

Georgia's Story

Georgia told her story in a recorded interview. This is the transcript.

Hi, I am Georgia, I have Cerebral Palsy and Epilepsy. I use an electric wheelchair for my mobility as I can't walk. I'm currently living with my parents and my twin sister. Living at home with my sister and parents is terrific. They have supported me in everything I've decided to do. It's so good to have them behind me.

In the future, my parents will live here in their own house, but I may look at the possibility of living on my own. I will probably live by myself and have carers come in to look after me. In saying that, this is just a possibility, an option I may or may not take.

I am currently working as an Administrative Assistant to Minister Russell Wortley, Industrial Relations and State/Local Government Relations. We relocated from Parliament House in June 2011 when Russell was elected as Minister. My workplace is good because it is wheelchair accessible.

In 2009, I completed a Certificate II in Business through Tafe SA, where I learnt many administration skills. During this time, I was a trainee at the Department of Education and Children's Services from February 2008 to August 2010 for two and half years, so I was well prepared when I was offered the job with Russell.

The tasks I am given are mainly administration work, jobs that I can physically do. I have a support worker with me all the time, so if there is anything that I have trouble with, they're there to help me. My support worker is employed by Multiple Solutions.

My support worker stays with me from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm when I finish for the day. If I can't reach something, they're there to help me so I don't have to worry about disturbing the other employees in the office. I've been with Multiple Solutions since I left school, and they've been very, very helpful in finding me a job and getting any assistance when I need it. I also have personal care workers who come into the workplace and helps me. They are employed by Calvary Silver Circle, and funded through Multiple Solutions.

When I saw the job advertised to work as a personal assistant to Minister Wortley I decided to go for it. I hadn't been able to find any work for six months since my traineeship had finished. So, having an opportunity to work again was a great thing—it came at the perfect time.

To get the job was really exciting but sometimes a challenge. I like a challenge. I have been working with Minister Wortley since March this year. I'm so fortunate to have Minister Wortley behind me. He believes in my abilities and is a great support to me. I'm really enjoying the job and developing my skills further.

Work means a lot to me and gives me something to focus on. Even though I'm involved in a lot of recreational activities during the week, work gives me something else to do. It makes me feel like I'm contributing to something important.

Apart from my work with Minister Wortley, I go swimming twice a week with my swimming physiotherapist Julie Astley. I have been swimming twice a week with Julie for ten years now.

I'm also a singer-songwriter. I write my own songs and record them in the studio. I've been singing since I could talk, basically. I have been writing my own songs since I was fourteen—now I'm twenty-one. I write songs about being in a wheelchair and also songs that are about people close to my heart—someone who means a lot to me.

I just want to share my stories with people. In November 2006 I wrote a song called 'I'm Walking', which was about how I could walk with assistance. Two people hold me under my arms and I can actually walk with assistance. I can feel my feet touch the ground. I really wanted to get out there and prove to people that I actually can walk with assistance. The doctors said I would never be able to do that, so it was good to *prove* them wrong and say, "Hey, I can do what you said I couldn't do."

When I go swimming, I have assistance in the water. It's a good feeling to do all that swimming and walking. I also go out like other people—go to town and the movies, and I enjoy shopping. I'm always saying to people, "I can do this", or "You just have to believe in yourself". If people say you can't—you can.

When I see a challenge, I'm thinking, "Okay, let's see if I can do this". For instance, I can swim 25 metres in swimming competitions with Special Olympics. I've been involved in Special Olympics since I was fifteen, and am still doing it now. I never thought I'd be able to swim 25 metres. I've been coming first and second in the competitions I've been in. I have lots of medals and ribbons hanging up in my room. These are very memorable moments for me.

Other memorable moments include when I got the chance to sing two songs with Shannon Noll at his concert in August 2009, 'Drive' and 'What About Me' and he even changed the lyrics to 'What About Georgie Girl' in one of his songs (What About Me) and he is now a really good friend of mine.

We talk on the phone all the time and when he is in town, we catch up. He is a great guy and a very talented singer. I'm also friends with Sam Clark, who used to be on Neighbours. Sam is one of the nicest people you could meet, he always gives me his time. Sam and I talk every couple of weeks on the phone. He even visited me at my home as a surprise on my 21st Birthday!

I like to organise myself before doing any task. When I have to go somewhere, I just organise Access Cabs, so they take me places. I ring the company and book my runs. My favourite cab driver is Nick—he really looks after me. He's now a friend of

the family. We're very lucky to have him around to help me. We also have a van at home that has a ramp for wheelchair access. The Variety Club funded the ramp.

Whenever I have things on, I ring Nick and Access Cabs, organise a car to pick me up and drop me off. I also ring my carers and organise someone to help me. My carers are employed through CSI, which is short for Community Support Inc.

I can either have carers allocated to me by the agency, or I can recommend them, and say, "This is a person who I would like to have as my worker," instead of going through the agency. Although, in the past when I have had carers through Help At Home, I met some great people and have still stayed in contact with them. They have become friends of mine. I'm very lucky to have these people in my life. I have self-managed funding for my caring. Disability SA funds this.

I have been a battler my whole life since I was born from a tiny, tiny baby, because I was quite sick when I was born, and I almost didn't make it. My twin sister Tori and I were born three months premature. I was fighting just to survive, and that fighting spirit has stayed with me. I've always had it, and this has a lot to do with Tori and my parents, Debra and Paul. They have always encouraged me to fight for what I believe in and to never give up on my dreams. They are fighters themselves.

There's been times when I've been in hospital having major operations. My first operation was when I was three and I've had several operations since then and I've had to fight those to stay strong. I've also had a spinal fusion operation where I have two rods inserted down my back to support my spine.

I've also had a hip plate put in my right hip because it was dislocated. I've had cranio facial surgery and that was very painful. I've had a couple of infections in my spine because of the rods and they have always resulted in more surgery. It's been quite painful following through all the surgeries.

Last month I was in hospital having surgery again due to infections in my back. My Dad actually stayed with me in hospital for three-and-a-half weeks. He would sleep on a thin mattress on the floor every night and then wake up and go to work from there. He was there all the time when things were critical, so was my Mum. Every minute she wasn't working, she was at the hospital with me next to my bed.

My parents dedicate their lives to my sister and me. I am so lucky to have them. I couldn't have better parents. My family has always been very supportive. I have a twin sister and they say identical twins are very close! We certainly are very close!

My sister's fiancée, Scott, also helps the family out a lot. He is one of my support workers and carers too, so we're very lucky to have him in our lives. He is like a brother to me now. My grandfather Garth is a lifesaver too. He used to live with us when I was young to help out Mum and Dad as they both work full time. We call him Grandy and he is amazing. He is loving and kind and always there when we need him. We'd be lost without him.

I'm really proud of my sister, Tori who's also a singer-songwriter. She travels from Adelaide where she lives with me, to Los Angeles, where she is a member of a songwriting and production team. She's my identical twin sister, so I'm very proud of her in everything she achieves. It's tough being away from her. She's away for long periods of time, like for three months, three times a year. She is my inspiration.

And I am proud of myself because I got to sing in front of President Bill Clinton when I was younger, and Molly Meldrum in Sydney and Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, who was the Governor in South Australia. I did many performances for the Variety Club of South Australia.

Tori and I would travel all over South Australia and perform at many functions and also interstate. I also performed at Carols By Candlelight in 2001 with Tori in front of a crowd of 40,000! Then in March 2010, I performed at the Special Olympics Opening Ceremony with Tori and the TUTTI choir. I've auditioned for Australia's Got Talent, X-Factor, Australian Idol and Neighbours, and soon I'm going to audition for The Voice.

I'm proud of everything I do really. Basically, it's anything I achieve, like work, or anything that challenges me. I'm so proud I can achieve these things really. I really enjoy my life - getting out and meeting new people, doing the activities I do, and being able to enjoy life even though I am in a wheelchair. I can still be a part of things. The only problem with being in a wheelchair is that some places that you want to go are not wheelchair accessible.

I'm sure there are some people in wheelchairs that might feel like they can't achieve anything because of the obstacles that are in their way. I want to show people that just because they are in wheelchairs, doesn't mean that they can't achieve anything. They can achieve in their own way...in different ways.

Keep going, and if there are any difficulties, just ask for assistance, because people are really glad to help you in anything you need. One person who is really helping those with disabilities is Kelly Vincent. We went to Unley High School together. She is now the MLC for Dignity for Disabled. I'm very proud of her and miss our occasional lunch times together at Parliament House!

I am able to believe in myself because I just keep being strong and if there's anything that gets in my way, I just try and look at it in a positive way. Rather than being very sad and angry about it, I just keep going on and pushing through.

People around me give me good feedback. They say, "Come on," and they encourage me to do the best that I can. They believe in me and know that I can achieve. My family has always found a way for me to do these things. I think the important things that I've done in my life are reaching the goals that I have set out to achieve. If you know what goals are set, there's nothing that you can't do. Goal setting is very important.

I would say to people in similar situations just go and do it the best way you can, the way that's best for you. Believe in yourself. Just go and do the best you can and don't take "no" for an answer.

To listen to my original music and to find out more about me, go to my website:
<http://www.georgiahorgan.com>

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