

## Out of the blue

It started much like any other ordinary day, however, today I was determined to try and tackle my terrifying fear of water.

It all began 11 years ago when my obnoxious elder brother (Luke) found it highly amusing to push me into the local swimming pool, whilst on a family day out. Thankfully my mum was upon me in no time and dragged me to the surface where I coughed, spluttered and proceeded to scream for the next half an hour!

Mum and dad had tried everything over the years to encourage, coax and even bribe me to try and help but the best I have managed is paddling in the sea or standing in the shallow end of the pool watching all my friends career down slides and shriek at the fun of the rapids.

Back to today though and here I am, thirteen years of age and on a family holiday of a lifetime – Australia. We are here for two weeks over the Christmas holidays, visiting mum's brother and his family who emigrated here five years ago and who we are seeing for the first time in person since then rather than via a computer screen.

Our Christmas present from uncle Bob is an organised private boat trip out to the coral reef (merry Christmas to me!!!) and to try snorkelling to see what I have only been able to look at in books or on a screen because of my fear.

So here I am, sitting on a cruiser (yes, I've managed that much) and am constantly checking my lifejacket and the tightness of its straps. Our guide is telling us in great detail about the reef and its surroundings and where exactly we (they!) can and can't swim because of conservation and protected areas and I am staring at the turquoise ocean, half in fear and half in awe.

Before our swim, we were treated to a delicious lunch of fresh fish, salad and bowls of fruit and as we ate I kept staring at the scuba and snorkelling gear lying on the deck, wishing I had the guts to put on a wetsuit and join my family for the dive that afternoon. When lunch was finished and we'd had another safety briefing, it was time!!!! My mum and dad looked at me in anticipation whilst getting into their wetsuits but my brother had disappeared to the back of the boat. I found him, staring out to sea still in his clothes and asked him why he wasn't getting ready.

His reply shocked me as he explained that as much as he wanted to join mum and dad, he wasn't prepared to do it without me. He told me that he had felt so much guilt over the years and even though he was young when it happened he had never forgiven himself for all the fun I had missed out on.

He looked so sad and was so apologetic but I told him it was ok, that I'd forgiven him and to go and have fun to which he replied 'not without you'.

He held out his hand and I knew that if I didn't at least try, then he too would miss out on an amazing experience. As we walked towards mum and dad, my heart was racing but I knew I had to overcome my fear and there would be no better place to do it. With my wetsuit and a lifejacket on, I climbed down the ladder and stared at the rippling water where my brother was holding out his hand. My legs were trembling as I lowered my body into the water and let the lifejacket keep me afloat, still hanging onto my brother and putting all my trust in him to keep me safe. We slowly moved away from the boat and I tried to control my breathing to keep calm with Luke reassuring me that all was well.

The water was so clear and still and as I held my breath and dipped my head slightly under the water. Through my goggles, a colourful world of fish and coral appeared before my eyes – it was amazing and my fear was replaced with joy.

I was so thankful that my brother persuaded me to at least try and found it ironic that the person who created my fear was also the person to finally cure it – thank you Luke.