

Choose Māia

Written by Josh Arnold

“Who’s up next for abseiling!” The instructors voice echoed. I really wanted to try it, but the thought of it left me overwhelmed by fear.

What if its too high? What if I have an anxiety attack? What if I fall? All of these “What if” questions clouded my mind with doubt, so I convinced myself that I didn’t really care. I walked away slowly from the boisterous crowd with slumped shoulders, head down, feeling ashamed, regretting my decision. I felt like a failure.

I have always had a fear of heights. The diagnosis I received at age 5, was anxiety and Sensory Processing Disorder. This means that my brain processes senses too strongly. I always miss out on things that should be ‘easy’- like climbing or sailing.

As I reflected- I knew that I had let my fears keep me caged and I prayed that I could be braver. I silently set the goal that I would decide to overcome my fears next time.

Months later, my dad asked “Josh, do you want to come fishing tomorrow.” In the past, I always decline because of the lurching boat and murky water. I decided to show māia (courage), and I replied ‘Yes’. As I lay in bed that night, a million “what if” questions flooded my head. My fears about the waves washed over me, until finally it was waves of sleep that claimed me...

Out on the water, after we launched, the waves hit the boat as it skipped across the calm, glass-like waters. The salty air whipped across my face. We were heading out towards the line of buoys in the distance, marking the location of the mussel farm. I could see the mountainous islands around me, easily visible silhouettes against the crisp blue morning sky. I glimpsed shags diving into the murky ocean and discerned two penguins bobbing in the moana.

As soon as we were anchored down, we cast our lines. I listened to the whistling tune of the fishing line gently descending into the murky depths. Once the hooks were down we waited patiently. Partially covered by clouds, the sun sent light streaming down, forming glimmering spotlights as it reflected onto the gentle, glistening water. It was silent apart from the soft crashing sound of the waves and a seagull calling out from its spectators seat on the buoys. The bird life around us called out to each other, waiting, as we were, for the tip of our rods to nod.

All my ‘What if?’ questions left as I acclimatised to the experience. I felt joy and relief bubble up as I realised that I had reached a turning point in overcoming a long held fear. Now I wished that I could have gone out fishing with my dad all those other times when he asked me. It will be a life long journey, but when an opportunity comes my way, I am aiming to overcome anxiety and choose to be courageous instead.