

GRANT'S STORY

Grant, do you want to tell me a bit about your story, bit about your background?

Yeah. My name's Grant Wallaby, I was born in Katherine, NT. I grew up in Kalkarindji west of Katherine. I grew up all my life in Western Australia, Hall's Creek and in Arnhem Land, Maningrida. My childhood was okay, pretty good, growing up as a kid, going to school and at the age of nine or eight I started doing robbing, stealing, breaking into teachers' houses, school, at the shop then I was more like being a bad person and my mum and dad couldn't handle me so much breaking in. So, I was sent to juvenile detention for nearly two or three months.

The detention centre was way more hard and more violent than the outside world, you get treated as - not from the guards but the other kids, other juveniles were treat you as - they beat you up, torture you. It was terrible for me back then. I cried and that's the time, was a point where I just break down. Couldn't do much of where to go and what to do 'cause you were in this four-wall, isolated at the juvi centre. You were nothing at all. Once the lights goes off you just in the dark, you kind of hear voices saying that you're useless, can't do anything here. It's best if you get out of here and go and be someone out in the street.

After my six months' detention came out. For two months my mum and dad put me in a program in Hall's Creek and you get to be two months out in the bush in a station. You learn about culture and you learn about white society as well, how they teach you, a cattle station. The rule is you get to make your own bed, clean your room, get up, cook your own breakfast. As for lunch and dinner your meal already prepared but you get to do a whole lot of chores at the station. That actually benefitted me a lot. I met a guy from Queensland. He told me that for being a bad person it's to yourself, you can't look at yourself with others around you, you got to look after yourself, reflection on yourself on the water or in the mirror, do what you're going to do.

Then as soon as I left that station two months later, I started right back in school. The school went up to Year 9, I didn't pass Year 10 and 11 and 12. I came home Year 8, I graduated from that and I came to St John's College here in Darwin, done my Year 9, Year 10, 11 and 12 here, graduated in 2005. I left school and met a wonderful woman, a girl. We started dating for maybe two years then got married in Western Australia. For a few years we had a daughter and that's when everything got messed up again. I had a great life for her, and everything got messed up 'cause I was more into the - first drink I ever had was 2024, '23 and tasted my first alcohol, never turned 'round from that. I was constantly drinking a lot - not drinking a lot, drinking on the payday day each fortnightly, came back home on a Sunday and be massively violent to her - not violent, arguing, continuing arguing with her. I got choked and told myself I should leave so I left everything that I had which we are still married today.

She forgave me for everything what I done, and I came here, I worked in Kalkarindji for a while, started doing labouring job as a painter, quite enjoyed. It was pretty good then, didn't worry about alcohol or didn't worry about anything. There was a social club there, social bar or social club open seven days a week, Monday 'til Saturday. Every after work just go to there, just go and just go, have a few beers, hang around with friends and workers. Get too violent where you had - get into a fight with a person a lot. I got arrested four times.

So, I turned around and I said, "I resign from my job", I came here in Darwin. I was working here in Darwin from December, parttime job painting as a labour, interior housepainter. It ended up for a month and it got rock bottom 'cause of the cyclone and then the alcohol started to - drugs and alcohol started to kick in again. Didn't turn up to work a lot, turned up at work at like 9 or 10, sort of hung over, half drunk, body shaking and all that and my boss told me "I'm going to have to let you go". Tried pleading with them saying "give me one more chance".

That's when I started living in the streets in Darwin city, find a warm, cosy little alleyway. It was sad and just walking around for three, four days or five days without food, losing a lot of weight and getting Centrelink - the dole money was every fortnightly, just drinking, not worry about food, drinking, drinking. That was so hurtful that I - took me to a dark place where I just wanted to jump off to that edge of that rocky cliff area at Darwin city, Scenic View. Just wanted to jump off the rock and just end my life but didn't want to do it. I was thinking that I'm only 36 years old, it's a lot to do more than that.

For maybe four months now drinking, got into a lot of fights with locals around here, been beaten down a lot. Then I heard someone said "you should try staying at the detention centre, the old Berrimah, sober up centre". "Where's that?" Came here and then one of the workers told me, staff told me "you should go to that Stringybark Centre and try work on your alcohol and drug, start quitting and just start doing something better.

First two was me and Bradley, me and Bradley was - I knew Bradley from the outside area. Me and him were having a few beers back then. Came in here and it started to work, and a really good person taught me about your life, your feelings, thinking about that. So here I am, just trying to better myself, to be a better person and start my own business.

Can you tell me a bit more about the business you want to start and what you want for the future?

Yeah, I want to start up my own business with painting, painting interior and exterior house-painting, housepainter. That's a small business that you can work on outside the Kimberleys and inside the Kimberleys. That's what my biggest goal is 'cause I started as a small-time labourer at the community. The first thing they got me doing a job is painting and I didn't like it for maybe two weeks or three weeks but ended up in six months, in one year I started to like painting and I never looked back at anything else. I was so good at painting and then a guy told me, he said "start your own business, you got the skills, you got everything" so he gave me that advice and I've still got it in my head so I want to start off painting, start my own business. It's a great opportunity for me to do that. From coming to a bad background and beaten down a lot and now I'm here to start off that as a new business for me and being a painter would be great.

It's great, even though you said you've been beaten down a lot, you're still trying, you're still moving forward it sounds like?

Yeah, it's real good. I feel down a lot sometimes but there's always someone to talk to like you, and the staff, the guys outside there been helpful from the start, they're really good. It's like you motivate yourself, not only keep your feelings inside you, get to bring it out to them as well and they can listen.

I really appreciate this chance to talk and hear your story.

Thanks for that, mate. It's really good to talk about my life story.