

come and enjoy a free

... film night

free
30-minute
documentary

Wednesday 19 July 2006

@ Salvation Army Hall, 13 Stuart Tce

5.45pm for 6.00pm start



“See How She Runs”

a young woman's battle with mental illness

5.45pm
drinks &
nibbles will be
provided

Anne Garton is a young Queensland woman who consistently achieved outstanding results in the sporting, academic and professional arenas. Her childhood dream of a police career was underway when the stresses of emergency call-outs triggered a devastating psychological collapse. Severe and mysterious mental illness left Anne Garton and her family literally fighting for her life. At rock bottom and struggling for a lifeline Anne wrote a list of challenges for herself. At the top of the list she wrote, 'compete in a triathlon'. Against the odds, Anne started to notch up victories, and last year was chosen to represent Australia at a major event in Hawaii. *Australian Story* accompanied her on the trip as she battled through illness and financial and emotional obstacles towards the goal of just getting through the race.

Please RSVP to Helena at MHACA on
8950 4600 by Tuesday 18 July 2006



“I Was a Winner Just for Being There”

Anne Garton’s story of living with mental illness ...

“Aussie Aussie Aussie ... oi oi oi ..”

It was the parade of nations in the opening ceremony of the 2005 World Age Group Triathlon Championships in Honolulu, Hawaii. I was marching behind the Australian flag, representing Australia in triathlon. The race: a 1.5km ocean swim, 40km cycle, then a 10km run—ouch!

I was a winner just for being there, for I have a serious mental illness. Its symptoms—depression, anxiety, and psychosis—were so severe that I spent eight months of 2005 in a psychiatric hospital and seven months in 2004; six months in 2003.

Impossible! How could a person who spends eight months in hospital make the Australian triathlon team?

Mental illness took my home, career, dignity and self-esteem, so as my last act of defiance I began triathlon training because it was the hardest thing I could think of.

In 2002, I joined a beginners’ triathlon squad and learnt how to swim, cycle and run. It was hard—*very hard*. And *it still is*. Before I can swim even one lap of the pool or turn the pedal of the bike, I have to fight my mind. I have to push past the screaming, horrific roar in my head; deep, dark depression, crippling anxiety, overwhelming apathy, terror, zero self-esteem.

With permission from hospital doctors and nurses, I kept a bicycle,

swimming gear and running shoes in my hospital room. I was the patient always just off for a run, or coming back from a bike ride. I trained every day that I was in hospital. Many days I could barely pedal, swim or run, but I did it. I never quit.

From hospital, I won the 2004 Queensland State Triathlon Title Series. From hospital, in 2005, I qualified for the Australian Triathlon Team and flew to Hawaii for the World Championships.

Why am I so determined, refusing to quit despite serious illness?

Triathlon gave me my first taste of “*the other side*.” The other side is the happiness and pure pleasure I feel when I ride my bike at sunrise. It is a

feeling of accomplishment after a tough run. A feeling I never had before.

The “*other side*” is like chocolate – once you have the first taste, you crave more until you want it very day and in every part of your life. And hence, I started to recover. Through triathlon, I started believing in myself, I finally accepted that I had a mental illness, educated myself about my illness and sought treatment.

Every day I get stronger. I now manage my symptoms much better and in a more positive way. I no longer regard myself as a “mentally ill freak”. I am a *normal person*: I just happen to get sick sometimes.

Yes, I still get unwell and end up in hospital. But it is different this time – I have hope. I *know* that things can be different. I know there is “*the other side*”. I *know* setbacks are only short-term, and manageable. And despite the ravages of illness, I have found something that makes me truly happy.

Triathlon is my chocolate. I hope that you can find your chocolate too. ✕



Anne Garton, competitor 748, in the 2005 World Age Group Triathlon Championships in Hawaii