

Find your Y at the YMCA



Thor's Story

Step outside your day to day lives for a minute, step outside and look up to the sky.



And then ask yourself “why?” Why am I here, what is the meaning of my life? At YMCA Lakeside we help guests find the meaning in their lives and the strength in themselves by harnessing the power and inspiration of the great outdoors.

We help people to find their own personal “why” and we’d like to share Thor’s story with you. Take ten minutes time out from your busy day and be inspired as Thor tells you in his own words ...

“We drove our camper over to the lake district from Edinburgh to stay around Kendal for a few days with my wife Emily and 10-year-old daughter Catherine. It felt like home being in the Lake District. A slight chill in the air and beautiful views of the lakes, hills, and greenery.

I had come over from Australia to compete in the World Transplant Games for Australia in Newcastle. I competed in Archery, Tennis, Cycling and Ten Pin Bowling. I came around 5-7th place in each category. This was to be my first world games since I received a double lung transplant around two years ago.

I suffered from cystic fibrosis since I was a young kid. Being born in Kendal 42 years ago it wasn't standard procedure to test for CF as a kid. It wasn't until I was 7 that I was diagnosed with CF. During my early years I watched on as over 56 of my close friends around the hospital died from the incurable illness. I was confronted daily with my own mortality and the life expectancy back then was the age of 21.

I felt like I was a write off and thought I'd die an early death. So, I was quite rebellious as a kid. I didn't do too well at school as I wasn't there much due to hospital admissions which lasted around 2-3 weeks at a time. This would happen every two to three months every year. I began to have a stronger relationship with my friends with cystic fibrosis. Then watch them die.

I felt that every time one of my friends died that I took their spirit and carried them with me. That made me feel stronger. Every time they passed away, I would take their strength with me. Every time I saw a beautiful sunset or view from the top of a mountain, I felt that they could see it through my eyes.

It was because of one of my friends passing away that I did the world transplant games on his behalf. His name was Kaiser. He died only weeks before he was due to compete for Australia years ago. So, I did it in his honour.

I spend my time in Australia now after my transplant inspiring others by pursuing outdoor activities. I love the cold weather and go camping in the snow, hiking, snowboarding, camping, cross country skiing, climbing, kayaking, cycling, mountain biking and soon to be sky diving.

I grew up with a family that did outdoor activities. My father Earle Bloomfield circumnavigated Tasmania here in a sea kayak in 1983. He made the first Australian expedition to the arctic, circumnavigating the south tip of Greenland in a sea kayak under royal patronage and the Australian government patronage with 3 other expedition participants.

It is this mind-set of challenge and adventure that has been passed down to me by my mum and dad and where I think I find passion for the outdoors.

My mum Katrina Workman (Bloomfield) was the cook at the YMCA and my dad Earle Bloomfield was the climbing instructor at the YMCA at Lake Windermere. I have always had extremely vague thoughts like dreams of the area - but it wasn't until seeing the view on my trip at age 42 that I can marry my dream up with the real views and feeling of the air around me.

I wanted to come and see where my mum and dad and myself as a baby grew up and where my parents worked. Also, how their story started and how they lived at the lake. My parents are divorced now and we are not wealthy people. So, it was a humbling insight as to this part of my family history. I loved that they worked in such a beautiful part of the world.

I had managed to make it to the 'new' life expectancy of 40 for a person with Cystic Fibrosis. With only a few of my close friends still around, I became quite sick at that age due to catching pneumonia. I got over that only to catch Influenza A which sent my lung function down to 17%. It wouldn't stop me from going snowboarding.

I convinced the hospital to allow me oxygen. I went to the store and rented an on-demand oxygen machine which I could wear as a backpack. Then I could snow board with oxygen on my back. People thought I was crazy. I said to them that I would rather die doing something I love than die in a hospital room.

I was nearing the end of my life when I was listed for a transplant in August of 2017. It was a life-confronting time for me. Hard to talk to my daughter about what was happening to her dad. Trying to focus on enjoying life while I knew time was running out.

My wife and I spoke calmly about the future. I wrote letters to them both in case I didn't make it. I then had two false starts with the transplant operation. Around late November I had the transplant of both of my lungs. It was a massive operation.

I was in recovery when they noticed I was losing a lot of blood. They took me back down to surgery again and realised that the knife had cut my diaphragm and needed stitching up. I was back in recovery and yet absolutely beaming from my eyes and smile.

I had survived one of biggest fears. I was on a lot of pain killers and feeling like I had been reborn. The feeling of sadness was completely gone. I was in a state of shock that I was still alive. After two days in recovery they said I was well enough to be wheeled up to the ward 5 east to recover.

I was presented with my first challenge. Without hesitation, I told the doctors I was going to walk out of ICU on my own two feet. I started at 10am and the nurse said NO. I kept negotiating for 6 hours and finally the doctors agreed to let me walk out on the proviso that I have a nurse either side of me and a nurse pushing a wheelchair behind me. As I walked out a patient sat up in bed and I waved to them as I walked.

From then on, I felt that my calling was to inspire other people in life and promote the donating of organs for the greater good.

I have gone on to inspire people motor biking at the motocross track. I tackled activities I hadn't previously been able to do because I didn't have the lung capacity to do them before my transplant. I remember fainting due to riding my dirt bike in 42-degree Celsius heat and still feeling like these moments were the greatest on earth.

I feel like I have been starving and now I can eat as much as I like in terms of what I am now able to do in the outdoors. I also have no fear or inhibitions anymore. The blinkers are off. I now see the world a whole lot bigger and brighter. The experience I feel are amazing. I appreciate life like I have never done before. I don't take life as seriously as I used to. My choices in life now revolve around, working with good people, putting my health and family first.

I am preparing to do my own expedition to the South tip of Greenland and be the first Australian Arctic Expedition with a double lung transplant. I plan to kayak the same route with Larry Gray, who invented and designed the Pittarak sea kayak, who my father did his expedition with, back in 1986.

I was excited to see the YMCA and I had in a vision of a small building and a lake with a sandy shore. Didn't know what to expect. I drove the camper around the back way from Ambleside. The roads were tight, and I scratched the camper's side on the close trees as I drove. I was determined to find this place. So, over the bridges we went. I found the sign that said YMCA.

I was excited to finally see it after 30 years of dreaming about it. I parked the camper in the old YMCA and got out to stretch my legs. As I walked to the office, I was so warmly greeted by one of the staff with his hand out- stretched he introduced himself. I was shocked at how warming and hospitable this place seemed. I instantly felt positive about being there.

He said if I go into the office and wait for the manager, he would let them know we were here and we were welcome to look around. It was after 5pm so the place was quiet. As I was reading the brochures and stats on the years progress, I noticed a brochure about sponsoring a bunk bed. This connected with my instantly. I was curious to hear more about this.

I met Tom as he came to the office. I explained that my mum and dad used to work here. Also, I noticed that the YMCA signs that my dad had hand carved were still up on the walls out of wood some 40+ years later. I asked Tom if there was a possibility that I could take back something to Australia that said YMCA on it. He took me to the little shop, and we picked out a few things for me and my daughter.

I asked Tom if I could hear more about the sponsor a bunk bed. Then I heard about a new facility that was being built around the corner. It sounded amazing. I really wanted to donate money towards this new facility, being that this was where I started my life in this place. Tom looked at me and said, 'I don't think this is the right way we should do this'. He said this should be done at the new facility and could we come back tomorrow? I said great and Tom would show us the new facility.

We left and came back the next day. I had managed to scrape in a little hike to the top of the mountain above lake Windermere and also a little boat on the lake at a very slow speed. Then off to the old YMCA. We found Tom and he said I have a surprise for you. He would take us in the speed boat from the old YMCA to the new YMCA. So, excited as we put our vests on and walked to the pier (jetty). Tom arrived in the boat. We got in and Catherine held her YMCA teddy and we had big smiles all around with the ride around to the new YMCA.

Getting off at the new dock and seeing the modern facility was mind blowing. It couldn't be more opposite from the old facility. It was bright, open, inviting and looked to enhance the scenery it was in. We got a tour of the rooms, bunk beds, the big hall and conference rooms. I was touched and brought a tear to my eye to get our photos taken with Tom in front of the new building.



I had survived an incurable illness, a rebellious teenage life, I had my wife and daughter with me, and I was back to the place where I was as a baby. It was an extremely important moment in my life to which I am humbly grateful to Tom and the other staff of the YMCA. I work in business for myself and belong to a professional mentoring group in Australia. In our group one of the guys talked about brand strategy and the need to find your why in business and what does it mean for the business. How was my business going to give back to the earth or to society? How could I make a difference in the world?

My passion has always been in the outdoors. No matter if I could barely walk 30 meters, I would still push myself to make it 35. I know what positive effect the outdoors has been to me. I mean, responsibility, trust, ownership, independence - especially for kids. Tom gave Emily and I a little insight as to where the YMCA Lakeside was and the support that was generously given. I feel so passionately that I drove away and felt that I would like to be able to help in some way. I was on holiday and hadn't planned on any of this. It truly all came to fruition by coincidence.

Tom mentioned that he didn't get to see all of the people who would donate and especially from a family that had such a strong connection to the Association. I agreed. This was all unscripted and we were moved by the lovely people we met there. We headed off to Newcastle again in our camper. Then after that to Bath and Brighton in the South. I was in the caravan park there and I could feel the feelings I had were settling.

I spoke to my wife and told her that I have found my WHY. My why in life to make this world a better place. I had been waiting until I found Tom's email that I wanted to tell him that I wanted to donate a regular amount from my personal money & business income to the YMCA. The YMCA can use this to buy equipment, renovate, increase and do whatever they need to do to keep the YMCA there at the Lake Windermere.

This is something that I would love to see as a second-generation supporter of the Association. My mum and dad being the first generation myself and wife being the second generation and my daughter being the third generation. We would like to come back as much as we can from Australia (half-way around the world) and see what great work you do there.

My parents are good people and still love the outdoors, my wife and daughter can now walk with me in the outdoors since my transplant. I can't explain the feeling I feel about how much the YMCA in the lake district means to me personally.

I am looking forward to coming back some day to where my life first began.

In such a beautiful place. Thanks, you so much.

Thor"

Here at YMCA Lakeside we'd originally planned to precis Thor's story and make it a much smaller article. But we figured everyone has a spare ten minutes. And sometimes taking a bit of time-out to think about the *why*, gives meaning to a life.

To book your own visit to YMCA Lakeside and plan your own inspirational challenge call us today.

For details about how you can sponsor a bed please contact the team by emailing lakesideenq@fyldecoastymca.org or call us on 015395 39000