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Craig Hamilton will be a name familiar to many people who listen to the wireless.

Craig has been with ABC Sport for decades and he recently stepped down as a much-loved radio presenter with ABC Newcastle. Craig Hamilton came to the wireless literally blinking in the sunlight. He'd been working for years as a coal miner deep underground where everything is blacker than black and where you're always casting a nervous glance at the roof of the tunnel. It wouldn't be true to say that being a radio host and a sports broadcaster was Craig's dream job because Craig never really dreamed such a thing was even possible for him. He loved the work but then a few cracks appeared in the roof of his own mind.

During the 2000 Sydney Olympics Craig had a very public breakdown on a train station platform which sent him in a whole new direction that was as unexpected as his radio career.

Craig's story is now at the centre of a new documentary called The Promise. Hello Craig.

Hi Richard. Your story starts in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Tell me about the farm you grew up on. Well it was a small farm. It was only about 50 acres in those days. We used to call it acres. It was flat. The soil quality was very good. It was rich river flats. It was a dairy farm so you know dad was milking cows. Not many. It was only about 30 cows and I sometimes look back on those days. It was a great experience growing up in those you know because we had plenty

of room to play cricket. We had plenty of room to play rugby league. You know dad made a cricket pitch which was almost and then we had a field almost a full size of a cricket field and the mates would come out and we'd play on that and we'd have a footy ground which was basically the size of a full footy ground but then I'd milk the cows and help dad as my brother did too and it was a great life and it's like any childhood though. You don't know anything different. So it's normal. Was your dad that kind of classic man on the land on horseback?

Yeah absolutely. He had a horse, rode a horse. He would work the cattle on whilst riding a horse and he'd always have a dog, always had border collie dogs but there were times when I think around about the time he was having a few too many beers so instead of driving the car into Singleton because we're on the edge of Singleton instead of driving the car into Singleton to go to the pub and have a few beers or drive the tractor which he did as well sometimes drive the tractor on the highway into Singleton to have a few beers he'd ride the horse and this you know you look back that's an extraordinary thing to do. Can you get pinged being DUI on horseback? I wonder in this country or no one would bother to do that I suppose. I would imagine not. I've never heard of anyone who's gone DUI on a horse. So it was a good place for a sporty kid. You mentioned you helped dad with the milking. What did that mean for you getting up in the morning? Well I wanted to be a part of it from an early age so I can remember probably from the age of eight or ten years of age saying to dad make sure you wake me up in the morning. This is school days

make sure you wake me up in the morning because I want to come down and help you milk the cows. I got you a keen. Well I was and you know I thought back as to why I did that whether it was that connection with dad I just wanted to do whatever dad was doing and the way to do that was to go down and milk the cows. See that sounds vaguely romantic to me Craig but what's the reality of getting up at 4 a.m to milk the cows? Well it wasn't much fun because you'd remember that the night before you'd said wake me up wake me up and when dad would actually do what you're asking to do and wake you up you go oh my god it's early but then you get out and you'd you'd go milk the

cows but many times he just let me sleep you know he'd let me sleep in. And how were the cows did you cop a few kicks from them over the years? Yeah definitely definitely that was one of the occupational hazards because there were some cows and you got to know them in the in the herd which

were more aggressive than others and you knew that you had a chance to get kicked by one or two that were in that herd so you had to leg rope them that's one of the first things that I learned you put the cows in the bale right and then you put a chain around them at the back so they don't come out backwards but then to prevent you from getting prevent yourself from getting kicked you get a leg rope just a bit of rope tie it around the leg of the cow below the knee pull it back into position tie a knot around it so this restricted the cow's capacity to kick you.

Cows of course don't discreetly duck into the ladies when they need to go to the toilet was this an occupational hazard for you at times craig? Very much so very much so anyone who's milked a cow particularly in summer it was worse because you know without putting too fine a point of it cows shit and they shit in the bales when they're getting milked and with the normal force sometimes

as well with the normal force and so you're milking the cow and you end up with this all over the tail of the cow now if it's summertime there's a lot of flies and so out of the cows get rid of the flies they you know swap them away with the tail with the tail so if you're sitting there you're going to cop that across the face and that happened more than once. All before you start school

of the morning how about your mum what was her story? Well mum came out from the UK as a basically

was a 10 pound palm in the would have been the early 60s she came out with a good friend of hers named Cecily and she's both done nursing in in the UK mum ended up working at Singleton hospital and Cecily her friend worked there for a while as well but then she went to Brisbane and met her future husband mum stayed in Singleton and met dad in Singleton. Well she ever cut out to be a farmer's to live on the land to be live the farming life herself? Absolutely not I don't know circumstances was mum cut out to be a farmer's wife. She hadn't grown up on on a farm in in the UK?

No. Had no experience of farm life until then? No no no it would have been very tough very tough because um yeah mum had no interest in being on the farm no interested in milking cows but then by the same token she had her hands full with with kids and trying to bring us up which would have been problematic in itself. What sort of a kid were you Craig? I'll probably there was no such thing as ADHD when I went to school but knowing what we know now I think I'd get a I think I'd get a diagnosis pretty quickly because I was always one of those kids who was disruptive always one of those kids who was talking and didn't have a great deal of interest in the subject matter in the classroom and so that ticks a few boxes. Yeah there's also the thing I remember

talking to a country teacher once who said it's hard to teach sometimes it's hard to teach the boys in particular in the country because they're always looking out the window wondering what dad and their older brothers are doing was that you as well? I think I spent a bit of time looking out the window because looking out the window I found was more interesting than what was going on

in the classroom and there was also the practical joke side of it as well and I used to do a lot of

that just to entertain myself and to entertain others in the class I would have been a nightmare So you're this wriggly hyperactive kid were you expected though to take over the farm one day? Well there would have been an expectation certainly because that's the way it worked you know granddad has the farm passes the farm on to dad dad passes on the farm to the kids and so on and so forth but certainly the expectation was there but by the time I'd reached my mid-teens that was the last thing I wanted to do well because I could see how hard dad worked I saw how hard he worked there's no one I've met in my life Richard who had a better work ethic than my father never saw him have a sick day and he would he'd get up and go milk the cows regardless of how unwell he was everyone gets sick and he injured himself a few times he fell off the horse a few times he was kicked himself in the in the bales milking the cow he had physical injuries he tore a muscle off he had torn groin muscle at one stage we had to get a neighbour to come and help milk the cows we were there as kids dad could hardly do anything but he was still there so you just saw a life of hard work stress and injury then and I saw a job where you never had a weekend off and you never had a holiday and I decided I didn't want that but you didn't know what you wanted to do but just not that you know what it was yep so where did that leave you where did you go to from there well halfway through year 12 I still had no idea what I wanted to do not a clue and there was some jobs advertised on the native sport at school and they were for the jobs were for cadet coal miners or cadet underground miners the bhp collieries in Newcastle which was west side of Newcastle at that stage bhp had five underground mines I thought well there's a job I could apply for I've no idea what I'm getting into but I applied got an interview got a job and was told that I had the job two days after I sat the English exam in my hsc and so from that point on the hsc didn't take precedence it was irrelevant right it was irrelevant as were my marks what did your parents think of you saying I'm going underground I'm not going to be on the land I'll go underground I'm sure dad was disappointed but he never said he was and I think mum would have been horrified that I was going underground even though she didn't ever she never said that but I would imagine that mum would not have liked that idea at all see to me Craig the whole idea of going underground and working in a mine seems vaguely science fiction like to me it's almost like going to the moon to work like to go that far underground I think I'd have trouble getting in that mine for in the first place so get a little bit of claustrophobia and going that far underground and spending your working days under there but you're in a community in the hunter where it's the normal thing to do to go down and work in a mine tell me about your first day on the job when you went down into that mine well fortunately I wasn't claustrophobic because what you say is is absolutely correct if you are claustrophobic suffer from claustrophobia you will not work in an underground mine so I didn't have any of those fears so I'm not even 18 years of age I'm 17 and a bit 17 turning 18 about three weeks later and I'm underground for the first time and I had there was two other guys with me and we started exactly the same time same day we didn't know each other at all we are great mates today still stay in touch and we were all together and the under manager in charge which is

effectively

the manager of the underground part of the mine he delegates the jobs in the morning right you're on day shift and he basically looks at the three of us and says this is where you're working today you need a sledgehammer each and you're going to knock down a stopping a brick stopping so it's effectively a three-tier brick wall so how do you get down into the pit of this mine two ways there's a drift and that basically paint a bit of a picture here if you've been to the blue mountains and you've seen the scenic railway which is more of a terror ride I think than a scenic railway but it's like that only not that steep it's more of a gradual grade down to the seam and the other ways is a straight um cage a straight basically an elevator which takes you from the surface down to the the pit bottom which was from memory about 300 meters right so that's not a very long ride then well no 300 meters is a way is it so that's what like five meters uh five minutes 10 minutes in a cage going down is it uh it would be yeah this is a while ago but I'm thinking I'm thinking about maybe five minutes what does the air feel like when you get down there it's cool it's cool because the mine where I started was a wet mine so there's a lot of water that leaked through the strata and so when you've got it's particularly in winter if you've got you know cold conditions on the surface of the mine and you've got water in the mine which is seeping out of the strata and then you've got powerful ventilation fans and that's how it's you know it's dragged in sucked into the mine and then basically blown out the other side so you got all this evaporation happening down this like net air conditioning effectively yeah that's exactly what it is like air conditioning the further you go out though into the different roadways as the mine is developed the hotter it becomes because it becomes harder to to ventilate the mine much harder and it's less wet you've got less water so we worked in some some pretty hot conditions so this you and you these other two newbies mates mates of yours are given this job to knock down a wall effectively with sledge hammers how was the work hard um it was the very physical because you're you're swinging it must have been a seven pound or a ten pound hammer and the the brick wall wasn't moving much you know there was not a lot of give in it so we had to and because it was our first day we wanted to make an impression you know this is our job we're gonna get stuck into this and so we we just threw ourselves into it half and half the day half the shift had gone we all had blisters so it was just um but yeah it was it was hard physical work and a great introduction to underground mining meanwhile this is around about 1980 now this is when you put tyres on your wife Louise for the first time tell me about that we've heard about um I think all love at first sight and this was as good of an example I think as that as possible she was training with a touch football side so it was a number of her girlfriends and they were on the same touch football side at Howe Park in Singleton which is the main rugby league main cricket ground and I'd been down at the cricket nets with a good friend of mine and because we used to we used to go and have a practice session every now and again to improve but it'd be just the two of us so we're walking out from the nets and we walk past the cricket ground and so the girls are training probably 60 meters away maybe 50 meters away and I saw Louise for the first time and so I'd never seen I never had any discussion never uttered a word and I just turned to my mate that day and I said I could marry that girl what did your mate say I can't remember I can't remember maybe it was a case of

wake up to yourself or yeah yeah of course you of course you could yeah you don't even know her and then we just moved on and did she ever catch sight of you do you think you made a similar impression

no no no no because our next the next time we crossed paths was I was playing cricket in one of the local teams in Singleton her father Pat was the captain so Louise used to come to the cricket and she would do a lot of the scoring for the cricket and she used to confuse me with someone

else in the team so you got a real problem on your hands here then because because if you get the love at first sight thunderbolt it's a frightening moment because it's very real it's very shocking and you think I really have to do something about this now I have to I can't let this thing go because it's you actually realize you're in quite a state of danger there at that point because you know what's happened to you and she's mistaking you for someone else what were you able to do about that thing well thankfully I had a number of other people who were close to the the cricket club like other players their wives their girlfriends who could see something you know they could see something that

I think Louise had not seen I was aware of it but I still remember it was like a matchmaking to the nth degree we were having a drink as you did after the cricket down our local pub the Royal Hotel sponsored the cricket sponsored our team in in Singleton we're out in the beer garden and having a drink and the next thing we know everybody has bolted they've gone they've left us turns around the conspiracy oh total conspiracy and there's just the two of us sitting there so we had no choice to have that first conversation yeah and you were what 18 and she was what 16 or something no I must have been 17 and you still the ways were 16 and you're still together after all these years it's extraordinary isn't it meanwhile you're still working away in the mines there but there are moments when you're underground I have to ask this where you looked up looked at the ceiling of the the mine tunnel and thought mmm that's not looking good yeah a number of times yeah that that happened look I was mining for 16 years so I think when you're in an underground situation you're going to face those things I mean there's a lot of jobs that are risky there's a lot of jobs inherently dangerous and thankfully the underground industry today is far safer than it was even when I was was mining but yeah there were plenty of times when we'd work in areas underground and I'd look at the conditions carefully and think this is not great did you share those thoughts with your workmates look we we would share the thoughts with each other but only to a point there was there was this understanding or there was this we talk about camaraderie and underground mining but we also talk about the macho culture and the blue collar tough guy attitude and you've got to be resilient you've got to be tough you've got to have that to be underground but there was also this I think sometimes there was a collective fear of some of the situations you found yourself working in and no one was game to be the first one to say I don't think we should be in here so Craig how did you make your first step away from being a coal miner well not so much away from being a coal miner but towards the radio sliding doors moment I was playing cricket Monica Roval the Canberra number one ground beautiful ground and I was playing for Newcastle and it was a representative match against the ACT against Canberra our team's batting the Canberra

boys are bowling local radio station one of the commercial radio stations broadcasting the game one of the I think the producer comes up to our team who batting said look we need one of you

guys to come on do a bit of color cometry and they said well look you my teammates said look you never shut up we're sick of your we're sick of your cricket in commentator impersonations just here's your chance just go down there so I went down and I think I was on for 25 minutes or 30 minutes I loved it from the first word I spoke did you feel comfortable straight away straight away straight away I knew what I was talking about because it was cricket and I could I had those communication skills and so I loved it and I could do it and that's where the seed was sown were you shocked by how much fun it was yeah I was actually I was I wasn't nervous I wasn't which is interesting I wasn't nervous I just I was the inquiring mind kicked in I thought I wonder what this is going to be like and sat down and I thought this is pretty good how then did you begin to start taking up space in ABC Newcastle after that well someone was listening or there was a couple of people in Newcastle I think was team managers were listening they had the radio on and I think the story goes that one of them said this guy's not bad he could be a good publicity officer for the local cricket competition and so I ended up doing five minute spots with all the local radio stations I talked to the local media the newspaper some of the television stations but I also had a five minute spot on the ABC on a Saturday morning on the sports panel and that's where it started and then it sort of snowballed from there you know basically Richard what happened there were opportunities that came up and every single one of them was taken so you're going down to ABC Sydney to down down the road to do spots there how are you juggling working the mines between and working at the ABC well by that stage after a few years later you know we went through a different the whole range of different opportunities that were taken along the way from around the grounds reporter to sideline I and then to calling games and Peter Longman obviously saw something Peter was the head of sport at the ABC at the time and and Peter Wilkins was another and Wilco gave me a start on the call and then the rest is history podcast broadcast you're listening to conversations with Richard Feidler hear more conversations anytime on the ABC listen app or go to abc.net.au/slash/conversations and what kind of a decision was it to leave the mines for good I difficult one but one that had to be made I thought you know if you're going to chase your dream here I didn't want to be in the mines for another 10 years I asked myself that question I still remember where I said do you want to be here in 10 years the answer was no so I left so you left but that must have been a hard decision financially for you well it was a risk of three kids all under 10 and a mortgage so yeah it wasn't full-time work I was going to I was going to part-time work so 1999 Craig's when you got a job as a full-time presenter and as the radio presenter on Saturday it's on ABC Newcastle how much of a relief was it to have a full-time job in radio oh it's fantastic I'm so excited I'm so excited and what it did it took the the pressure off the the family in terms of having a steady income having a secure job rather than what I'd been doing for the two years straight after leaving the mine which is to work freelance you know I MC events I hosted trivia nights I wrote in newspapers sport reports when the the regular reporters that have holidays so I just scratched around I had \$15,000 a year worth of work with the ABC which by that stage I was doing the a Saturday morning breakfast show and driving to Sydney to do the still doing the sideline commentary so you know patched together I think made \$40,000 each of those years so it took the pressure off but it also it also vindicated for me the decision to leave it takes that pressure off but it puts a whole other bit of pressure on you particularly when you work for the ABC it's not like commercial radio

where you can substitute facts for opinion if you like you know you've really got to be on the wall there's no big long ad breaks to prepare you're on the air a lot you feel very much in the public spotlight you have this great sense of obligation to your local community were you feeling the pressure

no not at all because I was ready to do it I'd done my apprenticeship I'd done my apprenticeship on air I'd done my apprenticeship you know as a sideline I'd been a broadcaster and called the play-by-play so I was ready to do it so I had a great belief in my own ability and I don't say that in an egotistical way I just knew I could do it you can't do the job without that conviction you probably shouldn't either for that matter and you're doing sport at the time this is in Newcastle at the time it is like two years after Newcastle the Newcastle Knights had won the what was then still I think the ARL Premiership and thereby putting Super League to the sword at

the same time and I think Newcastle was in a state of continual ecstasy as a result of that grand final went for a good five years after the fact it was a good time to be a sportscaster in Newcastle I would have thought that was the best time it was the best time you couldn't write a better script or set up a better set of circumstances than Newcastle winning the grand final in 1997 they were rank underdogs manly the team they beat the Knights beat in 1997 had beaten the Knights 11 games straight in their previous 11 matches so rank underdogs they win and the drama surrounding the way they won so they weren't in front in the game at any stage they were behind at every from the first minute of the game through to the 80th minute manly were in front until when it really counted which was the 80th minute and so I was on the sideline that day and I will never forget Darren Albert scoring the match winning try after Andrew Johns initially went the blind side and then turned Darren Albert back inside and just about everybody I can't think of anybody other than Andrew Johns who at that time thought it was the right decision to run the blind side they've all gone he's blown it he's absolutely blown this by doing that making that play but Andrew thought it was the right play and he made the right call 99.9% of the time and all of these stoic Newcastle types you've been talking about I'll just crack right open emotionally at that point I think so then we move on to 99 like I said though two years afterwards when did you notice that there was something there that wasn't quite right with your state of mind well with the benefit of hindsight I was high or manic for much of 1999 I think there was yeah there was an element of this the excitement of the job but there's also at that stage undiagnosed bipolar disorder so there's you know these mood swings highs and lows so I'm feeling fantastic in 1999 when I begin to notice that there are some cracks is the early part of 2000 the next year and did you mention this to anyone no no I didn't because the the symptoms at the time were moderate they were moderate what depressions like periods of depression that sort of thing um well I didn't know what depression was really early I knew I wasn't sleeping properly I wasn't eating properly I couldn't concentrate on things I was finding just basic concentration different difficult this is when doing this job comes very very hard if you go through that absolutely you really have to hold a whole lot of stuff in your head and and and be quite relaxed and had a good night's sleep beforehand yeah exactly and so and it was very difficult I was constantly stressed I had huge anxiety which across the period of January February March April May just got worse it got worse the symptoms became more acute and I

told nobody because I'm an Australian bloke and we we don't talk about those things you know I was

embarrassed about the way I felt and so therefore I wanted to deal with it myself and you know 20 odd years later is the worst thing I could have done but it was the only way I knew how to deal with it at that time it's standing what you said about your conviction that you were in the right place at the right time it's almost a universal syndrome that anyone is presenting in the media whether it's radio or TV that you do get a bit of imposter syndrome particularly when you're successful at it you after you you do sometimes ask yourself who am I to be doing this who am I I mean I'm going to be caught out on Sunday here someone's going to find out and someone's going to

walk into the room and say all right you've fooled everyone this far we found you out going on on your bike come on off you go off you go did you have any of that so found out that I admit it I am actually the Wizard of Oz it's all just a big scam no not really because I didn't ever try to be something that I wasn't from day one I never tried and I think you would know you've done a million radio shows the moment you try to make out you're something you're not you're inauthentic and it just comes out straight out of the the the speakers when people are listening one of the first bits of advice I had when I came into radio and the manager's name will remain he'll remain unnamed said we've got to do something with your voice you don't sound like an ABC broadcaster you sound like a coal miner and so therefore we've got to do something with that and I remember George dropped right here well it's an amazing thing to say well I said and it was very early in the piece I just said look this is who I am this is how I speak and I I'm not going to change that and so you and I are just going to have to agree to disagree that's a great many of your listeners speak as well just quietly so so that's all good that's all the greater good but then we get to the Sydney 2000 Olympics and my god you've been chosen as part of the broadcasting team for

the ABC what a what a fabulous thing what a great career hire that's going to be what did that mean for you to be chosen to be part of that team well it was a career highlight to be selected and if you'd said to the kid who was 11 years old on the dairy farm in singleton milking cows that one day you are going to you know you're going to be broadcasting for the ABC on the Sydney Olympic Games I just you couldn't make it up you couldn't dream that yet it was I was on the cusp of achieving that yeah but your state of mind wasn't good as you said no and then came that afternoon in September 2000 and you're about to get your a train to the Olympic Stadium what do you remember of that day Craig I probably remember far more about that day than I should given that I was tipping into a psychotic episode I was in the I was in a psychosis I was experiencing psychosis so how did that come upon you well gradually and then it that happened quickly because the depression that I described before took about seven or eight months and then finally I got some help saw a doctor was prescribed some antidepressants and said take these and they worked after about five weeks but with someone with bipolar disorder antidepressants

can actually ignite a high and that's exactly what happened five weeks later I'm manic and a few days after that I'm psychotic and no one knows least of all me and I'm on the train station and the I remember becoming verbally aggressive for no reason it was like a light bulb going off being turned on and aggressive to who complete strangers complete strangers I was just and it was all verbal I mean it was just I remember storming up and down the platform and just hurling abuse and if you do that your behavior is like that you quickly going to draw attention to yourself and the mental health crisis team was was called I was told that later but they didn't come

because when when they heard it was described to them why they said well what's happening why why do we need to get involved here they said well we've got a bloke here is in his late 30s he'd probably weigh about 85 kilograms he's in an agitated state and he's verbally aggressive and they said well we can't handle that call the police and so the police arrived and not too far after that I must say they did a brilliant job absolutely first-class job number one because they'd done it a hundred times before I wasn't the first person in the grip of psychosis to be assisted from a critical situation by the police so they knew what to do very calmly very professionally got me across I ended up handcuffed because I did put up a I put up a struggle because I just didn't want to go in the back of the the police van because I hadn't done anything wrong you know so you think there's sense of injustice why am I going in here I'm off to the Olympics and that's not who I am I'm not that guy that gets in the back of a police van no no and then 15 minutes later after a 15 most horrific terrifying 15 minute ride that I've ever had in my life I was I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital what was your state of mind once you'd I'm presuming you're given a sedative once you got there and once you had that once you came out of that what was your state of mind could you make sense of what was going on around you well I still very belligerent when I first got there when I first emerged from the back of the paddy wagon I can remember that because there was a number of the staff there who were observing me just to see right what's he gonna say what's he gonna do we need to try and put some pieces the jigsaw together here but yeah after I think after about 15 minutes of that I remember being put on a table and genes were pulled down and I got a pretty decent size needle in the backside a sedative so that was through about 3 30 in the afternoon and I can remember waking up at about 11 that night did you have any understanding of what was going on no no didn't have a clue how did things progress from there did your family come in yeah well they'd been in they they were there pretty much as I was being admitted and thankfully I had a I had a good friend on the train station that day just by pure coincidence so he could actually say look this is not the guy that I know because we'd known each other for 20 years so I had someone in my corner on the train station so he arrives the boss from work arrives my family arrives and so then the backstory gets put together you know very depressed put on antidepressants hasn't slept really for two weeks you know quite manic in behaviour now he's had an episode on a train station and within two or three minutes they say well he's got bipolar he's bipolar one jada psychosis so you finally got the correct diagnosis very early on it didn't take the the psychiatrists very long at all they didn't have to sit down and and and think about it for too long to realise what this was and how did you reckon with that diagnosis well for the first three months I didn't believe it I you know I was in total denial that that's could be me I would be saying I haven't got a mental illness you know your guy gets it before I am to milk the cows and can work down a mine and cope with all the stress and tension of that you can host on air sports you can do all these things so that's not you you told yourself no that's right mental illness my view was mental illness happened to other people and to other families not to me what did you have to do to accept the diagnosis um that was difficult and from memory I think the fact that I kept going back because I was required to keep going back to see the government psychiatrist before I'd be allowed back to work because even though I felt great because I was still high I was still quite manic you know they bring you down from a psychosis back to a level of mania on the way down to

just

leveling you out to where you should be I was feeling fantastic let me back to work I can't wait to come back to work and they're saying you're not ready to come back to work so it was across that period of time and I thought maybe I'm not maybe they're right and I'm wrong so you had to swallow a fair bit of ego to accept that thing absolutely yeah so did you learn to manage it a bit better I mean obviously with some medication but was there are you using like cognitive behavioral

therapy or something like that to recognize when you're about to enter a new phase and can you do that now interestingly cognitive behavioral therapy was something I didn't enjoy or I couldn't concentrate on I tried counseling I had some sessions with a psychologist for me what worked and continues to work is medication and educating myself which I did from day one I've got to know more about this I have to read about this I have to read other people's stories I have to find out how other people cope their strategies the tools they use to stay well and then all sorts of books on you know I read some books on spirituality I read some self-help I read just about everything going and took a little bit out of all those places to learn how to recover and heal which is what I had to do and it took a year at least to get over that episode and then it was a case of the rebuild are you getting better at figuring out when things are not going well for you and just to take it a bit easier leave off a bit and try and remove yourself from stressful situations yeah I am a lot better but it's taken a long time for that to happen I now know when I'm getting tired and I feel a bit rough around the edges and that's when I know I'm vulnerable I'm vulnerable when that happens when I don't sleep properly I know if I have a really disrupted sleep I've you know straight away I go Craig you're vulnerable pull back on your commitments make sure you get a good night's sleep the next night and the medication's critical it's still for anyone with bipolar one disorder the medication is critical but there wouldn't be one person who has bipolar one disorder who hasn't stopped taking their medication at some stage and I did that and it was a mistake when did you decide to start talking about what you'd been through probably three years after the episode and the only reason I did decide to speak about it was because I'd got angry at that time not because I'd missed the Olympic Games I was well past that I was cranky because there wasn't a lot of intellectual property around there weren't a lot of stories there wasn't much conversation it was still very taboo and I thought at the time you got a choice here you can either be part of the solution or you can be part of the problem and the problem was always the silence and the fact that conversations weren't being had we just didn't talk about it it was all too hard and so I thought no I'm going to I'm going down the other road I want to be part of the solution you'd been on air you'd been broadcasting from things like the 97 Grand Final victory and people in your community would associate you as this guy they've had a really good time with in the past what was the reaction from the public when you started giving public addresses on this subject um oh look I think I can remember the first few that I did and bear in mind the first few that I did were very difficult for me because you're standing up you're literally bearing your soul and my public speaking was okay but it wasn't polished to the point where I could do a 45 minute or a one hour keynote what I sensed from just about every audience was a real they were uncomfortable why why oh the subject matter the subject matter made them feel uncomfortable because I was talking about the depths of depression and the signs and symptoms

of the depths of depression I was talking about suicidal thinking which is where I was when I was depressed I had suicidal thoughts then you move on to oh then I had some medication I had some anti-depressants oh then I went manic oh then I became psychotic and was delusional then I had a wrestle with the police then I was put in a psychiatric hospital then I talked about what it was like in the psychiatric hospital they're not easy things to for people to listen to without feeling uncomfortable it's part of that because just about everyone has someone in their family or their extended circle of friends who has mental illnesses of some kind or another and they might have recognized something in their own lives from this yeah I think that's I think that's very likely I think that's spot on actually when does that shocked reaction start to change and have you noticed a change with talking about this subject oh definitely I've been speaking now for 20 years so it's been and I've been speaking more more regularly for 20 years and I think with just the sheer numbers of people who are reaching out for help now just the numbers of you know there will be nine suicides on average in Australia today nine the suicide in Australia is more than double the road toll every year so we're talking not we're not talking about a small problem those numbers don't include those who attempt suicide and don't and survive and it doesn't include those who contemplate suicide never act on it they think about it those numbers only clue either so you know you can draw a I think you can safely say that these issues impact on far more people than we would ever imagine maybe this is a really stupid question but you are an advocate for encouraging people to talk more about their experiences of these conditions what why is that a good idea to talk about it well it's a good idea to and here's the difference this is not everyone is going to do what I do and and I get that and I think that's you know it's each to their own the important thing in talking about it is to make sure someone else knows someone else needs to know if you are in a suicidal state because there have been so many

family members have been so many people who've been lost to suicide who have never had that conversation no one knows but they take their lives and then the family and the friends and the work colleagues end up at the funeral and they go well gee I didn't ever see any signs of depression I didn't know they had a problem this is a complete shock which it is however if people feel more comfortable say yeah I'm struggling at the moment and I'd like you to know about it and I'd like you to know that I am getting some help and so that I think is the way it should work we've got to be more open about these conversations even though they're difficult conversations I want to stress and I'm sure you're the first to agree that's what's worked or not worked for you isn't the same for everyone by any means everyone's got their own path in or out of these these situations but you're now the main figure in this new documentary I mentioned called The Promise which focuses on your story and your recovery and the act of talking about this and presenting your own story is like holding it in your hand after a while and does it give you like that kind of insight and a certain degree of control if you're able to tell your story as like this thing you can hold in your hand and and curate Craig I'd much prefer to be telling my story publicly myself rather than have someone else try to tell it for me because I'll put their own nuances on it which is only normal and their own you know viewpoint so I'm happy with the documentary I hope it's going to make a difference you've just very recently finished up at the ABC after 25 years on air what was that like doing the last shift and I say this knowing fully well what a community Newcastle is and how there might have been a little bit of buzz around you at the time and a lot of interest and a fair bit of love and hugs and kisses as well what was that like

[Transcript] Conversations / Craig Hamilton's three lives

that last shift well the first part of the shift was pretty much normal actually it was a six hour breakfast show it was a long shift up there six hour breakfast show six hours six hours yeah piece of cake six to midday so but from 11 till 12 my colleagues have put together you know a fantastic package there were bloopers there were messages I got a message from Peter Garrett I mean

that's pretty cool I had a message from Wayne Bennett which is also yeah he's a friend of yours isn't he Wayne Bennett yeah we have known each other for a long time so and then of course I got emotional because I said goodbye and thanked everybody and thanked the audience and family and friends and colleagues and then because you is a sense of finality about it so I did get emotional I knew I wouldn't that's fine Craig it's been wonderful speaking with you and thank you so much for sharing your story today that's a pleasure thanks Richard

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