

ASHLEY

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If you could start with your name and a bit of background about yourself.

My name is Ashley Davies. I grew up as a RAAF brat, as a military kid. The old boy was posted between Amberley and Williamtown. The last posting before I joined in 2006 was Williamtown, so I classify Port Stevens as home. Yeah, went to high school. So I done my year 12 exam on a Thursday and then that Tuesday I was down at Edinburgh getting screamed at by an MSI.

And so how old are you now and what's happened between that time?

I'm 27 now. I've been out for two years and in that time I've been in therapy for post-traumatic stress.

What was your period of service?

My period of service was seven years and three months, from 2006 to 2013.

In Afghanistan primarily?

I did one tour to Afghanistan - yep.

So yes, the idea of this is not to talk about war (though you're very free to do so) but to talk about peace. Could you tell me what peace means to you?

[Laughs] Peace? What peace means to me? I guess it will be somewhere where my nephew and my kids and their kids would be able to walk around and wear whatever they want to wear, do whatever they want to do, be wherever they want to be without the fear of prosecution.

So you associate it with freedom?

Yeah.

Do you associate it with other values as well, other conditions?

Well, peace itself I feel is hard to come by. I mean if you go back through the ages we've never had peace for any longer than three years. And that's going right back to the Middle Ages. So peace itself I only associate with when it comes to freedom, because obviously when it's free then it's a peaceful society.

How important is peace to you?

It's up there. I wouldn't say it was the most important thing. The world's economy can't operate in peace. So there is always going to be war. But it's up there obviously because you want to have a better future for the next generation.

Has the significance of peace changed for you over time?

Yes, absolutely, after my tour. Peace for me before my tour was no fighting, no anarchy, no nothing. After my tour it was understanding that people have a different perspective on life and what we might find peaceful or what we might find annoying, they might find absolutely liberating.

Is peace a real thing? Is it tangible to you? Or is it something you imagine?

Peace for myself? I don't think I'll ever have peace because we're still fighting our own demons. But peace itself, well, hopefully I'll be able to at least help my nephew and my kids, when I have them, see it.

So when you say you don't have it... do you think that you live a peaceful life? And how?

A peaceful life? Depends on what you call peaceful. Umm, I ride bikes, I go fishing, I go shooting. That to me is peaceful. To others, they see that as a way of me letting out anger and frustration. So to me it's peaceful but to others it's not.

And so is there big gap or difference for you between inner peace and social peace?

Yes.

Do you think they're connected?

No. They're absolutely very different. My inner peace took a battering when I went overseas. But it's getting there. When you get back into Australia you come back to an environment where everyone is walking around cheerful and enjoying each other. And that's the hard part, society's version of peace, as opposed to what we want as peace, will never correlate together.

What do you want as peace?

An environment where my next generation can enjoy themselves.

Live without fear you think?

Yeah.

Do you think peace is best found alone or do you think it's got to be found with other people?

It depends on the person. Where we are right now, at the MC here, a lot of us find peace with each other because we've all gone through the same situation. If you're by yourself, sometimes you have too much time to think. And that's when your peaceful track of mind runs SQOL.

Do remember choosing peace? Consciously trying to grasp onto it? Was it a decision that you made at any time?

I don't remember choosing peace. I grew up, as I said, in a military family. I knew I was going to join. I knew I was going to go to war.

It was a real expectation on you?

Yeah. I joined up at a time when Australia was going to war, so if you joined up not wanting to go to war, why would you sign up? If you joined up wanting to be peaceful, you're in the wrong job.

Have you ever had experiences of intense peacefulness? Can you recall something like that?

Yeah. In my therapy we do mindfulness training so we go out on a surfboard and just lie out on the board for a couple of hours. That's peaceful because you're able to see your worries per se float over the horizon.

Oh yeah - so there's a real connection between your inner environment and the outer environment?

Absolutely. It allows you just to relax and be at one.

And you do that with others? Or with just you and your therapist?

Me and my therapist.

And do you do any other activities that help you with your inner peace? I mean we're artists or from an artworld so I've been asking if there's a connection between art and peace but you know, if you don't do that, do you...

I study. Yeah, I read, I explore, I plan, and I build things and I shoot things. That's fun. That's my peace.

So you can meditate through those activities?

Yes, because it's all familiar.