

# REDISCOVER **YOUR** ATHLETE WITHIN

A practical **10-step process** to get you moving  
and keep you moving, **for the rest of your life**



**Dr Brett Lillie**  
with Lisa Lillie

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‘IF WE WERE  
MEANT TO STAY  
IN ONE PLACE,  
WE WOULD HAVE  
ROOTS INSTEAD  
OF FEET.’



RACHEL WOLCHIN



## **WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT DR BRETT AND *REDISCOVER YOUR ATHLETE WITHIN***

‘Ah – it’s about time! A simple, eloquent, fast-paced, step-by-step guide that shows you how to change your thinking so you can change your mind and let go of past beliefs that limit who you are. Then, with the grace of a professional athlete, Dr Lille provides the what to do to put your body in motion. The end result, better health, more and longer mobility and increased happiness. I’d say that is soooo cool!’

**Dr Larry Markson, Author of *Talking to Yourself is Not Crazy, The Cabin Experience***

‘What an inspiring book to get you to appreciate the Athlete Within. His stories of his patients and their journey really gets you to think... “what’s holding me back?” Brett, you got me to start making changes in my life thanks to your book.’

**Dr Mayo Patel**

**Author of *Sleep Apnea Hurts – the cure doesn’t have to and Take a Bite out of Pain***

‘Brett’s energy and passion really come through. I read the book on a plane trip from San Diego to Boston and I couldn’t put it down. It was the perfect message for me to revive my energy. I want the best me as I close in on 70.’

**Dr Steven Olmos**

**Founder of the TMJ & Sleep Therapy Centres**

‘This book made me reflect internally about whether I’ve been doing a good enough job at making the most of me, particularly the physical me. How much better condition could I be in? I’ll be 67 shortly – I think I should resume training. If, like most, you have let your physical condition slip, you may want to consult the excuses list in this book and then embrace the strategies suggested to do something about it.’

**Dr John L Kelly DC FACC FICC**



‘Brett has an unmatched passion for physical wellbeing. I know because I spent 15 years attending his Sydney clinic. Brett has been an essential ingredient in ensuring my athletic performance at 60 is superior to that of when I was 40. Sounds unbelievable but it’s true. The man works miracles ... I have seen them with my own eyes.’

**Craig Anderson**  
**Executive Director, Princeton**

‘Purely delightful reading.’

**Dr Catherine Norton**  
**CEO and Director, Heal with Laser**

‘Brett makes you see things in a different way, challenges your thinking and is incredibly curious. A conversation with him is always interesting and rarely goes as you expect.’

**Lucas Kohlenberg & Yolande Nyss**

‘Brett has fundamentally changed how I think about rehabilitation and recovery.’

**Ben Matthews**

‘What an eye-opening approach to finding not only my inner athlete, but inner strength and confidence and love for self. The Athlete Within was able to capture and explain my darkest moments and turned them into actionable steps.’

**Dr Andrew Sargent DC (Canada)**

‘Brett has a sixth sense when it comes to pain and rehabilitation. He always shares his wisdom with patience, generosity and lots of encouragement!’

**Jill Fulcher**

‘What an excellent book. It certainly made me review the steps I have taken! It is very helpful for us all to ensure we keep moving and really think how we want to be at 80 or 90.’

**Judy Snowdon**

**Pilates and DNS instructor**

‘We owe our awareness and wellness to Brett. He is not just hands on but “mind on”.’

**Rebecca and Simon Turner**

‘If there is someone who knows what they’re talking about – it’s Brett! He is so knowledgeable and has a knack for educating his clients so they want to continue working on themselves. Thank you Brett for inspiring us to be the best we can be.’

**Angela Garcia**

‘This book is a personal health booster. It will re-energise the chronically ill and unfit. It will also tune up the amateur or professional athlete. Start at the beginning and go to the end, or dip in at the points where you need help now: this book will be useful however you choose to read it.’

**Julie Garland McLellan**

**CEO of The Director’s Dilemma**

‘Brett is not your ordinary chiropractor, and this is not your ordinary “wellbeing” book. As I flipped each page, I could see Brett’s smiling face right there, coming along for the ride (as he aptly describes it) to encourage me not only to find my Athlete Within but also to help me maintain it. A great concept cleverly narrated.’

**Damien Roberts**



## **DEDICATION**

*To the love of my life Lisa,  
for your never-ending ability to live life and press my buttons*

*To my five beautiful children  
Amber, Alexander, Alexandra, Scarlett and Ryder*

*To my mum  
for your love through my thick and thin*

*To Jas – you've got this*

*To those of you who know  
deep inside  
there is an athlete within  
waiting to get out*

*To you*

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# INTRODUCTION

## HOW I DISCOVERED THE ATHLETE WITHIN

I have come to believe inside every one of us there's an Athlete Within, an athletic element, an evolutionary and ancient drive to want to move, an urge to be more. You only have to look at a child excited on a swing in a park to be taken right back to a time in your own past when you were that little kid, full of energy, vibrant with life, wanting to move and explore just because it was fun.

Truth is, you may not have felt like this for a very long time. Life just happens. It's busy, it's messy, it's full on. But life is also beautiful, full of hope and possibilities. In fact, it doesn't mean that you're stuck and can't experience that amazing feeling again. I believe inside every one of us there's an athlete that never goes away, you just need a process to find your way back to rediscover it. And you can do that, right now, at any age, on your terms. This book is your process.

Your Athlete Within is waiting, it's ready for you, it's up to you now to find it and give it life and I know you can. I believe you can.

As a chiropractor, you get to know people and understand where they are at. You quietly enter their lives and you become part of their team. As they get to know you, they begin to share more and more about themselves. And it's their stories that have been some of my greatest teachers, inspirations and sources of pride. Treating them, I constantly improved myself and became better at what I do, but I also came to understand their journeys, how they were putting the pieces

of their puzzles together to make meaning of their life. Their worries, their angsts, their pain. Their hopes, their dreams, their visions.

When I was 26 I was in a motorbike accident. I was always very cautious on two wheels but that afternoon it was raining and the lady who accidentally cut in front and hit me simply didn't see me. I broke my right shoulder, and my collar bone had pretty much become a knife precariously situated right next to the brachial plexus, which is nothing other than the nerve supply to the arm. If cut, I would have been left with a loosely hanging limb.

At the time I was in the second-last year of my Chiropractic Master's Degree, so I took all I had learnt up to that point and diligently applied it to my own recovery. Within months I had regained good control and stability of my right arm and by all standards felt I was back to normal.

A few years went by and all was falling nicely into place. A happy marriage, a bigger clinic, more patients, more knowledge and confidence. Except, I started to experience pain along the left side of my body, particularly in my neck. At first the pain only occurred occasionally, but then it became more frequent and began impacting my practice. With time, the pain was a daily occurrence that drained me and left me exhausted. My life as I knew it was drifting, my career was being disrupted and I was struggling to find a solution.

I had always been a very curious learner. Whenever an answer didn't quite fit a question or a solution wasn't as effective as I had hoped, I would explore other avenues and question my understanding of the world. The pain I was experiencing was no different: there had to be a reason. And so, after exhausting all usual avenues, I knew I had to follow my gut and continue searching, studying and immersing myself in the world of other disciplines.

That's when I started walking other paths.

In Prague I studied under Dr Karel Lewit, pioneer of modern diagnostics and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. Simply put, he

was the Yoda of rehabilitation. And just like the great Jedi master, he too challenged my approach and pushed me to think independently and in a way that forced deeper understanding. It was ultimately Dr Pavel Kolar – another freakishly good younger Jedi master – who had the biggest influence on me and provided answers that fit my questions. He taught me to look at the way my patients moved and compare them against ideal patterns to identify issues and discrepancies. It was no longer just about ‘where it hurts’ but also about ‘how it moves’ and ‘why it hurts’.

At the same time I was jumping across another ocean and landed in the US where Dr Steven Olmos, an orofacial specialist who took lateral thinking to a whole new level, was deep into studying chronic pain and everything that went with it. I was now entering the world of sleep medicine and pathological ageing.

At that point I made a promise to myself that I would always look at the bigger picture, not just where the problem seemed to be. I would always be curious and continue to expand my understanding of the human body and mind. That’s where the thinking and approach behind the Athlete Within had its roots.

It was however years later in the clinic that I started to form the belief that inside every one of us is an athlete, someone with a dream of being able to do more, be more and become more.

In my clinic I was seeing the effects a sedentary life had on my clients. Injecting movement back into their lives as a way of reconnecting to what made them happy often meant they could overcome pain (and overcome their own story) and become who they wanted to be. I could see that they had different starting points but ended up following a specific path to achieve their goals. They were invested emotionally and physically, and – even if each journey was individual – the steps to become their Athlete Within were the same.

I had to follow those very steps back in 2013 when, at 44 years of age and four days before Christmas, my life turned upside down.

I had known something was wrong, but the stress of a prolonged divorce while running a busy clinic had blurred my thinking, and even the doctors hadn't been able to put their finger on what was happening. I showed up at Emergency at 3 am. Something was just *wrong*, and it's then that I knew I had to stop and really make sense of it all. And in an instant my life didn't just change, it flipped on its head with a shattering diagnosis.

The reality of walking into a hospital mere days before Christmas meant doctors and nurses were working at reduced shifts. MRIs were done first thing in the morning, colonoscopies at 11 pm. It was hours of waiting, worrying, not knowing, and then going into rooms to be tested and prodded, feeling uncomfortable the whole time. My surgeon delivered the news: it was colon cancer, and the prognosis was three months.

I had to absorb the enormity of the moment.

The next day, I had family near my bed and the children were running around. Looking up from my recumbent position, I saw everything in slow motion and I knew I had to go inside and look at myself. I had spent so much of my life putting other people ahead of me, following what I thought was right – now it was my ultimate decision. Life was closing one door on me but I saw this as a second chance, my act two. Another door was opening, and I stepped through.

Boxing Day was surgery, first thing in the morning. The process had begun, and so had the process in my head. I wasn't sure exactly how, but I had to let go to move on, to reach new ground. Internal determination now set in, and life was never going to be the same.

It was here I truly learned how to block out noise and distraction to follow my own story, my own desires, my true me. I had to revisit principles I shared with my clients to see if they rang true for me. I was meditating and visualising my future, I was 'staying in my own lane' (one of my favourite principles). I wasn't living according to the scoreboard and I was following what worked for me. I embraced my

pace and started to embody the principle of ‘slow burn’. I was living the lessons I taught for so many years, feeling them in my mind and my body. I knew then that I could find me again and move into a better, improved version. One that had no stress and no regrets. A version of me that prioritised my values and an active lifestyle. I wanted love, fun, adventure, and I had clarity. I was moving forward and away from my illness. I was aligning with my Athlete Within.

I was just about to turn 50. Professor Stuart McGill, one of the world-leading experts in back pain and none other than my absolute hero, was in Australia to give his final lecture – he was on his retirement tour. I was there, front row. During one of the lunch breaks the other students went off to get some food and I found myself sharing a table with Professor McGill. It was just us, and I was nervous. We started chatting. We exchanged thoughts and ideas. We discussed functional training, what he was doing to keep in shape, and the importance of recovery. Then, out of the blue, he said to me: ‘I train harder and I’m stronger now at the age of 78 than when I was 50 years old.’

You can imagine the questions that started going through my head: *What just happened? How is that possible? What does he mean? How does he do it?* But also: *Ohhhh noooo, I’m nearly 50 ... what am I going to do? Am I doomed? It can’t be ...* After that simple revelation, he sprang out of his chair and ran back to the lecture theatre.

At the end of the seminar I went home to my family, and after helping my wife put the kids to bed, I found some quiet time to take a breath, collect my thoughts and think about what had happened just a few hours earlier. It all made sense. Professor McGill embodied my idea of the Athlete Within. I knew how to rediscover the Athlete Within. It was time for me to put pen to paper (or fingers to the keyboard).

And that is how this book came about.

Rediscovering your athlete is something you carry with you forever. As you grow and you enter new decades, your priorities and

needs change too. And to be true to your wants and desires, you have to make changes that can be small but also quite radical.

I am currently putting the finishing touches on this book from a small office in Hobart, Tasmania. How I got here, having lived in Sydney all my life? My Athlete Within (and that of my wife) implored me to slow down and adjust the pace, to reconnect with nature and find a way of life that was closer to my truth. This is why you can often find me running up the trail of a ridiculously steep hill (through the bush) on my way to collect the kids from school. Who knows what my Athlete Within has in store for me next?

I cannot wait to hear your story. To help you along your journey of rediscovery and celebrate the moments. To meet you and your new you.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK**

*Rediscover Your Athlete Within* is designed to help you get off the couch and embrace a more active life. It's definitely a journey and only you can decide the destination, how far or simply where you want to go. We start from way back with your old you, when you were a kid, remembering what you were good at, what you loved, what you were naturally drawn to, all the way to reconnecting with that part of you now and becoming your true you.

This book is intended to be for everyone; it is inclusive at its core. I hope to inspire you, through practical steps that are within reach but far away enough to keep you going. This process is designed to challenge you to be a little bit more *you*, a little bit better, and a little bit more athletic.

Here's how to get the most out of this book ...

### **1. Flick through the book**

Well, you got this far, it's now time to be naughty and flick through the rest of the book. The aim is for you to have an idea about what's ahead and how it all fits together. Start getting into the groove of rediscovering your Athlete Within. Get a feel for what's coming before you go back to the start and dive in.

### **2. Follow the sequence ... or not**

This book has 10 steps that have been developed in a particular sequence that just works. Ideally you'd start from Step 1 and get to Step 10 in the order suggested. I find those who follow and stick to the process step by step in the right sequence are more likely to find success and really build from what they learn through the framework.

Ultimately though, I want you to be yourself. Your true self. And if you're inclined to jump around, take side steps and find inspiration your own way, please do so. My desire for you is to rediscover your Athlete Within and live your best life, one way or another.

### **3. Make time**

This one sounds super hard, and we all know why. Finding time is often one of the biggest issues we encounter. But you have to make time to read the book. To explore each step. You have decided to invest in yourself so the best thing you can do is schedule ahead and book time in advance, just as you would a meeting or a Christmas party. This is your time and you need it to absorb the messages, the learnings and explore your Athlete Within.

### **4. Do it all**

However you approach this book, I'd love you to complete all the steps. Why? This process has 10 steps for a really good reason. It touches on 10 aspects of your inner athlete. Some sections will speak



to you more and some may not leave a massive mark, but they all have a purpose and they can all really help you be the best you can be.

You may pick the book up at different moments, and chances are you will take home something different or something new every time. That's the beauty of rediscovering the Athlete Within. It is about you, where you are and who you are right now.

## **5. Do it with intention**

In each section you'll find some ideas, questions and exercises to help you rediscover your Athlete Within. Take a moment and give these challenges a go. As you move deeper into the process I'll help you find more purpose, meaning and even hope, but the journey starts with you. It's about allowing yourself to be on the path, not doing it perfectly. There is a downloadable workbook on our website that can help you go through these exercises. Head over to [brettlillie.com](http://brettlillie.com) to grab your free copy.

## **6. Stop and stare**

We can all find inspiration everywhere, yet it is our own experiences that can offer the greatest wealth and greatest resource to tap into. If a thought, a memory, an experience resurfaces during the process, capture it. Stop and stare at the moment because it may be a message, the key to opening a deeper part of yourself or seeing the road ahead.

## **7. But I am not an athlete**

Ahh ... my favourite excuse, along with all the stories of why we can't do it.

If you think you're not an athlete then this book is *definitely for you*.

Many things in life work but they don't necessarily make sense. Take the English language for example and all its beautiful rules. Did you know there are nine different ways to pronounce the letters 'ough'? It makes no sense.

In this book I am going to make you think about things differently, and that includes your version of what an athlete is. All I ask is that you keep an open mind and have fun along the way. Be surprised by your discoveries, inspired by the possibilities and amazed by what you're capable of.

## **WHAT IS THE ATHLETE WITHIN?**

Now if I asked you to describe what an athlete is, I'm sure you would start thinking of someone who is super fit, sweaty and wearing sports clothes. People who are disciplined, pushing their body to the limit, for hours upon hours in gruelling training schedules, all leading up to a big event. Things like swimming, rugby, grand slam tennis or the big-ticket events like the Olympics. Platforms with serious elite competitors fighting it out. Right?

But let's talk a little about what being an athlete means to you. To do that we need to go back in time to visit some distant relatives.

There was a time when being a valued member of a village meant doing your bit, playing a role useful to the village as a whole. In most instances, your role was related to your physical capability. If you were strong, your job was to lift heavy things. But there were other factors that would influence your role. For example, if you had an innate understanding of nature and the environment, you could grow food. A highly valued role in any community.

In times of plenty a feast might be held to celebrate the harvest. Other villages would come to trade and share ideas. It would have been a time of opportunity, with people showing off their abilities, and in a way it was the beginning of sport. Competition would have evolved naturally, with people trying to best each other.

Of course this has morphed over thousands of years to the modern world where we have a very clear definition of what an athlete is. We follow sporting teams and sporting heroes, we have major events,

even our children are encouraged to be athletes from the youngest of ages. Athlete, athlete, athlete ...

Well, I see things a little differently.

What if an athlete is someone just actively being themselves, working towards a level that's in accordance with their own characteristic talents, abilities and nature? Where being active and in the right condition is also about being in tune with who you are. Where we are allowed to go through periods of intensity that reflect the seasons and stages of our lives. And at the same time not dropping the ball when the going gets tough. For the true athlete, movement becomes a way of life.

So, what I'm really trying to do here is get you to rethink what being an athlete means. This book is all about helping you rediscover your Athlete Within, but you get to choose what *your* athlete looks like. I'm not trying to turn you into an Olympic weightlifter or an ultra-marathon runner (unless you want to). I want to help you rediscover that wonderful energy and sense of fulfilment that comes from moving the way you used to, without overthinking it.

I watch my six-year-old twins play and they couldn't be more different. One is like a monkey – she is on from the moment she wakes, running and jumping everywhere until her head touches the pillow that night. The other is a turtle – she is slow to wake and harder to get to sleep. A little princess, she does not run, she only dances, everywhere, mostly ballet. Did we teach them any of this? No. It is their way, their nature. It just resonates and oozes out of them. Your athlete has been with you since the beginning. If you look back, you will see your athletic self rise to the surface.

Your Athlete Within could be a dancer, rock climber, walker, hiker, roller skater, dog walker, bike rider, volleyball player – it's a *very* long list. But remember, it's *your* Athlete Within. And it is most definitely tied in to the athlete you were as a kid.

This is the perfect place to ask you two questions:

- What is your current definition of being an athlete?
- If you rethink what being an athlete means to you, what does that look like?

Once we've defined what being an athlete means, and at the same time, redefined what you want your Athlete Within to look like, we can take the next step in this journey. Rediscovering your Athlete Within is not only about rediscovering the best things about your past but also how to keep refining where you are now, taking aim to a better future, a better you.

## **ARE YOU TALL ENOUGH FOR THIS RIDE?**

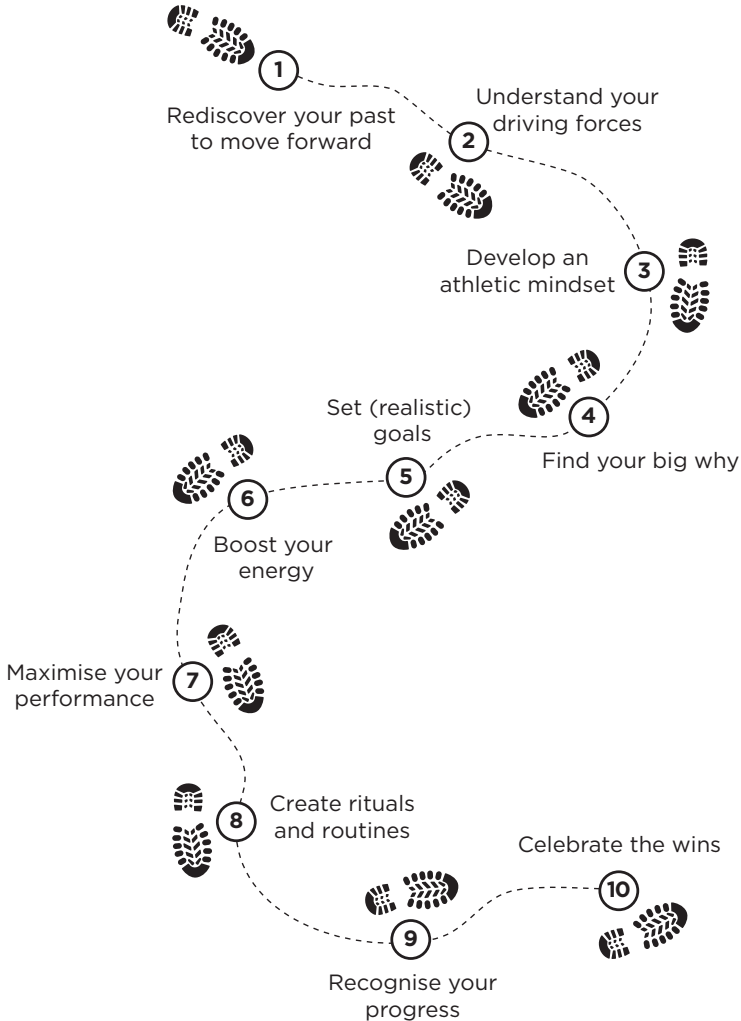
My son was exceptionally tall for a 12-year-old. Having grown five centimetres in the last three months, he easily passed the required height for entry. He was standing in front of this insane, let's call it a 'roller-coaster', but it was clearly much more intense than a good old-fashioned roller-coaster. This thing would speed forward, come to a sudden halt, throw everyone this way and that, then hit reverse hard. He looked at this ride and then he looked at me. *Surely not*, I thought. But then he was young and full of bravado.

'Dad, can I go on this ride?'

The sign says if you are 'this' tall – that's the only requirement. In my head, I urgently ran through the list of reasons why not: you're too young? You just finished your lunch? Your mum will kill me? And then I shifted to his side of the fence; this might be his only opportunity to try a ride this intense at this age. If I say no, the rest of the day will be filled with regret, maybe even the rest of this week? The rest of this trip will have this cloud. I turned to him and – without showing my hesitation – said, 'Yes ... let's do it together!'

You picked up this book, now you've got the ticket in your hand and you're about to go on your own roller-coaster ride. Chances are you *are* tall enough for this ride, but just in case you're worried, don't be, because I'm coming along with you.

This is the journey you are embarking on ...



## **CHANGE IS NEVER EASY**

Often what's easy is to follow the predictable and familiar trail, to sit back down on the couch where it's warm and comfy and make yourself a drink. Taking the ride means making a shift, crossing a gap, experiencing a period of discomfort. Decisions cause change, which means embracing the new and learning to say no. It requires putting in the effort, making a commitment, time to face the music, you have work to do. All of this involves developing the mindset and rituals that will carry you through. There are times we step into the unknown, feel the fear and do it anyway. It begins with saying yes. Just like taking a deep breath as the roller-coaster turns towards the sky.

We all know it's easy to talk ourselves out of getting on the ride in the first place. We're busy, other things are more urgent, life seems to creep up on us. We just seem to become buried under a pile of 'I can't' and 'I used to's' or – even better – 'I'm too old'. Beaten down by the past. This stops us in our tracks and keeps us where we are, not where we want to be.

Life doesn't come with a guarantee or a warranty. There comes a point we have to make a decision on what we feel inside. Not deciding is a choice in itself. Experience tells us that change is never easy, and even scary. What if it is the wrong choice and it doesn't work out?

The journey you are about to undertake will certainly be a little scary. It will have dips and dives, go fast and slow, but if you are willing to stay on the path you will rediscover your Athlete Within, and that will unleash an amazing sense of possibility for you in everything you do.

You then have the choice to stay on the ride or get off. My job is to guide you, encourage you and help you finish the ride.

## **SLOW AND STEADY**

Wherever this book may take you, the goal is to experience a change, small or big, that impacts the rest of your life, something that truly lasts and becomes part of who you are. So for the time being, please consider where you are and keep the word 'longevity' in mind. Maybe even the word 'sustainable'. If you haven't run, skipped or jumped for a very long time, chances are you'll have to take this slow and steady. There will be no entering marathons in two months, signing up to climb Mount Everest with your friends or even joining the local touch rugby club until you have sought proper advice.

Just as this book has 10 steps, you too will need to take one step at a time in getting back in the saddle. Rediscovering your Athlete Within is not a competition, nor is it about doing it in a certain amount of time. It is about you discovering an aspect of you, maybe an old part of you, and bringing it back to life.

PART I



WHERE  
**YOU**  
ARE  
**NOW**







## FIND A BIGGER PURPOSE

### MEET JANE

And in bursts Jane.

I don't think Jane actually opened the door when she entered our clinic, she just seemed to arrive. Filled with such excitement, she unashamedly unleashed at the top of her lungs:

'I did it – I finished the walk!'

As anyone would understand, to finish the Bloody Long Walk is a feat.

To spend a day walking the 35-kilometre scenic route, strolling along the 15 different glorious beaches, is the stuff champions like Jane are made for. A charity event, the walk begins in Palm Beach and winds its way down into Manly, making for a seriously impressive challenge. Did I also mention climbing the gruelling steep headlands, dealing with onshore headwinds and the direct winter sun glaring down? But the real win for our Jane wasn't just what you see on the outside. There was also the inside job of who Jane had become before she had even shown up that day.

Eighteen months before, when I first met Jane, she was struggling to get out of bed every morning and walk the five steps to her kitchen to just greet the day. A simple netball injury years before – coming off second best from a ball challenge caused her to land heavily on her hip – resulted in a painful limp for two days. Years later, she was involved in a collision, without too much damage to her light blue '69 VW Beetle, but she reagravated her old hip injury when she jumped heavily on the brakes. Then her house of cards came falling down. An ongoing and now degenerated hip spun into a spinal disc injury, which meant living with some serious pain more often than she could remember.

But there's more to her story.

### **Having it all ... ?**

Jane had been left devastated when her husband of 19 years had walked out on their marriage for no particular reason except his secretary seemed like the better option. Deep down she knew it was coming – she hadn't been herself for some time. With the kids getting older and rarely at home, scoring that incredible promotion at work was now chewing up more hours than she would care to admit. They were now simply ships passing in the night. Homelife had become routine. The weekends were like small escapes for a quick breather, just enough for her to wrap up each week at a time, only to prepare for the next.

Looking back, Jane seemed to have it all: the first one in her family to graduate from university, getting snapped up by one of the top firms in her industry, it was all a dream where the pieces were just fitting into place. Then she fell in love, married, and relished a six-week honeymoon spent travelling around Europe, soaking up culture, touring endless castles and of course eating way too much food.

All too soon life took its natural course with the arrival of three beautiful children. Jane's house became a home filled with the sound of little feet. It felt like life just couldn't be better.

But the years went by and things just seemed to creep up. Money became tight, there were credit cards due, mortgage payments to make. The kids being old enough for school meant Jane re-entered the workforce. A previous law partner happy to see her return, knowing her high work ethic, snapped her up, and soon 2.5 days turned into three and occasionally four. They seemed to be getting ahead, paying off the car, taking bigger holidays, moving in the right direction. Yet the schedule was full, constantly driving kids to various dance activities, soccer training, and then Saturday was sport.

When was there time left for her?

She knew she should be taking better care of herself and for periods she did, meeting friends and going for walks, joining the gym, but none of it ever really stuck. She was stopping and starting again, always with the latest first-world family or work crisis to deal with. But she was mum, the superwoman, the one who would listen, would understand, got everyone where they needed to be on time – the glue that kept the family together.

## **Implosion**

Wide awake at 4 o'clock one morning, her mind racing at a 100 miles per hour, frustrated about the case she was involved in at work, nothing seemed to be going her way. Rolling over for the umpteenth time, her mind wondered at her own life and how she had ended up at this point. She thought to herself, *is this how it is meant to be?*

She was now nearing another birthday – this one would tip her into the 50s club. All she could think about was how old she felt, how embarrassed she was at being so out of shape and feeling so unhappy about herself. She stopped to think back to her younger self, how

she used to love to run through the bush and down along the water's edge in the evenings, never with a time in mind or breaking a record but just finding her own space. This was her element, her sense of freedom away from all the challenges of the world.

Deep down she knew she had to get herself moving again. She had to think more long term, and realised as much as she liked to get things done quickly, this would require time. Jane slept in a little longer than usual the next morning; she was tired, only getting up to go to the toilet. It was then she was struck by a lightning bolt of back pain which left her on the floor. That was the real sign that tipped the scale. Jane realised she had reached a critical point – she *had* to do something different.

That was when I first met Jane.

Overwhelmed and exhausted, she felt like she had lost her grip on life. Sitting down with Jane was touching; on the surface she held strength and determination, yet her personal story was moving. So many battles and so much emotion. Helping Jane also meant her finding her own truth, who she was meant to be.

We got to work.

Jane looked back and saw her life as a series of events, a series of moments, each being part of a bigger picture, each chapter connecting to form her own life story. She wondered what she would say to her younger self, or what her younger self would say to her today.

About this time, on one of her lunchtime walks, a friend mentioned she was forming a group for a charity walk. Jane called for a special appointment in our clinic – she felt she had come so far, it was time to discuss her future and what was possible. She floated the idea of being part of this walking team, part of something with a greater meaning and purpose. We brainstormed her gap. At this point she was successfully walking every day and was now able to run her Saturday morning 5-kilometre park run. But 35 kilometres in one day meant her gap was a ... leap.

And so began our preparation and her journey, building a process, designing a framework, starting at her base camp. This way she could tick off each step, see her own progress and what was around the corner. In the background, Jane had cut back some of her work hours to help with the team preparation – this project was something bigger than just her. There was a feeling deep inside. A bigger purpose. She had found her reason to do it and she didn't stop.

'I did it – I finished the walk!' I'd had no doubts she would. Because I believed she could and so did she. More than that: Jane found and became her Athlete Within.

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We all recognise Jane's story, because as much as we try, life doesn't always go to plan. There is conflict, mistakes and pain where we can either get stuck or we can use it to grow to become our own greatness. Jane was living life, ticking all the boxes, juggling all the balls and doing what she thought was right. Yet things didn't turn out as she expected. She had to stop, regroup and make decisions along the way. It is in these moments she created a different version of herself, something that held a greater meaning.

It is this story and many others that help us recognise our own Athlete Within.

We each have our own unique life story, our library of experiences and our list of dreams to choose from. That challenges us about whether we are living our best life. Whether it is time for a new chapter.

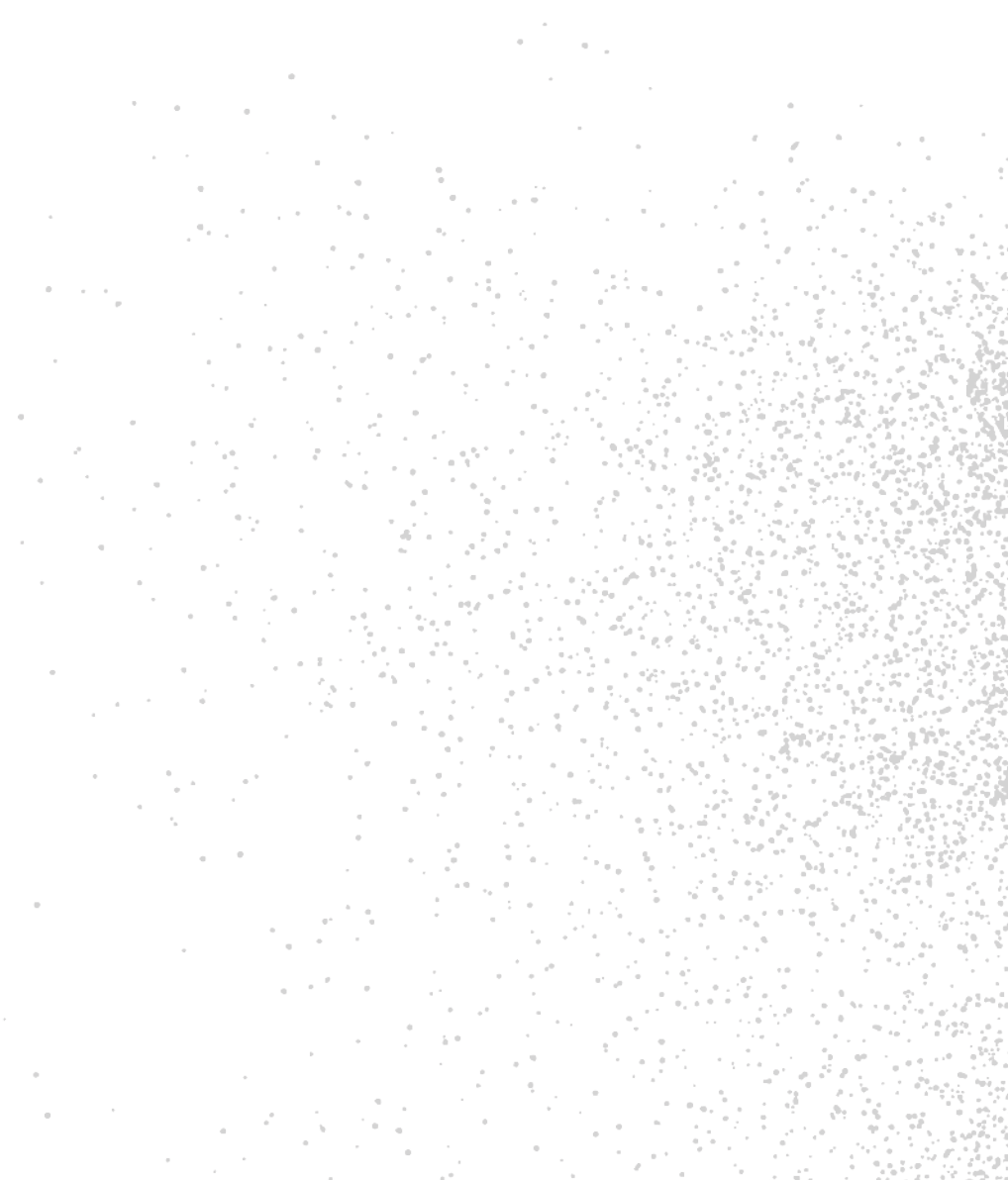
Maybe you are Jane and her story is very familiar.

Where do you find yourself now?

Are you ready to rediscover your Athlete Within?

# Notes

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## THE BEGINNING OF BEING AN ATHLETE

### DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN ... ?

It's the middle of the school holidays, the peak of winter. The wind has a certain chill to it that tastes of snow and this year we chose the beach as our holiday destination. Filled with ideas of building sand-castles, walks up to the lighthouse and BBQs for dinner. How wrong did we get that ...

Kids just change the plans; they see the world in a totally different way. On this occasion they clearly did not read the brochure. Beach means surf, surf means splashing in the water. Of course we didn't pack the swimmers – we got this, the undies will be just fine. In the end you talk them out of the ocean, the final straw being their little lips turning blue, hiding chattering teeth. It's back to the bungalow. Of course, the bungalow is decked out with a pool and a water park. Open the gate, it just starts all over again. Remember that age when the fun outweighs the cold?



Remember when you were a kid, what you got up to? It was crazy. It was fun. It was the stuff dreams are made of. Childhood was where all your hopes and ambitions about life began. The rules didn't apply. Responsibilities weren't law. Getting kicked outside for making too much noise. You were unstoppable. When going on a car trip was boring and sitting still and being quiet required something called patience. Yawn. Life was full, it was fun to play, where a park only needed a swing for entertainment.

In these moments you were planting the seeds of your Athlete Within. The construction of concepts and definitions. Of memories tied up in games, joining in, being active. Where learning – and sometimes making – the rules happened while you played the game. Where the fun was being part of the gang. We all shared winning, we all got a turn. Now you are older, you look around and ask, 'Where do they get all that energy? When do they ever stop?'

But the real question is, when did *you* stop?

Of course we all have our moments of greatness, not all of them on the sports field. There are your 'firsts': your first bike, your first three-legged race, your first tap shoes or trampoline if you're lucky.

Or great memories of being a kid – out on your bike for hours, kicking a ball with your mates, cartwheels at lunch down at the oval. It was all tied up with being active, laughing and having the time of our life. These moments we often shared with family and friends, where no one really kept score, it wasn't about the win, competing or doing a PB. The rules were letting loose, having fun, classic catches, enjoying each other's company, soaking up the moments.

Let's dive a little further. Who was your greatest athletic hero growing up? Can you pick just one? I grew up with images of Grant Kenny jumping through the waves, the Nutri-Grain commercials – Iron Man food. I remember my grandfather always had sport on somewhere, even if it was just the radio out in the garden, prompting another game of backyard cricket with the neighbours.

Back to today – everything is moving so fast, working to deadlines, running to be on time, a quick break for lunch. Never stopping to recognise our own wins. We are so caught up juggling balls, exhausted with overflowing to-do lists. We are hard on ourselves, noticing every time we drop the ball, forget something or turn up late. All of this creeps up on us with time, until we lose belief in ourselves, in our own ability. The next time someone pulls out a ball and says let's play, you are reluctant, feeling like you will miss and make a fool out of yourself. You've already outplayed yourself in your head.

Remembering is a chance to go back and dig up those good times. Memories are more than tiny stories of our past, they are your history, your emotional library, the recipes that made you who you are today. Looking back is an opportunity to relive the magic – remember the moments that made you laugh and smile – and reconnect. Seeing how your decisions shaped the person you are. It strengthens your understanding of yourself.

Remembering is connecting with your story, decide if it needs to be updated with a new perspective.

## THE GAP

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*'When a man says he has exhausted life, one always knows life has exhausted him.'*

Oscar Wilde

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Good decision-making is a key characteristic of an athlete.

But what is it that holds us back when making decisions? What makes us want to stick our head in the sand or continue travelling the known path? Often there is a change we desire, a promise we dream of. What stands in the way is a gap we need to cross, filled with

'unknowns' and 'not nows'. The thing is, you have made it across gaps in the past, many times.

Crossing the gap begins with an internal agreement about why you want to cross this gap, getting yourself out of the way and taking the first step. Decisions don't come with a guarantee. As we walk the path between chaos and order, it is our wisdom that guides us. The context is more than just the existing conditions, it is our previous experiences and concerns, as well as our future expectations. It is a feeling we hold on to that keeps us stuck to the old path:

- It's hard.
- I'm tired.
- I'm too old now.
- I'll start tomorrow.
- I have the kids to deal with.
- I haven't got the money.
- What if it doesn't work?
- I need to wash the car.
- My work is full-on at the moment.
- My partner tries to understand.
- I need to do this other thing first.
- You don't understand the pressures I'm under.
- I can't remember the last time I bounced out of bed with energy.
- Maybe I am just happy the way I am.
- I have tried it so many times before.
- I'm just not ready yet.
- My doctor says I'm okay.
- I don't feel heard.
- I'm worried.

What causes us to make decisions? To make serious changes in our life? To start something new?

Change is never easy. If it was easy, it wouldn't really be a change. Trying something new requires making a decision, a process of assessment followed by real commitment. Often we cling to a story, comfortable just the way things are. To change would be to open up a door, take a risk, expose ourselves, step into vulnerability – the consequence being growth. Comfortable just means the world is meeting our expectations. We have a sense of control but life holds little surprise. Why do we cling on? Because our stories give us meaning in the moment and a predictable identity. But stories can also be an insight into our own narrative. To shift is to step into the unknown and create growth.

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*'Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.'*

Hellen Keller

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Many of the decisions we make satisfy a short-term need. It's New Year's Eve, you make a list of resolutions, you finally decide the next day you will join the gym. You start living the dream and loving the honeymoon period. Then things start to happen – the tests. You stay back late at work, you didn't bring your runners, and gently the five times a week falls back to three times a week. But you're okay with this. It's all part of the plan, and three times a week is what they recommend, right? By April, the wheels have fallen off. You still make it twice a week ... mostly. But who are we kidding? The plan really needs a bigger engine if it's going to last the distance.

## **THE BIGGER ENGINE**

Rediscovering your Athlete Within is a process that starts with your story. You know you, the ups and downs, the pitfalls and mountain

tops. Unless you are dedicated and you make a real commitment, your plan is not going to last the test of time. The reality is, sustainability and longevity come down to your amount of buy-in in the first place. I love to ask new clients if they have that exercise bike or treadmill which has morphed into a clothes horse.

How do you go about making decisions? Is it a strong character trait in you that you are proud of? I'm talking about creating clarity, redefining the question so it is clear, understanding the context and circumstances, then making a decision you can hang your hat on. Good decision-making is about working with failure. The ultimate aim is understanding that failure is a key learning process for the human species.

### **Why you do what you do**

If you're not sure what your bigger engine is, start by thinking about these questions:

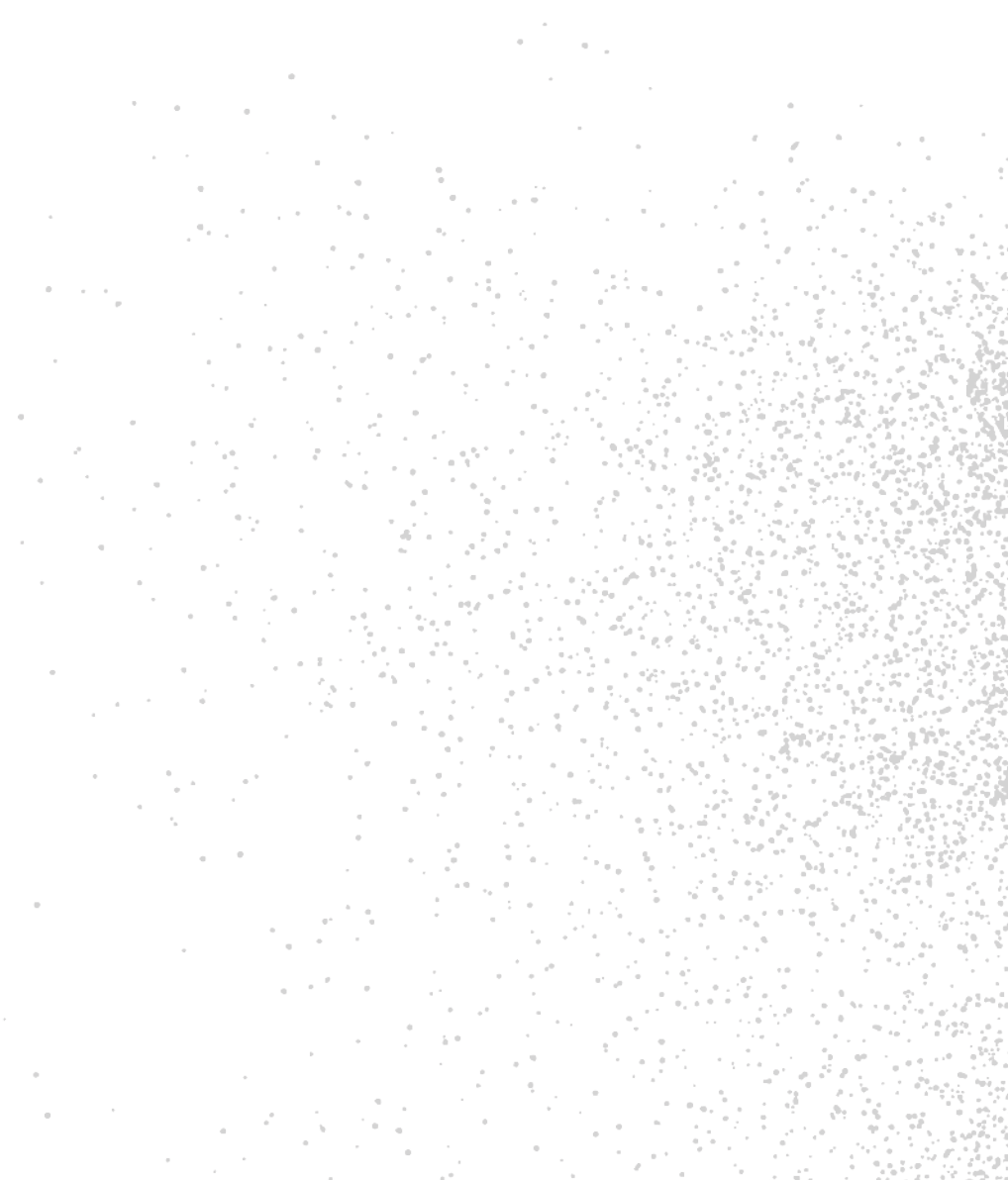
- What are your favourite hobbies?
- When was the last time you really laughed out loud?
- What is your favourite movie?
- What music do you listen to?
- What is your favourite restaurant?
- Who are the top three people you love to spend time with?
- Who would you most like to have dinner with?
- What is the last book you read?
- What two things matter the most to you?
- How would your partner or a close friend describe you?
- Write a list of your best seven qualities – why do people love being around you?
- What are your five top beliefs?
- What are three qualities you want to practise more of?
- What are seven things you want to do more of?

- Is there enough adventure and risk in your life?
- Is your life organised and structured?
- Do you arrive on time?
- Do you finish things?

The whole purpose of 'rediscovering' you is to find out what resonates.  
What do you really want?

# Notes

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## YOU DON'T HAVE TO ACT YOUR AGE

### **MOVING FROM THE AM TO THE PM OF YOUR LIFE**

Bronnie Ware, a palliative nurse, wrote the incredible book *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. In it she discusses the top five lessons she has taken from the dying:

- find more courage
- spend less time at work
- express your true self
- stay in touch
- let yourself be happier.

How often do we take time to contemplate life? The reality is our lives are constantly changing, winding and weaving, tending to follow a general script, yet we all still trail off into our own versions. The previous section prompted you to think about the decisions shaping our lives, and now we are turning our attention to the PM years. Stopping to see where we are makes sense, yet how often do we actually take



the time? We joke about the midlife crisis and carrying regrets – this is almost an accepted part of the process – only to realise we’ve lived on autopilot and strayed from our own identity, what makes us who we are. It is time to turn your attention to the bigger questions in life.

Like a rite of passage of a child becoming an adult member of the tribe, the shift from the 40s and 50s into the PM years should celebrate fresh new hope. From the morning to the afternoon of our life. There was a time when growing older was respected. You were treated gratefully for your knowledge, experience and advice, and referred to as an ‘elder’. The old ways are being left behind in our fast, technologically driven lifestyles.\*

There is a shift in values that changes our perspective on life, affecting our expectations. I caught one of my friends telling his teenager he is ‘too old to do that anymore’. Are you? Or are you just letting it slip away?

In our 20s and 30s we tend to look more to the outside, towards the physical stuff. It’s all about time, achievement, fulfilling expectations. We put our heads down and follow predestined pathways without too many questions, following a career path, starting a family, hopefully buying a house and enjoying some holidays. With age, these adventures of youth tend to fade, the roads narrow, become more dirt tracks, not tending to make sense like they once did. Those middle years become a turning point, towards a more internal and deeper understanding of life. We start to ask the bigger questions. As you hit the afternoon of life, the rules that governed the morning don’t apply. Many of us lose sight of the bigger picture.

We might be looking for big, instant changes: a new, maybe younger, partner. We drop everything and travel or buy a motorbike. Some make a gentler transition, follow the same career path well into

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\* This is eloquently put by Professor Wayne Dyer in his book *The Shift: Taking Your Life from Ambition to Meaning*.

their 70s, only to ask the big questions lying on their deathbed. As Talking Heads put it, 'Well, how did I get here?'

For many of us there is a jolt of awakening that lands on our doorstep; a misadventure, a death, financial chaos, a divorce or serious illness. In a sense, a point where the decision is thrust upon us. This is a shift from the external to the more internal, more spiritual. A time when you may slow down, shift into a different gear, and your thoughts turn more to understanding, meaning and your own life.

Rediscovering your Athlete Within is about hitting the middle parts of your life with new energy and new reasoning and finding purpose. An opportunity to take a breath, reach out and navigate the next chapter forward.

I remember a conversation with my grandmother when she was 95 years old, laughing about the fact it gets easier to say 'no' the older we get. After living through World Wars and depressions, life goes on, and she told me it was our job to grow with it. Saying no means you become clearer about what is important, and with it you grow a thicker skin.

When was the last time you thought about what life looks like in your PM years? What adjustments should you be making in the now? Think back to a time when you had a conversation with an elder; what was said, what did you learn? Why did that moment impact you? Are you on track towards a life well lived?

\*

Our ancestors were remarkable, mastering how to be upright, figuring out how to think better, think ahead, use and develop tools, build a tribe and develop speech and then language. They became runners, they developed endurance, they learnt how to acquire food diversity through growing skills in hunting and foraging, and learnt the art of sharing, probably one of the biggest keys to our survival. They lived through famines, plagues, predators and everything else Mother Earth

could throw at them, yet still they evolved. You are the latest model of this incredible line of success stories. What is your story going to be?

At birth you were handed a Version 3.0 model that came out of the factory of Mother Nature. It included an operating system with the most advanced features and upgrades already installed. Of course, evolution has stress-tested its capabilities and made required adaptations to meet environmental demands and conditions. We turned tools into technology, creative became innovative, our nomadic past driving forward through the agricultural era, the industrial era, the information era to today's era of technology. We stand on the shoulders of millions of years of evolution.

So if we are living our best life ever ... why doesn't it feel like it?

It's all about reframing your understanding of what ageing is, injecting your version of an athlete to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. So, what is biologically possible? Our bodies, given the right environment and way of life, have the potential to live to 120 years, or even 150 years. We have become smarter, more capable, more adaptable, but not necessarily stronger or faster. We live longer with more leisure and pleasure, but not necessarily better.

The stats are in your favour. If you were born in the 1940s like my mum, your life expectancy is around 63 years. Today this sits in the mid-80s. One in three Aussie kids will become centenarians. A 10 year old has a 50% chance of living to a 104 years. No surprise the centenarians are the fastest growing segment in today's population; they are overtaking the planet. America has 800,000 centenarians, Japan is a close second with 500,000. What do you have to do to live 100 birthdays? Just grow old, right? The bottom line: the older you get, the greater the chance you will get even older.

## **THE CRITICAL WINDOW**

But stop ... there is a bigger conversation to be had: assuming you're well on your way to 100, how will you actually live out those PM years?

It's easy to plan the next three months, talk through ideas for the next five years, but seldom do we plan 12 years ahead or more.

The 50s club is a turning point. Your body shifts gears. Statistically it's where life catches up and you meet challenges in the form of illness and disease. Your body can also experience transitions, such as menopause, all of which slow you down. The science shows that how you spend your 40s and 50s will largely determine the quality of your PM years. It is a critical window.

What does that mean for you? Now is the time you want to rediscover your Athlete Within.

Let's wake you up for a moment. Do you know what you are bound to deal with when you hit 50? The list is long. Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death up to 64. If your cholesterol and blood pressure are high, you have 10 times greater risk of a heart attack. Starting at 65 years of age, your risk of Alzheimer's disease doubles every five years. If you are over the age of 60 you are 90% likely to be carrying around a chronic condition, and if you are 70 then you are 80% likely to be walking around with at least two chronic conditions.

Just getting you thinking about your future is key. Thinking about your own impact on how you live, earlier, sets a new direction and way of life.

Ageing is a normal part of any biological cycle whether it be degeneration, deterioration or erosion. At the end of the day it is the inability of a cell to accurately replicate itself. Think of it like this: every time you take a photocopy, the image looks the same, but with each copy it loses a sharpness, a focus, some definition of detail.

In research, scientists take this seriously, studying 'pathological ageing', the processes that speed up ageing. The biggest player? Lifestyle. Exercise, activity level, behaviour, all the way through to the quality of our sleep and circadian cycles. Scientists look at balancing biochemistry, energy expenditure equations, cleaning out toxic rubbish and making repairs. But also the significance of keeping

within our natural habitual rhythms, both in our internal world as well as our external environment. We are entering an era where the way we live is the greatest impact on longevity and quality of life. An era where age is not just a number – your chronological age – but reflects the quality of life you are living – your biological age.

But wait, there's more. The good news is coming. What kind of lifestyle is conducive to a long and healthy life? There is Blue Zone thinking where researchers are investigating specific locations where large pockets of centenarians live to study their lifestyle and habits. In 1981, 18,000 residents in a retirement village once referred to as 'Leisure World' in – where else – California took a detailed survey examining many factors about the way they lived. Today this group of people over 90 are referred to as the 'Older Oldies', forming the basis of a string of research into what longevity looks like. One of these researchers is Dr Claudia Kawas, who led the study of the Laguna Woods residents. Her findings make so much sense to me, because they align with the Athlete Within:

- Exercising at least 15 minutes a day affected longevity in the participants. Those who exercised moderately for 45 minutes or longer per day lived longer.
- People who drank moderate amounts of alcohol or coffee (one serve a day each) lived longer than those who didn't.
- Residents were socially active: they read, played bridge and other games, plus enjoyed a little romance on the side.

As you drop some of the baggage of the AM years, embrace saying no, living more in line with your own truth, it also means finding your own athletic self. Living your best life means taking care of your body as if it is your most valued treasure. Let's face it, if you haven't got your health, it's hard to enjoy an incredible life.

Are you thinking about how you're living right now and how your lifestyle could impact your PM years? We all want to say *yes* but do we stop to think about what that might actually look like? This is your time for action. This is your critical window.

## **THESE ARE YOUR GOLDEN YEARS**

In 2004 on a trip to Prague, I encountered one of those moments we have all experienced: you meet someone who defies the laws of gravity and time.

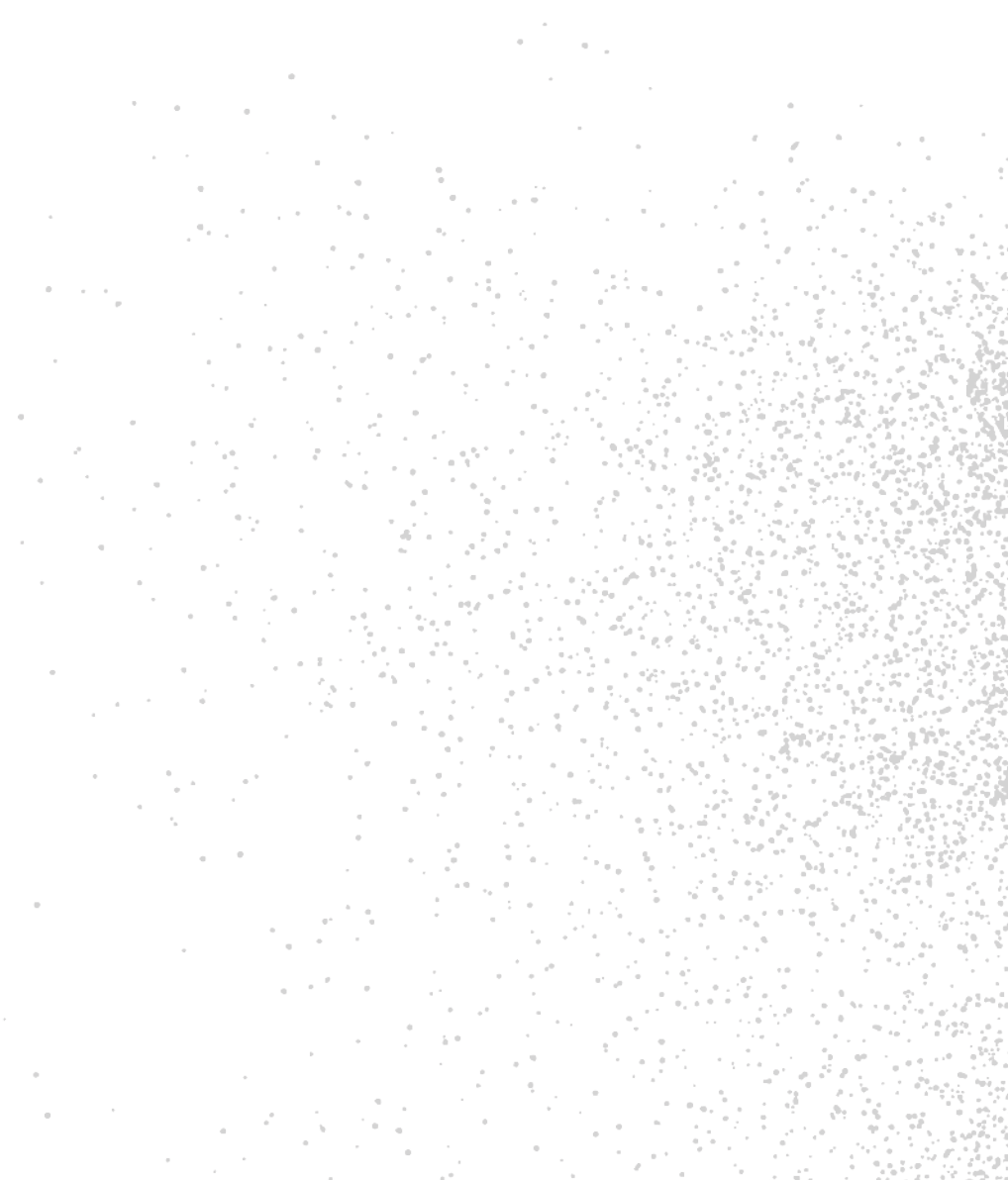
Jiří Čumpelík was a retired professional ballet dancer, now a leading authority in functional movement. In 2004, I was part of a group of Australians who found ourselves on a wooden floor, attempting to follow his direction and emulate how a 'baby' learns to roll. It was horrible. Our Aussie ears found it difficult to understand his thick accent, so he promptly popped on the floor and demonstrated the exercises himself with grace and agility. Probably half his age, we struggled to follow, let alone keep up. It then became a game about guessing how old this guy was. He looked old, but the way he could use his body left us speechless. It's not like he didn't age, he just didn't act his age.

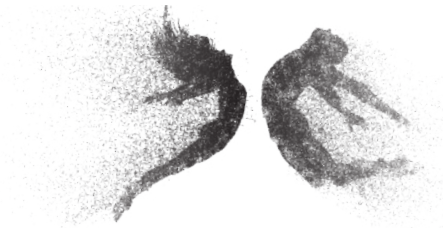
A lot of us grow up with preconceptions about what it means to get old. As we reach old, we just begin to act out these stories: 'you start, I'll catch up'. I think maybe it has more to do with having a reason to live life and more so the PM of our life.

So if age is more than just a number, what do your golden years look like? If I asked you to describe what 82 years old looks like, who would you start to picture?

# Notes

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## OPEN THE DOOR TO POSSIBILITY

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*'Don't die with the music still in you.'*

Professor Wayne Dyer

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### **YOUR WISHLIST**

We seem to keep a dream wishlist in our head that only ever remains that, a dream, something far ahead in the distance. What if we created our wishlist and started ticking it off today? We all walk around with these ideas floating in our head of 'one day' that would be really great. But when does that one day ever come?

We are here, now. So what do you desire? What are your dreams? What lies on the realms of possibility, what could be? What if you were done waiting and every day for the next week you woke up with a clean page and wrote 20 things down. Where would you go? What would you do? What is the craziest thing? What is the most fun thing?



What would just make you laugh? What would be a moment you would want to slow down for and cherish?

This is the magic we all want. What could you be proud of? Who do you want to be? It's time to start writing your ultimate wishlist without fear, without worry about the nitty gritty. Just step into the moment and be free. And if you find it hard to start your list, think back to what you wanted to become or do when you were a kid. What were some of your wishes then?

Dream and then dream some more. You're made for a life well lived. To rediscover your Athlete Within means taking the best of who you are and designing the life of (you guessed it) your dreams.

## **EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY**

There is something about heights. Many years ago, I skied in beautiful Jackson Hole. High up, by myself on a sky lift, I was doing a last run before calling it quits. My ride came to a grinding halt, leaving me swinging way up in the air. Long minutes passed. Then my mind woke up. With the light fading, I realised there was no one on the seats in front of me, or behind. Slowly panic set in. Was I going to be stuck here all night?

Fast forward 15 years, I am away with an incredible group of friends, out for an early morning adventure. Driving through the dark in the back country above beautiful Florence, we come to a stop in the middle of a random field. Hot-air balloons are waiting for us on the cold morning grass. Instantly I am taken back to Jackson Hole.

No, I'm not going up in a hot-air balloon. *You don't understand, I have history.* My head takes over and my mind quickly goes into a panic. Suddenly everything is like a tunnel. I approach the organiser, who is surprised by my strong reaction. The pressure is only mine and I have a choice. I realise my ripple effect on others, as they start swallowing hard, unsure about their own feelings of going up.

A close friend holds my hand tight and makes a pact. 'I will stay with you, we've got this ... but the choice is yours.' There is a moment when her eyes hold mine, in that early morning light, still crystal bright in my memory. I breathe out, move my body out of rigidity and answer, 'Let's do this'.

Every process comes with its own adventures. We are all familiar with the feeling of stepping out into the storm. It is time to work, time to stretch. We relinquish control, brace for what we sense is coming, and increase the effort to make it through. We all sense there is still more inside. Our brain is a protector. It has been a survival machine for eons. It's just keeping us safe. But is safe what life is about? Remember that saying, a ship is safe in the harbour, but is that what it was built for?

You realise it's your time, where embracing uncertainty requires a deeper trust. You do it because something inside of you speaks to you. It is a feeling, call it a truth. If we put out a challenge, the universe responds by checking in to see if we are serious. Throwing a little problem here, an obstacle there. It is all part of the process. Rising through this shows you are willing to step up to the line and take your place.

Everything in your life leads up to this point.

Just like taking the roller-coaster ride.

There comes a point where the analysis is done.

Your heart says yes.

It's your turn.

Step up onto the ride.

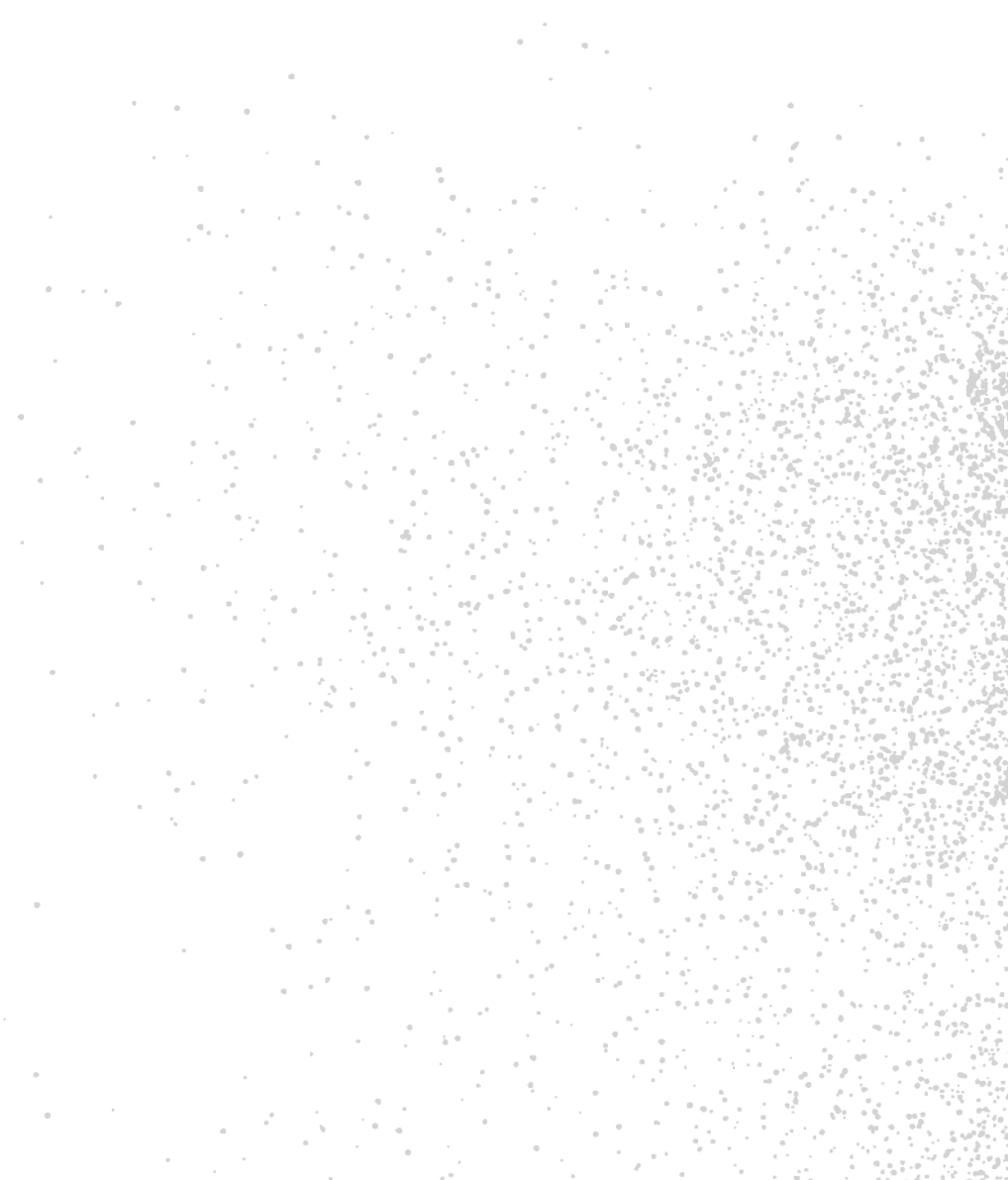
On your marks.

Set.

Go.

# Notes

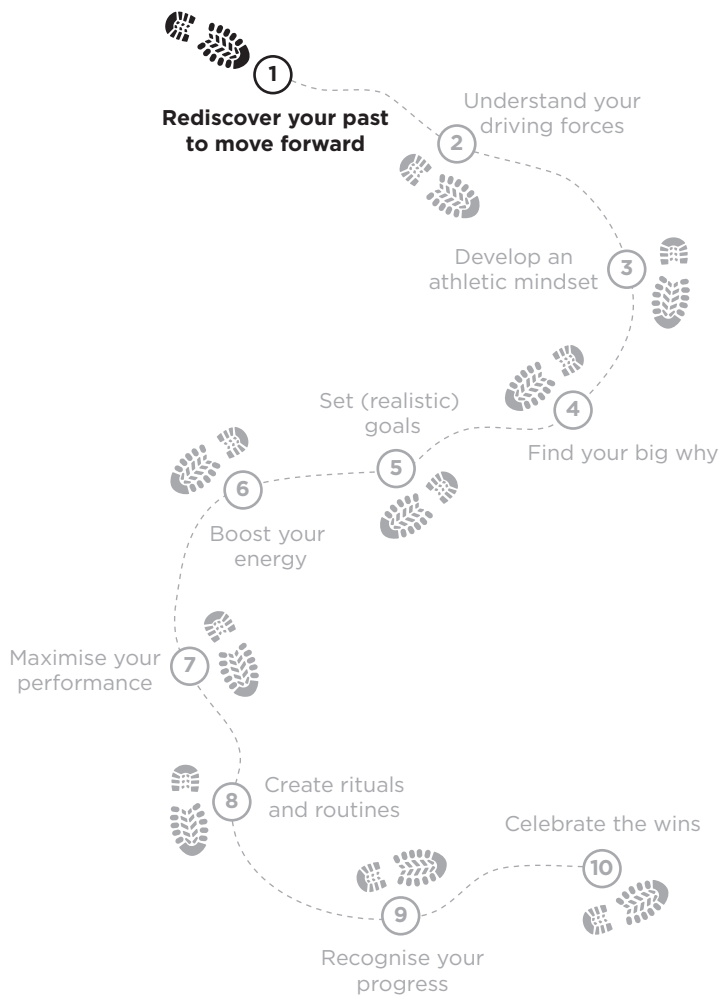
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PART II



THE  
**ATHLETE**  
**WITHIN**  
FRAMEWORK





## **STEP 1: REDISCOVER YOUR PAST TO MOVE FORWARD**

### **WHO IS YOUR ATHLETE WITHIN?**

John was an executive banker who came to our clinic complaining his spine clicked a little. Each time he stood up there would be a chorus of clicks like someone running a hammer along a xylophone. Of course he knew it wasn't right, but there was never any pain. It was his wife that scheduled the appointment and sent him in.

When John was growing up he played rugby. He loved it. His school had multiple teams, from A-grade down to F-grade. John was much smaller compared to the other boys so he was relegated to the F team, which he and his friends affectionately named the 'failures'. John had no chance of climbing up the grades. He didn't shoot up in height and size until much later in his teens; he was almost 16 years old and too late for a rugby career. You can almost imagine the moment when John lost his athletic confidence.