



Turning tragedy into triumph, a hero shows the way

By Aney Mathew
Doha

Be thankful for what you have and don't focus on what you do not have. Challenges are actually opportunities. You don't know what you can achieve, until you try. When you fail, try again."

These are not the average phrases from some motivational speech or book. They were heartfelt, awe-inspiring words from Nick Vujicic, a young man of 28 who has no arms or legs. Nick was addressing an audience of about 1,500 people at Qatar Foundation, as he delivered the HSBC message of HOPE 2011. The event open to the public, was organised by Hope Qatar in association with VIGOR events.

Born limbless, Nick has only two small feet, one



'Be Thankful' Nick Vujicic tells his audience

of which has two toes, yet he has overcome the challenges of life to become

an inspiration not only to physically and mentally challenged individuals, but

to everyone who is fortunate enough to come across his way. He is one of the most

loved motivational speakers in the world. As a young boy, Nick did

not have the opportunity to climb trees, chase squirrels or kick balls like little boys

do. In fact even climbing out of his bed and flipping on a light switch by himself was a challenge. Today however, Nick heads his own company - Attitude is Altitude - holds a double major in accounting and financial planning, has acted in a short film called 'Butterfly Circus' and has written his first book titled 'Life Without Limits'. By the way he can throw tennis balls, play drum pedals, comb his hair, brush his teeth, answer the phone and shave. Nick also loves fishing, golfing, swimming and playing football!

The audience was also treated to a video footage that showed Nick's activities. While watching him ride a horse and later swim without arms and legs leaves you open-mouthed.

Listening to Nick talk is a heart-warming and overwhelming experience. He forms an instant rapport with his audience and has no issues laughing at himself. His love for life and optimism are genuine, they stem from deep rooted convictions. He believes firmly that his life has a purpose.

"The most important things in my life are my faith, my family and my mission. As a result of my faith, I know I am here on this earth for a purpose. I know the truth of my value. In everything I do, I find love, joy and peace. My parents are my greatest heroes; they planted seeds of hope in me, by telling me every day, that I was an amazing person. Today I believe, when the clouds in your storm don't pass, you can carry someone else through their storm," he told the audience. "Remember, you are beautiful as you are. Your life has value", he added.

Well, it was not always like this. As a young boy Nick was often teased and the subject of bullies.

He remembers feeling broken, hopeless and lonely. "Growing up, my biggest fear was 'How am I going to manage life alone?' At the age of ten, I tried to kill myself by drowning in a tub of water. What stopped me was the thought of the guilt and sadness I would cause my parents who were my greatest encouragers". Nick told the audience, "If I fail, I try again and again and again. There will be ups and downs in life. What matters is how you finish. Are you going to finish strong?" he asked.

His words give you the swing to get up, during low moments. Watching him struggle to get back up from the table where he had thrown himself (to demonstrate a point) with absolutely no ounce of self pity, but with dignity and purpose, makes one realise there is so much we take for granted all the time, every

moment of our lives. "Be Thankful" is Nick's catch phrase. "I have never met a better person who was thankful or a thankful person who was bitter. I remember the time I injured my foot, playing football and was bedridden for three weeks. My toes are to me what hands and legs are to other people. I need them for virtually everything. Those three weeks in bed, taught me to be thankful for my toes", he told the audience.

Nick makes 120 trips a year, travelling around the world, spreading his message of hope.

Countless people have realised there is hope and purpose in their lives. In some parts of the world, people with disabilities are still thought of as cursed and Nick's changing the tide with his message. He recalled talking to a tribe in Africa which believed children with disabilities were cursed and needed to be put to death."

When I finished speaking, a mother brought her young disabled baby to give me a hug, in front of the astonished crowd. Since then, thankfully the killing of such children has been stopped" he said.

The defining moment of his speech was when he said, "If I had to live all over again and had to choose between having arms and legs or to be born this way, I would choose this all over again, if it means I can change one life for the better. It is my mission, to be a miracle in the life of another person".

Another captivating moment was when Nick was queried by Gulf Times, about a pair of shoes that he supposedly keeps in his closet, hoping he will one day be able to wear it. "I believe in miracles. My faith allows me to believe that one day, I could wear those shoes. But if my circumstances don't change, I will still be thankful", he answered simply.

Nick doesn't make you uncomfortable, depressed or guilty - you come away feeling deeply moved by the strength of his courage and faith. His genuinely cheerful disposition leaves you touched in a profound way. It is not surprising that he has been invited by presidents of nations to listen to him and draw inspiration from his life.

Nick's book and DVDs featuring his inspiring messages are available at his site www.attitudealtitude.com

Later, addressing the audience Dr Saif al-Hajri, vice-chairman of Qatar Foundation, vice-chairman of Shafallah Centre and chairman of Friends of Environment, thanked Nick for bringing the message of hope to Qatar. The evening ended with an endearing dance recital by the students of Hope Qatar.

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Sri Lankan school honours Hope Qatar

Sri Lankan School (Stafford International School) has honoured Hope Qatar, a centre rendering services to the "differently able" and physically challenged children among the country's expatriate communities.

The honour coincided with the 63rd Independence Day celebrations of Sri Lanka. To mark the occasion, Sri Lankan embassy's charge de affaires Tharna Kulasingham handed over a citation to Hope Council advisory board chairman and legal activist Nizar Kochery. The lawyer was the

founder president of the centre, started in 2005 in Ruwda area.

Hope Centre, a non-profit body is affiliated to the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), working under the aegis of the Indian embassy.

While lauding the services of the centre, the school said in a letter that many children are still deprived of education for the simple reason that general schools cannot accommodate a special needs unit and Hope Qatar thus fills the gap, serving special needs children with utmost care, affection and sincerity.



Nizar Kochery (right) with Tharna Kulasingham at the ceremony held at Sri Lankan (Stafford) School.