

MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

EP 5 SEG 1 ROSS V14

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Hi, I'm Annette Shun Wah, welcome to Models of Achievement. In this series we're exploring the successes and aspirations of extraordinary Australians who have discovered their own inspirational paths through university study. These are personal stories from current students and recent graduates revealing how education has transformed their lives. In this first profile former soldier Ross has traded life in a war zone for shooting of a very different variety. He now spends his days creating television projects as a communications student and working as a video editor.

ROSS: My name's Ross and this is my story.

[SINGS IN HEAVY METAL BAND]

ROSS: My band, my baby, my intense baby. Managing a band is extremely time consuming. My girlfriend calls it my other girlfriend and it's very true, you know, there's another three personalities I've got to work with. In collaboration to make a creative works and on top of that there's the business side of it. That's a part-time job in itself but that's a beast I just can't leave alone. I just love it too much.

I grew up in Sydney out at western Sydney in Campbelltown. A bit of a rough part of town. Sometimes it was hard to distinguish the difference between the juvenile detention centre and the high school. They both had high fencing but, you know, aside from the looks of the place and the aesthetics, yeah, it was actually quite a fun childhood.

When it come to schooling I really loved my science and geology was the top of that. It was Mr Reid, actually, inspired me because he taught me that you can take a little piece of evidence and you can paint an entire picture of it and you can actually figure out what's happened in the environment and I was able from there to take that idea and fit it into other parts of my life as well. So just by figuring out a little bit you can get the whole deal.

My father was in the army, his father was in the army and his father was in the army. It's a bit of a tradition to go down through the sons of the family to join the military.

I just finished high school. I was doing like in between jobs after high school like storeman jobs and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I got into uni and it just wasn't for me. I wanted to go out, you know, drink beer and chase women. It was my father that suggested to me, you know, he goes why don't you go full time do four years and then go to uni.

Yeah, I joined the regular army and then I was fortunate enough to be posted to 1RAR up in Townsville. It's one of those things I just took too naturally, especially bush craft and going out field. I really enjoyed that. Take long strolls at night while you're patrolling, looking at the stars, it was quite nice.

In the military they call it signing your life away so you're basically signing yourself over to them and when you're a teenager and you sign that line you go it's just another document that you've signed but when you find yourself on a boat going over to, you know, a war zone, then it starts to become reality, you realise that wow, I really have signed this over and now I'm going to go and serve and do this duty that I've signed up to do. And, yeah, there I was 19 years old in East Timor.

I remember the first time I cocked my weapon to go on patrol and I put a live one into the chamber and you realise wow, this is serious. You know, we're set to rock and roll, if it all goes down we're set to rock and roll.

It was actually in East Timor that I made my connection for my next posting after that. There was this SAS guy that was there and I managed to get him the weapon parts I needed in a quick amount of time and he remembered me and he gave me his number and said, "If you ever want a job to let me know." So I gave him a call and organised a job to go over to Perth to work with the SAS, yeah.

I did five years working with the SAS. A year and a bit of my life was spent over in Third World countries so it is a high operational tempo and it's also high training.

You're constantly going away to different States and doing different jobs just to train. So you're rarely at home. So it is a massive commitment in your life.

Working with the SAS, there's not much that I can actually talk about. 2005 was my first deployment to Afghanistan and then I went again a year and a half later. Experience in Afghanistan when you first arrive you have the deer in the head lights sort of look on your face. You're like wow, I'm in a war zone and after a while you settle into your niche. You learn where things are, you learn what other people's roles are and then you start to fit into the machine.

You make friendships that you'd never, never have anywhere else. Like I've got mates that I made over there that they know me better than anyone else would because, you know, we lived together, we worked together, we fought together.

So I was sitting around with the missus one day, she was the at the top of her game, I was at the top of my game, we were both earning good money and we were advancing in our fields but we realised that we've never done anything else. So I was either going to do that for the next 20 years and not learn anything else. So we both decided there sitting on the kitchen bench going what are we going to do about this? We went well we did promise our parents one day that we would get educated so yeah, we took the leap and yeah, decided to go and get an education.

To find the path of what I actually wanted to get educated in that was an interesting pursuit because, you know, I'd done so much service for the military so I took some time off and then it dawned on me alright, I've made the decision to go to university but then I hadn't ascertained what I wanted to do at university. So, you know, I did some research on the Internet about what I liked and what I didn't like. I was thinking about going into the police, I was thinking about - I was even thinking about nursing at one point and then I realised they just didn't really suit me. You know, I'd already come from a job where you have to carry a gun, I didn't want to go to another job to carry a gun and nursing wasn't really appealing to me.

So I was just sitting on the couch and realised how many DVDs I had and how much I enjoyed television so yeah, it hit me like a tonne of bricks. I want to get involved in

making and creating film and television. And then it was - from there it was an easy process. Once I had found what I wanted to do it was - it got easier from there.

And mark it.

WOMAN: 8.1 take 1.

ROSS: Action.

MAN: Got the case.

ROSS cut. That was it.

ROSS: The feeling of taking that leap to go from a stable career to becoming a student was just sheer terrifying, you know, to sum it up. It was nerve wracking. The money didn't quite work out. Like I was always like \$20 out here or \$20 out there and I've gone bugger it, I'm just going to take the leap, I'm going to do it. So me and the missus decided let's just do it. We'll find work, we'll find the money, the education is paramount, that's the goal. Once we took the leap then it was a lot easier. It was just that moment of taking that leap when you're packing up your house and you're putting everything into, you know, a truck to get shipped over to Sydney and that journey and then I was looking for a house and it was really stressful and I found the house and then we loaded the house up and then we did our first day at uni then it all started to fall into place. The blinkers had come off and then all of a sudden I had a different clarity about what I wanted. It wasn't just about going for media. It was about what can I get for myself now.

And now I'm doing it for myself, instead of working in a team collaboration, now I'm working for myself and my education and now I'm pushing myself to see what I can do.

From going from sheer terror to sheer awesomeness, you know, it's an awesome feeling to be that independent and to be that much of a free agent to go and pursue what you really want.

You know, I'm in my 30s now, you know, starting uni in my 30s, you blink and you're in second year, blink again and you're in third year. Like time flies. I have absolutely no regrets about going to university. I had lot of fears and reservations about going into it before it happened but once I got there I realised that it was totally the right decision for me.

My name's Ross and this is my story. I enlisted in the army when I was 17. I served two tours in Afghanistan. I needed a change in my life.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Ross will graduate with a Bachelor of Communication degree in media production and is looking forward to developing his career in the world of television.

END OF TRANSCRIPT