

What I learned from Turia Pitt

Turia Pitt is an extraordinary woman. I was able to listen to her talk last night as part of her new book tour. She has just released her second book, 'Unmasked', which I have started reading, and I read her first book, 'Everything to Live For: The Inspirational Story of Turia Pitt', a few years ago.



Six years ago, Turia was running an ultra-marathon in the rugged Kimberlies in Western Australia when she was caught in a grass fire. As a result of this, she received full thickness burns to 65% of her body. This is an horrific injury – one you just can not imagine dealing with. But she not only lived through it, she has made her new life into something absolutely amazing. Listening to her talk last night was such a special experience for me. I am not a teary person, but I was struggling to fight back the tears. It was not because I felt sorry for her or sad for her situation. Turia did not inspire feelings of sympathy at all. She oozed happiness, strength, and positivity. I was tearing up because everything she said completely hit home with what I have dealt with and am dealing with in my own life (though on a very different scale to Turia's horrible experience and injury). And also because it floored me to see how someone who has lived through

such a massive experience can come through as such an amazing, funny, happy, and positive person.

She talked about the initial bleak time when she had to learn to cope with her new body, and with the fact that her life had been irreversibly changed – all her plans and goals completely flipped over. This hit me because that is how I have felt. I think that I have dealt with a lot of the changes and done it well, but there are things I am still trying to come to terms with and cope with. Then she started to talk about how she turned that into a completely new mindset. She could sit at home watching tv, feeling miserable and angry, and watch her life go past without her, or she could jump back in and hit it with all her strength. Sometimes I feel like I am watching my life go by. Because I rely on financial help and on other people to take me places or to help me out with tasks that take stamina, I find that a lot of the time I am not doing exactly what I want, or I don't want to keep hounding people to put their plans on hold to help me. I also get scared off by the physical consequences of doing certain things that I want to do. Turia made me feel like I need to find even more drive than I already have. She has so many physical limitations, but she has done phenomenal feats like running triathlons (she is currently training to conquer Mt Everest base camp!) and presenting a TED Talk. Those aren't goals that would go on my list! But there are goals that I do have that sometimes feel are impossible. She made me think, 'why?' I get up in the morning, and for the hour or so that I need to wait for my medications to kick in before I can start my day, I have got into the habit of watching mindless YouTube videos (Booktube is different – I learn a lot there) or tv shows. What a waste of time!! I have an endless list of books I want to read – why on earth am I not using that hour to read?! Or to write a blog post, or work on my writing? My friends and family often tell me how they are inspired by how I have dealt with my life change and how I have handled it with grace. I have always thought, 'hhmm...you should see the

behind-the-scenes!' Now I feel like I need to push myself even more. Not necessarily physically – my body isn't going to change its limitations just because I have been motivated by an incredible woman. But I want to make an active change to further improve my drive, and my determination to not get to 80 years of age and wonder what I have achieved. Turia talked about what she uses as motivation. Things like making her family and medical support people feel like all their hard work to help her has not gone to waste. She also wants to make them happy to see her happy. These are awesome driving forces and ones I will keep in my mind.

One thing that Turia has reminded me to focus on is to start looking after my body even better than I already do. For example, I have had goals to try things that could make my POTS symptoms better. Things like eating smaller meals more often. This sounds easy. But eating large meals three times a day is a surprisingly hard habit to break. Especially when you live with other people who follow that routine. I have learned over the years what I need to do in terms of my multiple and severe food intolerances and I keep to that diet extremely well, and rarely get symptoms these days. I am still learning what are triggers for my POTS symptoms, so I still have things to figure out. But it's easy to think, 'meh, my body is faulty and I am going to get the symptoms anyway, so I might as well have a second serve of this yummy meal.' Then I pay for it afterwards with tachycardia and pre syncope and a lot of other symptoms. I need to focus on it like I focus on my diet. Turia gets up each day and trains for marathons, and she works hard at her job as a motivational speaker, and she writes books. She would have to do everything possible to keep her body functioning as well as it can so as to do at that. Obviously we have very different physical issues, but this is something I can learn from her. A lot of the time I genuinely can not do the most seemingly simple or non-physical thing on my list – writing a blog post or reading a book is out of the question. Limitations can not be completely put aside. But finding those

reasonable goals and working towards them, and not wasting precious minutes is what is important.

Don't get me wrong, I know that I try hard already – I try to do gentle exercise when I can; I go to all my medical appointments; I research constantly about what I could do to improve my health and about all the medications I take; I think positively; I try to raise awareness; I have taken advantage of the change in my circumstances and am studying something I have wanted to for years. But listening to Turia speak has reminded me to push even more.

There is a fine line though, of course. I do have a habit of pushing myself to do something that I want to, and going too far. Then I end up in a heap for days. I do that too often. It's that tough balancing act – trying to find that safe spot. Chronic illness sucks, and no amount of positive thinking is going to improve my body. Lately I have been getting fed up by some people on Instagram saying things like, 'if you want something, all you need to do is put that thought out into the universe, and it will happen; you can manifest anything.' I even recently saw someone excitedly post a photo of a book she was reading that talked about how all chronic illnesses and physical limitations are caused and remain because that person wanted it and wants to keep it that way. Sorry...what?! One line of the book said that Crohn's disease is caused because that person is bad at saying no in life situations! Even if I didn't come from a medical background I would know that that is a load of codswallop! (If this thinking helps some people, and apparently it does, then I am genuinely happy for them, but I personally do not see the logic). You can not reverse a disease by learning to say no! Despite knowing that I can not just fix my health by positive thinking, Turia reminded me that although there is a lot that I can not and will not be able to do, there are things that I can always improve on and strive for. Ultimately, that is something everyone – healthy or not – can remember.

I have rambled on for long enough! I know there are a lot of other things I learned from Turia, so I probably will do another post about it. I will definitely do a book review when I finish her second book, so look out for that! And I absolutely recommend you read her first book as soon as possible.

We have to embrace the bad days and the feelings of anger, sadness and grief. That is what makes us human, and it helps to drive us. We also have to keep going and make the most of every moment that we can. Have a think, like I currently am, if there is anything that you can change to make you feel happier or more fulfilled. Is there time in your day that you are not making the best use of? Is there something that you could do to help someone else that would in turn help you appreciate your life more? Are there things that you could try to change that would make it more physically possible for you to work towards your goals? I have chosen one of the many journals that I have collected and plan to start making a list of all the little and big things that float around in my head that I want to do and change.

I would love to hear what your thoughts are, what your goals are, what you have trouble with – anything you want to talk about! Pop a comment down below, or privately message me in the contact form in the bottom right “Ask Gembles’ box. I hope that you are having a lovely day, and I will talk to you again soon! x