are all being pulled together under the heading of resilience, and I am a bit concerned about what happens to the people who maybe don't have the gene, have had the bad luck, and..*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Or just might not be coping for a big patch.

*JEANETTE KENNETT: Or just might not be coping for a patch. And I think that some of the stories here, perhaps some of those people, if you'd looked at them at a certain stage, you might have said, "They're not coping, they're not resilient." So there's no black-and-white answer as to whether a person is resilient because they might be able to develop those skills over time, they might find themselves a pathway, even though at one period of life they can't see a pathway. And I think a lot of the people that you might look at are people who are down and out, kids on the street. Actually it's very hard to survive in that environment, they are more resilient, perhaps, than we give them credit for.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Just the fact that they're alive sometimes.

*JEANETTE KENNETT: Just the fact that they're alive, just the fact that they're getting through a very, very difficult life. And by a whole lot of standards they're not coping - you know, they're not in school, they're not socially connected, but they're alive and they're getting through each day.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** I very deliberately haven't used the word 'overcome' tonight because I don't know that it's particularly relevant, is it, Wayne? The word 'overcome'?

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: No, it doesn't mean anything to me.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** It's not just about coping or not coping with a tragic turn of events either. I know you felt guilt, for example, didn't you?

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Yes.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Quite serious guilt.

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: I still do.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Why?

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: Because I couldn't save them. I just think could I have gone down a different track? Maybe we should have stayed at the house. But then I look at the house and that burnt down and that was hit also, and that was a house that for 70m around it had nothing, it was just lawn, there was no trees, nothing around that house.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** How are you dealing with that guilt or how have you dealt with that guilt?

*WAYNE GRIFFITH: I'm still dealing with it. It's not something that you will overcome. I think it's something that's*



*with me for life and I've just got to learn how to handle it. And when I know it's coming on me I've got to find a way around that so I can get to the next day.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Erica, you're a clinical psychologist and you train counsellors. What's your response to what you've heard tonight?**

*ERICA FRYDENBERG, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY: Well, we've just heard amazing stories, amazing people and there is just a whole lot of things that have come out in terms of personal qualities. And we do know that some people - and this is from doing what we call longitudinal studies, following kids from birth through to adulthood - but some kids do have more of those qualities that help them to cope with life. But resilience, and we've tried to define it here, is really quite a wide spectrum thing and it's about having personal qualities - like optimism is one of those - and having skills, but it's also about having supports and that's come out through a lot of stories. Supportive family is really important and environmental supports. We can all learn to cope better. We don't actually have to wait for that massive tragic event to hit us to test ourselves. We can actually learn what's good coping, what's not-so-good coping and we can improve our coping, and that's really what we're focusing on.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: And how often does something like guilt get in the way of moving on?**

*ERICA FRYDENBERG: Well, Freud a long time ago talked about guilt and it wasn't very useful. And really we talk about it as self-blame. It's one of our non-productive coping strategies. And we've found that people who use self-blame don't have a good sense of wellbeing. So obviously in certain circumstances people have difficulty coming to terms with an event but they're working through it, and I think we've heard that tonight. Blaming oneself is counterproductive.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Ruth, is there too much pressure to be resilient, do you think, in our community? Is there an expectation that people are going to just get on with it, get on with life?**

*RUTH RITCHIE: It's a huge relief to everybody else if you present well and the...wanting to do your bit, holding up your bit is if you're travelling well, then they can all do something else. Because it's such a burden on your entire community, you really want to present well. I try and balance that off with the real honesty when I'm just not, you know, I'm just not coping. Also I really...I don't know about the gene, I feel like it's.. for me it's a choice. How did I see myself coming out of this? Sort of 'Eleanor Rigby' or 'Lucy in the Sky', you know. And I just didn't see the 'Eleanor Rigby' future at all. So...so I, yes, try and balance up the level of honesty without just driving your friends and your community mad. I don't think it's I don't think you can make it their problem all the time. They will run when they see you, you know. You don't want that. I mean, they don't, they run towards you and they help you and you want that to be still be..*

**JENNY BROCKIE: But they don't want too much of it.**

*RUTH RITCHIE: It's not fair.*

**JENNY BROCKIE: Walter, you were nodding your head while Ruth was talking about that.**

*WALTER MIKAC: I think people will help you but it's also really important that you help yourself in that situation because, you know, 11 years on I still go and have counselling when I feel I need it and I do exercise and I do things that I know help me physically cope with that. And, I mean, I also now work speaking professionally, sharing some of those insights on how people do uncover their courage and their resilience. And, you know, talking to people like Blaize before, you know, for me that's...that's gold because that's what it's all about, it's that fighting*



*spirit, it's that wanting to take action and saying, "I'm not going to give in, in this situation." But I can really just stress that people It's one of those things that Australians find it so difficult to do is "I need help", to ask someone else for a little bit of help. And I think if in some of those situations they do that, it would be... it would make a huge difference.*

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Marjorie, I know we're about to lose the satellite with you and I know you've been listening intently during this whole time. How do you see your future now, do you think?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Well, I hopefully think it's going to be very bright. You know, I'm finishing up my bachelors and I intend to apply to medical school next summer.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And what do you think you can teach other people about resilience as a result of what you've been through? What's the big lesson you've taken out of it, out of your experience?

*MARJORIE LINDHOLM:* Well, I think everybody can get through something hard. I think everybody does deal with different hard things and just, you know, a day at a time and, you know, you can get through it. It doesn't need to define you as a person and it doesn't need to plan out the course of your life, you know, you can get through it.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** Jimmy, are you a different person now, do you think?

*JIMMY BARNES:* Absolutely. I think every time you do bounce back you learn something. I think the thing with resilience is you do have to hit lows, you know. There are days when I just don't feel like getting out of bed and days where I think, "God, it'd be easy to sort of climb into a vodka bottle and hide." But, you know, it's the actual the act of like doing something physical, making yourself feel better, getting up and going and helping someone else, or doing something like that, you know, you do have to bounce back. And, you know, I'm sure I'm a better person for every, you know, bad experience I've had, you know, and I'm sure I've still got a lot to learn.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** And Walter, you now have a daughter, Isabella, with your wife, Kim. Is there anything you'd like to teach her about resilience?

*WALTER MIKAC:* Well, I think being aware of what, you know I, from a very early age, have been able to take her to the cemetery where Alannah and Madeline are buried and for her to have an awareness that she did have two sisters. You know, Kim, as a partner has been fantastic. I mean, for me it's been... that's been a real rock because, you know, she doesn't take any nonsense from me. I think, you know, it's easy for me to think I can get away with things because of what's happened but she'll pull me up when it's necessary. And I've also got a couple of... two stepdaughters who are fantastic. So, I mean, it might sound unusual to people but I actually feel I'm very lucky and I feel I'm blessed in some ways because while I may have lost something, I've gained something that's just fantastic.

**JENNY BROCKIE:** That's a great note to end on. Well, thanks a lot for joining us. And thank you, everyone, for joining us. This has been really special. Thanks a lot. It's been lovely to talk to you all. And Marjorie, thank you very much, and Peggy, in Colorado, for joining us as well and for sharing your story from there.

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