



CRAIG GORDON

GIVE IT A GO

Craig Gordon's glaucoma left him partial sight until he was almost 9 years old, when he began to learn braille. At Townsend House School for the Blind in Adelaide, Craig was an adventurous boy. He enjoyed rambling and playing hide and seek in the vast network of old buildings, paddocks, and gardens around the school, and bike riding in the local streets in the evening (out of bounds, without lights or permission!). At weekends and on school holidays he 'mucked around' with his cousins, restoring old cars, exploring dumps for interesting things, getting into everything with the others.

By the time he reached the year preceding matriculation, the practice of choosing between leaving the blind school and entering a mainstream school had begun. Craig decided he had had enough of school, and wanted to grow up! So he chose to find himself a job. He was a practical person, so he was willing to give anything a go.

Craig and his sister were lucky. They had to do the same chores around the house and garden as their sighted siblings, and to be as capable as them. Mr Gordon senior was an interstate truck driver. Craig always helped him with trucky matters. He folded the tarpaulins, helped organise the load, and got involved in the mechanical maintenance of the vehicles. All this gave Craig confidence in his ability to do whatever task needed doing.

When their father took the family out driving, he made sure all his children were aware of the geography and the terrain – to notice bumps and turns, what streets they passed, what roads intersect, how to find ways of recognising the road with other senses. So Craig felt able to be independent.

At 17, Craig left school, and walked around his district presenting himself for possible jobs at local factories. At Seeley Brothers (now Seeley International), he knew they employed a large casual workforce, mostly when the weather increased the demand for evaporative air-coolers. Perhaps with casual labour, the manager could risk giving someone a try, without commitment. Craig asked to be shown a task and to show his ability. After an hour, he still didn't know whether the sceptical manager was convinced, although he had quickly demonstrated he could learn to do the job he was shown.

Craig was pleasantly astonished, on Friday afternoon, to be asked to report for work at 7 a.m. on Monday! He says: 'I was shocked, and excited, and didn't know what to wear, or how to prepare. I thought maybe I should get special overalls, or something like that.'

Craig's first job was to use a machine to punch pins in

where castors would be fitted on the air-cooler. He did this, and many other jobs, including assembling electric switches and water valves. In fact, in his eight years with this same firm, he had done 156 different types of assembly work. He even wired up electric motors, and once when he was free, he enjoyed building a complete air-cooler on his own!

But eight years of fast machine work, or heavy lifting, was enough for a while. He says: 'Up to that time, I had been working as many hours as the firm wanted. That stood me in good stead. I had been saving money as I wanted to go back to study, and to do the adult Leaving Certificate in the adult re-entry program. And after eight years of heavy and constant work anyway, my back needed a rest, and I had a wrist injury. I'd probably overdone things. But I never had a work accident. I'd keep my wits about me, and remember where forklifts might cross my path.'

Craig studied accountancy, and other commercial subjects so as to equip himself for running his own business. At first he thought he would get into real estate. But that was not to be. He found his area was now covered by a new company.

There were other things preoccupying him. His personal life was changing, like any young man's: 'I had married before beginning my studies, and had two lovely daughters: Allyson and Amanda. I was glad not to be spending huge numbers of hours away at work. I wanted to enjoy being a parent and getting to know my little girls.'

Craig began volunteering to help with introducing technology to students and teachers at his old school. He developed his knowledge of adaptive equipment and soon found he was involved in all aspects of adaptive technology:

research, maintenance, training students and staff, helping in computer class. He built up a reputation as a thoughtful accessibility expert. So he was employed by the resource centre of Townsend House to work in his varied technology capacities.

He also chose to continue helping low-vision people by working with CanDo to ensure that new websites are accessible. As it happened, his interest in technology changed his life again.

Craig met his new wife when he started helping her with computer problems on the net. He and Emma were looking at housing designs to share ideas on this important matter. They found the company Homested Homes most helpful to them. Craig took his 'raised-line drawing kit' and Emma and the employee helped produce raised drawings of plans for Craig to check out. He can't say enough for the helpful way he was met by Brian, the Homested Homes' employee. Not only with the raised drawing, but with thorough information on the building materials and configurations of best practice. So their home was built with the alterations to the design that Emma and Craig wanted.

In 2001, they moved into their new home, and Eddy, the first of their three children was born three days later! Moving and setting up home with a new baby was quite a challenge!

Craig does some braille writing for the books that CanDo produce for children. Although he was made redundant when CanDo Net was sold to another organisation. He knew he had to set himself up in a new business. He explains: 'We had to pay the mortgage, and to keep up with our family's needs. Both Emma and I are interested in

recycling. So in April 2008, we started the Gordon Gang recycling business. Emma drives and collects items: electrical goods, metal products, white goods and some extras. I repair what I can for sale and reuse, and I dismantle unfixable things to retrieve their usable components for tradesmen. It's our dream to offer items for sale at affordable prices. It's the recycling we're interested in, not really like a secondhand shop for its own sake. Our aim is to keep things out of landfill – to direct various metals and other materials to where they can be reused. Now we are working towards obtaining a storage depot to operate from, and where people can bring their stuff to us.'

As well as brailleing the labels for the picture books made by CanDo4Kids, Craig uses braille to keep track of his own affairs, especially the instruction materials for computers. He enjoys listening to country music, and participating in amateur radio sessions. He also enjoys sailing and riding a surf ski. I asked Craig how he navigates: 'I pay attention to the direction of the sun, the wind, and the sounds from the shore.'

With his children, Craig plays the game of Trouble, builds with Lego, and sometimes watches programs about animals on television.