

## **Have You Ever Been to the Great Barrier Reef?**

Luke Muir's heart monitor could be heard beeping down the silent nighttime hospital halls. It had been a long five weeks since he slipped into the coma. Long incisions spanned his shaved head; a desperate measure to save his life after the accident that nearly claimed it. His room was always quiet, other than the silent weeping of his mother as his father stood like a statue by her side. They were told early on that their son, just 21 at the time, had just a three percent chance of survival, braindead at best. If he woke up, doctors claimed he'd never live a normal life again - not that Luke was ever a normal bloke to begin with. An Australian native, Luke had always been a daredevil of sorts, finding adventure in the little things. Big dimples formed on his face whenever he'd smile big, eager to give everything a try without stopping for questions. Now, the monitor flatlined regularly, an up-and-down battle that his family didn't know he'd have the courage to adventure through. The IV dripped slowly, and the beeping continued. He couldn't say it at the time, but Luke felt the presence of his loved ones with him, their warmth radiating onto his pale, sickly skin. They'd walk in the room and his heart monitor would sing, the line crafting mountain peaks of life on the screen. He shouted from the inside, desperate to be let out, to be free. To everyone's surprise, six and a half months of treatment later – he was. The left side of his body was severely damaged, but he eventually came to talk, swim, and walk again, living by the three percent chance others thought would never be possible. To Luke, three percent was always more than enough.

Today, six year later, Luke wakes up fitted with a beaming smile. He suits up in his reflective traffic controller outfit, eager for another day at his work of choice. Kicking a stone down the lot, he looks up at the clear blue June sky. He takes a deep breath, feeling the air

expand in his lungs. He's alive. Just then, two men skip down the walkway by Luke's construction, fitted with thick black backpacks and camera gear. They're quite chipper for the morning, filming the beauty of Brisbane all around them. Tourists. Before he has time to direct the travelers, they approach Luke with a sinister sparkle in their eyes. Without hesitating, Luke throws out his hand for a shake, bantering with the Angelenos.

"Have you ever been to the Great Barrier Reef?" asks Matt, swiping his brown hair out of his face as he cocks his head to the side. With him is Thomas, a taller, blond guy holding a camera over his face and pointing it right at Luke.

Luke shakes his head and looks to the ground, knowing he hasn't been able to travel much with these injuries. "I wish mate! It'd be a dream."

"Well," Matt continues, "do you wanna go?"

"Yeah, why not?"

Simple as that. Through yips and cheers, Thomas and Matt blow up with excitement. When the excitement settles, they finally explain to the stranger why they're here. The travelers belong to a YouTube channel called Yes Theory, an initiative they started in college with the mission of seeking discomfort and embracing the true beauty of taking chances in life.

"When I was a kid, I had a globe on my desk, and I used to love spinning it. I'd close my eyes, point my finger somewhere random, and then open them up to see where I landed, letting my imagination run free about what that country would be like and if I'd ever get to visit it. The answer was almost always that I'd probably never get to... but today that's exactly what we're doing." Thomas squeezes Luke's shoulder, shaking his head with disbelief. He further shares,

“We spun a globe yesterday and ended up here, in Brisbane, and we wanted to invite a stranger to come along with us on the journey.”

“You can’t be serious!” Luke chuckles brightly, “That’s insane blokes! And you wanted to invite Australia’s very own traffic controller?”

“We wouldn’t have wanted it any other way, you’re the brave one that said yes! Pack your bags Luke, we’re leaving for Cairns tonight!”

Luke calls a friend to join the adventure, still dazed and unsure of the reality of it all. Back at home, he packs for the evening as his aunt and cousin warn him about the trip, teasing in a semi-serious tone that he’ll be kidnapped by the strangers. Deciding to have faith in their plan, Luke throws his toiletries in the bag and zips it shut. With short-term memory from the accident years ago, Luke is determined to experience something he’ll never be able to forget.

Later that night, Thomas chats to the camera about Luke and his friend that have decided to spontaneously join them on this two-day trip to the middle of the ocean. Without leaving time for anyone to second guess the plan, the four embark on their flight out to Cairns, eager for the early morning adventure Matt has planned for them all. But before they’re able to let loose, Luke sits with Thomas and Matt, agreeing to be on camera to tell his story. He fidgets with his hands and looks to the ceiling as he talks, instantly filled with emotion from that time.

“Y’know,” he starts, “I had a skateboarding accident in 2013, going down a hill with no helmet on. I fell and hit my head. I was comatose for five weeks and in the hospital for six and a half months; they really didn’t think I’d wake up. The doctors told my family if I did, I’d be braindead and never walk again. My family was coming up to say bye to me when I woke up...” He starts to cry, tears strolling down his cheeks, his lips downturned. “I’m here because of them,

because I had so much support around me, my friends and family. Every day my dad would come up and say, ‘Don’t stop. Never give up. Get stronger,’ and that’s exactly what I’ve done. Look at me now, I was at work yesterday and now I’m about to snorkel in the fuckin’ Great Barrier Reef with you lads! I’m never gonna get this opportunity again, so why would I pass it up?”

Matt wipes a tear from his eye, crossing the camera to hug Luke tight. “You’re meant to be here, and I’m so glad we met you.”

Funny enough, Luke wasn’t the first stranger approached by the YouTubers that day in Brisbane, he was just the first to say yes. In the dark of morning, the once strangers head out for their spontaneous adventure, fitted with all the gear they need to explore the ocean’s reach. Ivory boats stretch over the waters that are so blue the sky’s shade can’t keep up. Out at sea, Thomas captures the natural beauty with his drone, flying over the boat and into the clear skies. Across the ocean floor, coral forests span wide, bringing life to everything they touch. They put on black scuba gear that makes them look like agents of the sea, ready to uncover all the secrets that lie here. Without missing a beat, no hesitation or fear, they lead into the most amazing adventure they can imagine.

Luke, giddy and full of adrenaline, can’t believe it. “Yesterday I was at work, now look at me.” He points to the camera filming him to shout, “Say yes to things people, seriously! Look at this!” Cruising the boat and the waters alike, fish of every size and colour flutter by, as the coral gives shelter to the tiniest beings not yet ready to seek the same level of discomfort as the boys have today. They enjoy days of scuba diving, followed by voyages through foggy mountains and the added view of a rainbow spanning fully across the sky.

Months later, Luke still hasn't forgotten the magic of that day. Even with his poor memory, he knows he can never overlook the life changing moment that stemmed from this chance encounter. It's often easy to forget that every human we cross is someone totally different than us, dealing with all their own problems. When you pass someone on the street and make eye contact with them, why not be more like Luke and give them a smile and hello? At the end of the day, you don't know how far that moment will take you. That's why, before they headed home and Matt asked their new friend,

"Would you join us for an adventure again sometime?"

There was nothing else for Luke to say than a swift, "Hell yes."

Works Cited

“Introducing Luke Muir, a man with a tough story and a great heart!” YouTube, uploaded by Tribe Social Belonging, 15 July 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnvNKtyY6xE>

“Spinning The Globe and Flying Wherever It Lands” YouTube, uploaded by Yes Theory, 23 June 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOZnpwI2hIM>