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Special Edition
Guy
Sebastian
Concert
Newsletter

“Don't Worry
Be Happy!”

Some time ago I was thrilled to receive an email from Guy Sebastian saying how much he'd loved the clip of our Happy Feat team dancing to his song 'Don't Worry Be Happy' on the Happy Feat website. When I heard Guy was doing a concert in Townsville, I thought how great it would be for him to experience the magic of Happy Feat in person. After months of secret negotiations (or some might call it 'totally stalking' Guy and his team!) it seemed that time had run out to finalise this meeting as the concert was only four sleeps away and I hadn't heard from Guy's manager.

On that Monday afternoon, I was scoffing lunch at my desk when my mobile phone rang. I was tempted not to answer, but decided to take the call at the last minute.

“Hello, this is Dan, Guy Sebastian's manager. I would like to talk to you about your group, Happy Feat, performing with Guy.”

“Yeah sure! We'll party with him, all night!” I joked, whilst thinking *which* of my friends was taking the mickey out of me...and how the heck did they know about my secret negotiations?

“No, this is Dan, Guy Sebastian's manager.”

“Oh sure, Dan and I'm Angelina Jolie!”

Chuckling he continued, “No, this *really* is Dan, Guy's manager.”

Oh no! It dawned on me that this was for real. Red faced and feeling very blonde, I whispered, “You really are Guy's manager aren't you?”

“Yes and Guy would like to invite Happy Feat to perform with him on stage at his concert this Friday.”

After an awkward pause I continued. “OK, Dan, I won't be a moment.”

Covering the phone, I whooped and yelled whilst dancing around the office with excitement! Having concluded my manic celebrations, I uncovered the phone and said all businesslike, “Ok Dan, I'm finished now, how can we make this happen?”

Well, that was the end of getting any work out of me for the rest of the afternoon! I then had 40+ exciting phone calls to make...to let everyone know they needed to be available on Friday night!

I rang the parents and carers and said, “I have very exciting news for you. Are you sitting down? OK, now close your eyes and picture this...your son/daughter dancing on stage at the Townsville Entertainment Centre this Friday night...with... GUY SEBASTIAN at his concert!!!!”

The reactions were absolutely priceless!!!!

That night was spent writing truckloads of emails, preparing lists and gathering important information to pass on to all our Happy Feat families. (Luckily my hubby was away on a motorbike rally so I could get stuck into the arrangements without feeling guilty about neglecting him).

On Tuesday night I stayed at the office until 11pm, writing and printing letters for parents and carers. After that I continued working at home. Beauty sleep was, most definitely, not on the agenda that week and I averaged around 3-4 hours' sleep a night if I was lucky!

On Wednesday night at our Happy Feat meeting, we practiced and prepared for the concert...but things really weren't going well. Imagine trying to fit thirty-five very excited Happy Featers into the kind of limited space they'd be performing in at the concert and add to this the logistical challenge of making sure that everyone has enough space to perform their rock n' roll moves...you begin to see the picture! There were moments when I asked myself why I hadn't taken up golf instead!

Juggling work and organising an event like this was quite challenging but not as challenging as the phone call I received from my hubby in the middle of all this preparation.

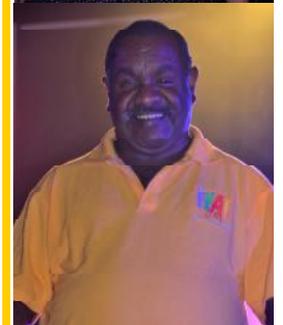
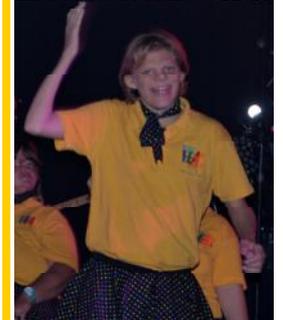
He'd had a motorbike accident.

He was okay but he'd hurt his ankle and shoulder and couldn't continue with the cross-country part of the riding...then the line dropped out. I had no idea where he was and no reception to contact him! I was beside myself with worry and continually tried to contact him at all hours of the day and night. Talk about a character-building time!

But as the song goes, 'Don't worry be happy!!'

Guy had very generously offered our thirty-five Happy Featers tickets so they could stay and watch the concert after their performance. I explained that to ensure their safety and well-being I'd need their carers to be present to look after them. This would mean that we'd need approximately 70 tickets and with tickets selling for \$76 each this amounted to an incredibly generous \$5,320 worth of free tickets.

How can we ever thank Guy, Dan and his crew for this amazing gesture!



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Enjoy the experience!

Friday morning arrived and I received several phone messages about an article that had appeared in the Townsville Bulletin. The article was advertising Guy's concert but, amazingly, equal news space was given to the fact that Happy Feat would be performing alongside him! In addition, the Bulletin even mentioned that the group might be performing at the Special Olympic Games in Newcastle (a cherished project in the pipeline). Media saturation or what?

In my new guise as media guru, I quickly made several phone calls to Dan, Guy's manager, to see if I could get Jepson Media to film the performance. This involved obtaining legal permission from Guy's solicitors and record company, organising media passes and many other event-type *things* I've never dealt with before! Those four hectic days of planning and organising were a fast learning curve for me but just the thought of our Happy Featers being on that stage with Guy got me through all the red tape and paperwork

The meeting time for the concert was 4.45pm at the Townsville Entertainment Centre. It was priceless seeing our Happy Featers arrive in their costumes, all so incredibly excited about their up-coming performance. Everyone had hundreds of questions and because I'd never done anything like this before I was flying by the seat of my pants and just following my instincts.

It was then that I heard the dreaded request. "Leigh, Channel 7 News is here and would like to speak with you." My first reaction was total panic and I wondered how I could get out of it? I took some deep breaths and agreed to do the interview...only if my Happy Featers could be involved as well. The interview went well and our Happy Featers stole the show with their enthusiasm.

It was soon time to go on stage for the rehearsal and everyone was gathered together except for a group of nine Happy Featers. It takes a lot to get me stressed but this was one of those occasions. I hid my emotions to try and keep everyone calm. It wasn't until we were actually going on stage that the lost group turned up, flustered and upset; the very last thing I wanted for my Happy Featers!

The band was also running late so the tension was electric.

To hasten the process of getting onto the stage, we split our team into two groups and brought them on from both sides. As we lined up the stairs, one of my Happy Featers freaked out at the loud music and I had to quickly find a volunteer to escort her away from the noise. Unfortunately, she was one of the front-line dancers so it was over to Plan B...I didn't quite know what that was at this stage but I'd have to quickly work it out.

Finally our Happy Featers were all in position and the music started. That's when the magic began! Their love of dancing and performing lit up the whole concert hall and Guy and the band were pleasantly surprised or, more accurately, totally shocked!

Guy was so thrilled; he actually filmed the performance with his phone as he sang. Then it was 'high fives' all round from Guy, straight off the stage, line up and back on stage again.

Each time the Happy Featers began dancing we realised it wasn't important that they weren't in the right position or doing the moves as we'd practiced. The important thing was that they

were doing it 'The Happy Feat Way'; **having fun and doing their best.**

As we went off stage again, I happened to look up at the band. Seeing their huge smiles of joy, I knew they'd just experienced 'The magic of Happy Feat'.

Dan, Guy's manager, had been a dream to work with; he was super organised as well as very caring and empathetic. Instead of our team having to find somewhere to wait until the performance, Dan organised a private room so that our Happy Feat family could all be together. This was wonderful as we could all support each other and keep up to date as information and plans came through.

The time soon came for the parents and carers to take their seats, leaving our Happy Featers in the care of our dedicated team of volunteers.

Throughout the night, I kept marvelling at how lucky Happy Feat is to have such an incredibly caring and amazing team of volunteers! None of us had ever done anything like this before but we all just worked together; no whinging or negativity, just getting on with looking after each other and making sure everyone was okay. We were all doing our best and giving it everything we had.

Finally the stage call came...SHOW TIME!

Our Happy Featers immediately slipped into 'professional mode' as they hastily walked through the backstage corridors and lined up, ready to go on stage. Seeing their faces and excitement made me realise I'd actually done it...our Happy Featers were about to perform on stage with Guy Sebastian...how amazing was that!

With the help of our awesome volunteers, our Happy Featers were quickly in position on stage and the music began...so did our team. They ROCKED the stage and I wish I could have captured their expressions as they danced their hearts out!

When planning the stage, I put four Happy Feat couples out the front of the stage by themselves (no volunteers). I had spoken to each of the eight Happy Featers personally to reassure them that:-

- ☺ I believed they could do it.
- ☺ I believed they could handle being out the front by themselves.
- ☺ I believed they knew the moves.
- ☺ And...as our Happy Feat Chant goes, "We can do anything given a chance." And I was giving them that chance.

And they did it!!!

Believe and you can achieve.

Thirty-five Happy Featers on stage with very few volunteers...talk about an amazing FEAT! I get quite emotional and tear up when I think about how proud I was of each and every one of them.

With the performance over before we knew it, our priority now was to get the team off stage as safely, quickly and quietly as possible and to deliver them to their seats to enjoy the rest of the concert.





During the concert, Guy's manager, Dan, spotted our Happy Featers in the audience and came to sit beside me. I thanked him for giving our team an experience of a lifetime. He seemed quite moved and asked how Happy Feat had begun.

I told him that I wasn't a dancer (that was obvious from a few minutes ago!) and neither was I trained to deal with people with special needs. I simply told him that I'd seen the Merrymakers group and had decided to do the same thing here in Townsville. I also told him my motto, 'Believe and you can achieve.'

He shook his head and we sat in silence as we watched Guy performing. No words necessary.

After the concert, it was extremely encouraging and very moving to see people from all age groups approaching our Happy Featers to congratulate them; we even had 14 - 15-year-olds shaking their hands. I was excited at the thought of achieving two of my goals:

- ☺ Breaking down the barriers and
- ☺ Acceptance in the community.

And the magic just kept on coming. It was so lovely watching the Happy Featers being congratulated and their photos being taken with family and friends as they enjoyed their newfound stardom! The smiles and jubilation on parents' faces said it all. After a lifetime in the shadows, with incredible challenges every day, our Happy Feat families were finally receiving some recognition for their family members' abilities and unique gifts...absolutely priceless!

Later, as I watched another of our Happy Featers enjoying the limelight, whilst his relatives lined up to take photos, I noticed Dan coming to join us. I grinned and pointed to the Happy Feater playing it up to his audience. Dan said "Yes, I know...he's a rock star!"

I told the group that it was 'Dan the Man' who had helped make this evening possible and we all cheered and gave him a 'Mexican Wave'.

Dan and I shook hands and when I thanked him again, he said, "No...THANK YOU!"

That's what I call the 'Magic of Happy Feat'!

It wasn't until on the way home that my friend from Sydney, who was staying with me at the time, mentioned something about everyone standing up at the concert.

"Hang on, what did you say?" I asked.

"Leigh, didn't you see...Happy Feat received a standing ovation."

It's amazing but when I'm on stage, I hear nothing and see absolutely nothing but our Happy Featers (it was the same with Carols by Candlelight!). I'm so focussed on making sure they're all okay that nothing else matters. My friend went on to say that for her, that wasn't even the biggest highlight. The highpoint for her was when Guy said the words 'Happy Feat' and the whole crowd gave the biggest cheer. Wow, I had no idea!

Arriving home at midnight, I had a shower then took my dinner outside to eat it under the stars. Smiling, and filled with a kaleidoscope of emotions, I looked at the night sky, chock-full with the most beautiful shining stars. It made me think of something that one of the Happy Feat Mums had said about comparing our Happy Featers to the night sky. 'When you look at the stars some are huge and shining brightly, others are twinkling beautifully and others combine to make the unique Milky Way; but all together they make the most exquisite and incredible display'.

Yes, that was a perfect description of our Happy Feat team.

Shining Stars!

Some of the little stories I've heard since the concert:-

- ☺ Before the concert, one carer stopped at McDonalds to get a coffee for herself and her Happy Feater. The young guy behind the counter asked if she was excited. When she quizzed him on what he meant, he said about how Happy Feat was going to be dancing with Guy Sebastian! He said everyone was talking about it!
- ☺ One Mum said about how they were stopped several times on the way to the car to be told how amazing the Happy Featers were and how her son was a star. One lady even got out of her car to come over and congratulate them on such a wonderful show.
- ☺ People were tooting their horns and waving if they noticed a Happy Feater in the car on the way home.
- ☺ During the week, there were people stopping our Happy Feat families to congratulate and thank them for such a wonderful performance.





Rave Reviews—Guy Sebastian Concert

From a 19 year old friend of my son's: "Happy Feat's performance was moving! Absolutely beautiful and it was amazing to witness. I actually cannot find the words to explain it. It was breathtaking and had me in tears of joy. I do volunteer work at xxx and one of the dancers knew me and gave me a huge hug. It was such a thrill to see all of them, including my friend from volunteer work, to be so happy."

From one of the Happy Feat Mums: "Thank you for coming into our lives with your awesome Happy Feat Team. The whole experience is such a wonderful adventure and we love you all to death. Thank you for seeing all the Abilities and Good in our Special Kids! You have brought them such excitement and experiences we could only ever have dreamed of for them. Tonight will be so awesome regardless of what does or does not go to plan. Our Happy Feat Family are openly accepted for who they are and what they can do and this is all thanks to you!"

From a Happy Feat volunteer: "I pinch myself every day to make sure I'm not dreaming that you have allowed me to be a part of Happy Feat. I think of the guys and girls as an extended part of my family. There is something that one gets from Happy Feat that money can't buy and words can't explain. I often find myself thinking of a particular comment or dance move one Happy Feater had done the night before and have a chuckle to myself and whoever I'm with at the time will ask what I'm laughing about. I tell them I'm just having a Happy Feat Moment."

A 21 year old family friend: "Just wanted to say congratulations with Happy Feat, they were awesome! The lady next to me was balling her eyes out saying how beautiful it was."

Business colleague: "There have been so many people talking about it around town."

A Happy Feat volunteer: "It was amazing and what a Feat indeed!! Everyone did so well and it was amazing how they inspired the crowd to get to their feet and dance!! (Even though Guy might have thought it was because of him?!! Ha!)"

A Happy Feat Mum: "Wow, how great was the TV news report. Thank you for dreaming up such a wonderful thing. We had the best night ever."

A Happy Feat Mum: "What an absolutely fabulous time we had on Friday night. It was truly sensational! We're both now even bigger Guy Sebastian fans than before and part of xxx's bedtime ritual is saying goodnight to Guy (thanks to the poster of him being placed in just the right place on her bedroom wall). What a truly lovely person he is. Anyway my dear, thank you again. I don't honestly know how you do it but I'm so incredibly glad you do!!!"

A Happy Feat Mum: "When anyone asks me about the night, I reply "It was MAGIC!"

The team at the Entertainment Centre: "I know a lot of people including our staff members were deeply moved by the performance and opportunity that was offered to Happy Feat. I know it will be an experience that they will never forget and it was so lovely to have them be a part of what was such a great night and class act by Guy Sebastian. We hope to see your team again soon!"



