

The Silent Journey

Story & photos by Felicity Stanway

In April this year I was fortunate enough to experience the beautiful Kidman Trail first hand.

I had decided back in November that I was going to tackle the nearly 270kms trail solo on my 8yo thoroughbred Rascal to raise awareness for those who have been bereaved through suicide.

This is a topic quite close to my heart as in 2001 and 2004 respectively I lost both my father and brother to suicide and as a survivor I have now been a member of a bereavement support group Silent Ripples since early 2010. Suicide claims more than 2000 lives in Australia each year. It is the 14th overall reason for deaths in Australia and accounts for nearly 1/5 of all deaths for men between the ages of 20 and 35.

The impact on the families, friends and communities is immense and until recent times has generally been hidden behind a wall of silence, however this is changing.

Rascal and I left Kapunda on Saturday 16th of April to ride the trail over 9 days arriving at my home club Southern Hills, in Willunga on Sunday 24th.

Our start on the Saturday was quite a nervous one, the lead up to the ride had been not without drama and so it was quite an emotional feeling both that night and each subsequent night when we arrived at our campsite and we had both made it there safely together!.

My back up crew for the ride were my wonderful parents Robyn and Keith Wotherspoon, mum being my number one supporter and Keith being my number one pit crew, both of them traveling each day from Finnis to move

my car and float to the next camp spot.

The scenery along the way was to say the least awe inspiring, the whole ride for me was quite a reflective experience, and I was fortunate enough to be able to speak to many people along the way about the topic of suicide.

The highlight being Wednesday when not only did I get to have morning tea with the lovely people of the Tungkillo Progress Association but I was welcomed at Rockleigh with a community bbq and bonfire gathering.

A very receptive audience who all had a story to share about their own experiences of being touched by suicide. This night was the wind beneath my wings to go on that next day. I don't think it really had occurred to me in my planning just how emotionally draining completing the trial in only 9 days would be!

However no matter how tired we were each night or how much I was worried that we may not be able to make it through the next day, each morning the sun would rise and Rascal would be there ears forward bright and chirpy ready to start that days adventure.

There truly was no feeling like the one coming down Thomas Hill road overlooking the Willunga basin and seeing bright Blue Ocean in the distance except maybe taking those last few strides through the gate onto home turf!

Rascal knew where we were as soon as he turned onto the linear trail from Willunga to McLaren Vale as we had ridden it last year and his stride turned from a slow "are we there yet" feel to a "wow I know where we are!" feel!



The whole experience taught me so much about myself and how we perceive ourselves in this world.

Just recently I was lucky enough to attend one of the SA Suicide Prevention Development Forums here in Adelaide and one of the key things to come out from it was that we all play a part in each other's welfare whether it be a friendly hello to our neighbours or picking up on when things aren't quite right with our closest friends, sometimes just being able to give a person permission to be able to speak about what they are feeling can be the light that they are needing to get them through to another day.

That is how I was able to live out my dream of riding South Australia's amazing Kidman Trail.

To read more about Felicity's ride search for "The Silent Journey" on facebook

