

Shirley



Spirits

Triumph over Tragedy

by Maggie Wilde



Perry Cross talks openly of his meeting with Christopher Reeve, his new book and life as a quadriplegic on a ventilator - all in a day's work!

Lets journey together into the spirit that makes us whole with the true inspirational story of local Gold Coast man Perry Cross and his mother Shirley.

At the tender age of 19 Perry was a healthy teenage boy. 'At that age you think you're bulletproof' he laughs. 'Your whole life is ahead of you, you're focus is on girls and sports and fun and life.'

For Perry and his family that innocent bliss was about to change. While playing football he suffered a tragic accident and awoke to be told he would never walk, speak, feel his body or have movement of his limbs again. In the blink of an eye Perry was faced with life as a quadriplegic on a ventilator:

Perry: When I had the accident I lost everything I had known physically. At 19 you couldn't have believed it was possible. I was unable to speak for the first six months and I went through times when my thoughts were like acid. But if I was to get through and remain whole I needed to change my thoughts. Today my thoughts are like gold.

Shirley: I remember during that time going to the hospital to discuss with Perry whether this journey was going to be worth it for him. I hated to think he would have to live through this if he didn't want to. It seemed natural to give him the opportunity to ask of himself if he could find the will to make this journey.

MW: *That's an incredible conversation for a mother and son to face.*

Perry: Yes. I needed it as a reality check really. To understand in my own head I needed to acknowledge that life was going to be like this.

If I was to live I had to face what it meant for me to live with quadriplegia on a ventilator. So that's when I decided. 'I've lost the physical, let's work on the mental, let's work on upstairs and get that right'.

MW: *Do you mean that if you'd lost the physical aspect of who you were, you made the decision to focus on the mental and spiritual aspects?*

Perry: Yes. You can choose to be negative or you can choose to be positive. It's simply a decision. So I made a conscious decision to be positive.

In the eleven years since the accident Perry has defied the odds. Told by the medical profession that a quadriplegic on a ventilator would never fly – he did. He has worked with and met some of the world's most remarkable men including Christopher Reeve and Deepak Chopra. He recently launched his first book and inspires and motivates at regular speaking engagements around the country.

Perry: I've learnt to simply love life. I love the simple thing... I appreciate sitting in the sun. I love talking to people, knowing what makes them real. I find passion in everything I do. What drives us is the passion inside. So no matter what I'm doing, talking to people or sitting in the sun, I find passion. That's the key. I also don't take life too seriously. If I did then I wouldn't do what I do because everyone says not to. Doctors have said to me you can't do this or you can't do that.

MW: *What do you say to those doctors?*

Perry: Well doctors have their place but you have to take what they say with a grain of salt. You listen and you weigh it up. They told me that I could never fly. Well if I'd never flown, I

would never have met Christopher Reeve and he would never have flown. We went to the States to meet him and do a bit of fund raising. I even went to the UN.

MW: *What response did you get from Reeve?*

Perry: His first comment was 'How the hell did you get here?' We said to him 'We flew.' He said 'You're not meant to do that are you?'

A year after meeting Perry, Christopher Reeve took his first international flight.

Perry: I think there is no doubt we gave him a bit of hope.

MW: *Did he inspire you?*

Perry: Definitely. I think because he was so passionate, so determined to make a dent in the research and cure side of things. I think he really believed he would walk. But sadly he was just a bit before his time. He has helped us come so far towards a cure. I think it's not long before something happens.

Shirley: When Perry was in hospital all those years ago there was never any time when anyone gave us any hope or any mention of improving quality of life.

Perry: The advice back then was more, 'Come to terms with it, there's no point to hope. Nothing



Spirits

will ever change.' But today researchers seriously talk about people with paralysis walking. That's now part of their vocabulary. For me it's more about the reality of getting off the ventilator. That's a very real possibility in the coming years. My generation will see people like me walking and benefiting from science.

MW: *Is that through stem cell research?*

Perry: Stem Cell is the most likely option to find a cure. It's just a matter of time.



Far left: Perry graduates.

Above: Perry with Christopher Reeve, USA.

Right: A young, healthy Perry on the farm.

Far right: Perry meets Deepak Chopra.

MW: *Does having so much time and stillness to focus on the spiritual and mental aspects of life help to get clarity on those big philosophical questions we all think about sometimes?*

Perry: Half my day is spent thinking. While people are active and moving I am in my stillness and I am simply Being and thinking. It's hard to explain because thoughts aren't tangible. You can't see them, you feel them and we are a result of our thoughts. I totally believe that what we think and feel on the inside is what we are on the outside.

MW: *Can you give me an example of that for you?*

Perry: I don't feel the cold because I don't feel my skin. But I know what cold is because I can feel it when I connect inside me. It's a clamminess inside me. When I sense that clammy feeling it's not good for my headspace. I become negative. So I work hard to change it. When I focus on warming myself from the inside I feel better inside (the clamminess goes) and I'm in a better frame of mind on the outside too.

MW: *How do you make that shift?*

Perry: I go into myself and focus my thoughts and feelings to get me to where I want to be. I

am in touch with my body from the inside. I'm not meant to know where I'm cold that's part of being a quadriplegic. I can't control my temperature. I just sense the internal clamminess and I know I can change it with my thoughts, which changes my external environment along with my attitude. My stillness has given me the chance to connect with that aspect of me. I actually think we are on the wave of a health and harmony



revolution. A time when we will all have the ability to control our thoughts more and live a healthier life. We're on that doorstep now.

MW: *(to Shirley) As a mother watching her son go through this how have you found the strength?*

Shirley: It's been a challenge. I recognised early that I needed to keep me strong too by doing little things to energise. I read a passage of something positive every day and I learnt to understand and listen to my body. I recognise when I need to adjust to exercise, water, rest, different foods or meditation. In the early days I started out by coping in the 'usual' way. I took Prozac for about two months. But I soon changed. I researched every avenue of health that I could and I think that the spiritual part is where the answers are. I don't do anything today other than get exercise, eat healthy and meditate.

MW: *If you think back to those first weeks in the hospital with Perry, did you know he would pull through this?*

Shirley: Yes. I think I had a strong belief right from the start that it would be okay. Like that knowing that Perry talks about. I took a deep breath and said to myself 'Okay now what do we do?' Before I spoke to Perry about whether he wanted to live through this or not I researched and found papers from all over the world from people who were like this. I knew it was possible if he had the will to do it.

MW: *Through it all what for you is really important in life?*

Shirley: Love for yourself. I think you have to love yourself first before you can love other people. To give you have to have something to give. I learnt I couldn't give love unless I had love. No matter what people are going through it is important to stay in a good space, fit and healthy, nurture yourself so you can give without depleting yourself and then you will have more to give.



Perry: I think affirmations are important if you start feeling down. I always say affirmations to myself. My favourites are: 'I'm whole, perfect, strong, powerful, loving, harmonious and happy' and 'I can be what I will to be'.

MW: *Who inspires you?*

Perry: Lance Armstrong - he has lived out his potential in the sporting sense. Dana Reeve (Christopher's wife) is a pretty amazing person. She stood by his side out of pure love. They had lost that whole physical aspect together and there was nothing else but a driving love for him. That's when you either find pure love or not. My mum, Shirli... she's pretty amazing. She rattles the cage. I admire both my parents immensely.

MW: *Is there anything else you want to achieve?*

Perry: I want to walk I suppose. That's what keeps me going.

MW: *What will walking add to your life?*

Perry: Nothing I don't already have. It's not that walking will make the difference. It's getting there that makes the difference.

It will show other people what Beings are capable of.

That's what we're here for - to learn from each other.

Sharing and letting people see it happen.

