

'Resilience, Road Safety and Coping with Change'* is not simply the title of speaker Dean Lanyon's motivational sessions—it's also the story of his life.

The Ballarat-based father of two has been to hell and back, not once but twice: 'I have had two major and unexpected hurdles to overcome,' he writes on his web site, 'which have taught me a great deal about the need for personal resilience.'

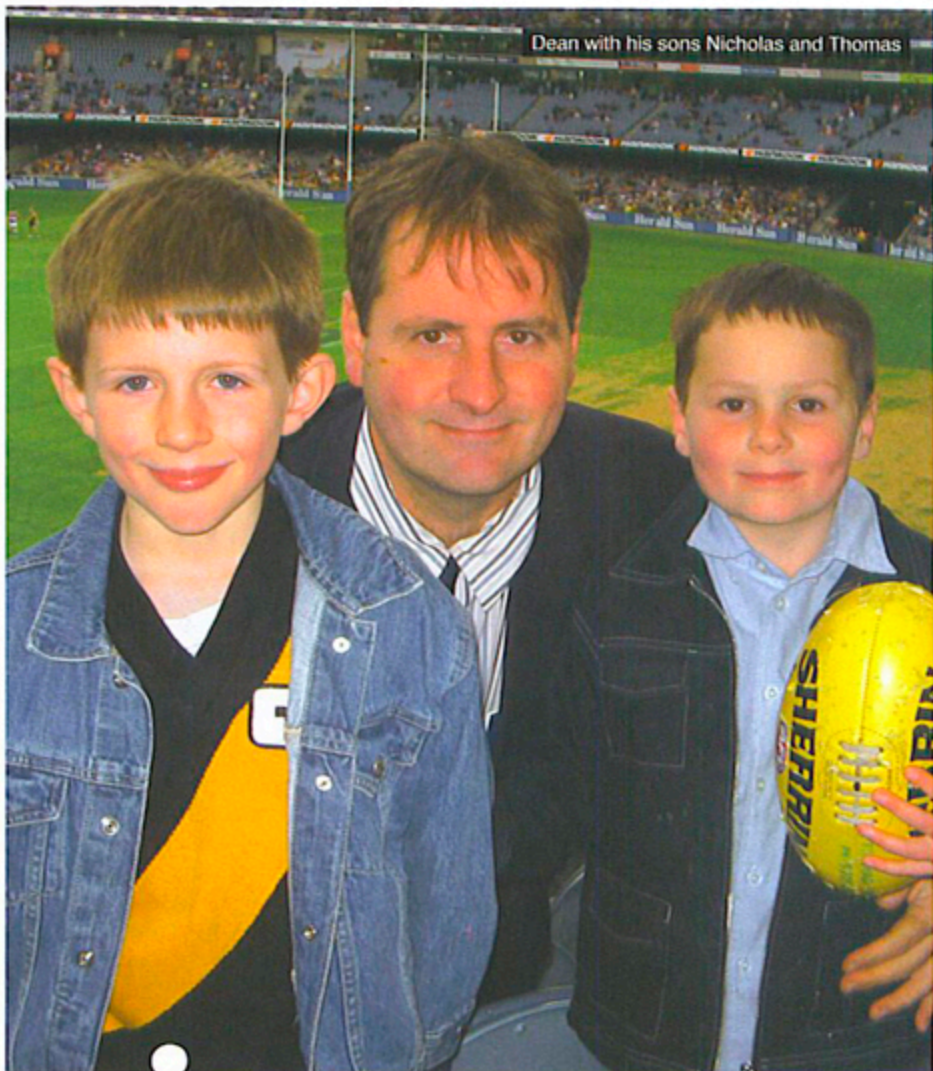
Dean's amazing journey began on a Victorian highway back in 1986 when he was driving home after a weekend in Melbourne with friends and his older sister Jenny, who was asleep on the back seat of the car. It had been raining heavily and the roads were treacherous. This and Dean's lack of sleep the night before proved a deadly combination.

'I must have dozed off momentarily but was woken by the sound of gravel under the tyres,' Dean recalls. 'I pulled on the steering wheel to bring the car back onto the road but it was too wet and we smashed into a large peppercorn tree. I was thrown clear and knocked unconscious in the process.'

'When I came to, I walked to where Jenny was still in her seatbelt. I felt her pulse, but I could already see that she had died.'

Dean spent the next few years in a kind of emotional wilderness; 'switching off', he says, was definitely a coping strategy. However, growing up in a strong Baptist family meant God was, thankfully, never far away.

'Faith was a very important element in coping. During the longest 20 minutes of my life when I was holding my sister, I felt a warm



Dean with his sons Nicholas and Thomas

Moving on

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Dean Lanyon knows the value of escaping from the ghosts of the past. By Jen Vuk

presence around me that is difficult to put into words.'

Another part of Dean's coping strategy was keeping busy. Coming from a family of 'high achievers' this wasn't hard and Dean threw himself into his studies, completing a bachelor of engineering degree at the end of 1990. By 1991, he'd secured a top engineering job.

In 1996, 10 years after his sister's death, 28-year-old Dean was married with a baby son, and working in the US for a prestigious engineering firm. Life finally seemed ideal—and then the headaches started.

'I took some paracetamol but this didn't have any impact,' he says. 'My headaches continued to worsen until, finally, I passed out, at which time I was rushed to hospital.'

During a brain scan doctors found the reason for Dean's severe headaches—a cerebral haemorrhage.

'Once this was realised, I was rushed into emergency, where I suffered a second haemorrhage and subsequently stopped

breathing. A resuscitation team put me on a life-support system and I underwent a seven-hour operation.'

While the operation was a success, 24 hours later Dean developed hydrocephalus (fluid on the brain) and fell into a coma that would last for 10 weeks.

'The longer a person is in a coma the less likely they are to come out of one in any reasonable shape,' Dean says without understatement. Once he 'resurfaced', intense rehabilitation followed.

'I had to learn once again to walk, talk, hold my head up, regain continence etc.' he recalls. 'I was basically like a newborn baby, but in the following months I did regain all of these skills and have now made a near-complete recovery.'

After having survived not one but two life-threatening experiences, Dean knew that someone was trying to tell him something (God obviously has a plan for his life but Dean says he's uncomfortable with the notion that he's 'more special' than anyone

else simply because of his circumstances).

It was a close friend who first suggested that Dean use his experiences to help others, but it was the flamboyant pianist Liberace who inadvertently propelled him onto the speaking circuit.

'On his deathbed Liberace said, "I wanted the world to be a better place for me having lived on it",' says Dean, 'and this inspired me to begin work as a motivational speaker, despite always being very nervous speaking in front of a roomful of people.'

Today, Dean travels around Australia, visiting schools and sharing his story. It feels, he says, very much like a new beginning.

'You can't move forward until you have dealt with the "ghosts" from the past,' he says. 'I spent considerable time seeing a psychiatrist and this, in conjunction with the passing of time, has allowed me to deal with my life, put it into perspective and move on.'

*For more information go to: www.dean-lanyon.com.