

Kerry McComish

# getting back on her feet... LITERALLY



Back in 1991, when her two daughters were 10 and almost five, Kerry McComish had been working as a show-home hostess for a large housing development company. During the hours when no one came in to look at the houses, she began developing an idea that would help real estate agents make more sales (and waste less of their clients' time).

Kerry's idea was a computer programme that sorted the purchasing criteria, depending on the requirements of the client: price range, number of bedrooms, school zoning, garden size, etc. This is all pretty basic stuff by today's standards but was a new concept back then.

Her programme writers were almost finished and the new product was about to be launched. Word had got out and franchise owners of real estate

companies were ringing her from all around New Zealand wanting to buy at what seemed like enormous amounts of money. 'Just name your price - we want it as soon as possible!' seemed to be the catch-cry. On the day of the last meeting with the programme writers, Kerry was hit by a car and almost killed. The accident happened while she was riding her bicycle home from the meeting, which had been held less than a kilometre away from her home. She

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was admitted to Auckland Hospital's Neurological Intensive Care unit, and there she remained until she was fit enough to return home, where she undertook the painful task of getting herself back on her feet - literally.

The process was to take several months and involved lying very flat and very still. "I wasn't really there," Kerry explains. "Most of the time I was in cloud cuckoo land!"

In the meantime, her programme idea had been superseded by another one identical to hers. Obviously, in terms of work and business, she had to begin again. She called a meeting with her two daughters and asked them what they would rather have when she got better: a mum who went to work and earned lots of money, or a mum who started a new business at home, earning a little bit until it got off the ground. The resounding answer was "work from home!" No hesitation there.

Kerry picks up the story: "during those long hours spent staring at the bedroom ceiling, I came to the realisation that I was lucky to be alive. My thoughts turned to what I could do to make this accident a gift. I began asking myself what I'd rather be doing with my life, and set about imagining that life in vivid detail. I was on the brink of a successful business idea, and a successful career in real estate, if that's what I wanted. But was it really my passion? (I love houses, but I certainly did not enjoy being treated like a 'shark'.)

I had spent time and money studying interior design years earlier, but had remained clueless about how to break into the market at the end of it all.

Working in real estate was my compromise because it was the easy option. I was scared of making inroads into what I really wanted to do: interior design. After the accident, such fears simply fell by the wayside. I had one functioning arm and, with that arm, I phoned David Levene, the owner of Levene's, a large home-decor company, to ask if he would be interested in listening to my business ideas. He had no idea I was calling while lying in bed, with the receiver propped up against

my pillow, and suggested that I come in to see him straight away to discuss my ideas further. Looking down at the white sheets and white plaster casts on my body, I must have been inspired. I said to him "I'm really snowed under at the moment..." and made a tentative suggestion that I'd be able to see him in March - three months away! Meanwhile I had a goal: I had to get better by March in time for my meeting.

My body was a mess, and all I wanted to do was float in a pool of warm water. My neighbour, who is a nurse, kindly offered to drive me daily to the warm pools in Panmure, where there is also an in-house gym. The floating gradually became moving, which became swimming, and eventually I worked out with hand weights under water. Those visits to Panmure were my salvation because I found the perfect treatment for my recovery, and there was a poster on the wall that filled me with inspiration: 'The Great New Zealand Bike Ride February 1992', a 600km bike ride from Christchurch to Queenstown via the foothills of the Southern Alps. I became completely focussed on regaining my fitness in time for the ride and never once forgot that my purpose was to regain my physical strength and energy in order to create my new business. It was simple really, because I had already played out in my head exactly what I was going to do as soon as I was well again. It was just a matter of joining the dots, if you know what I mean


I completed the ride and have continued to take my bike somewhere interesting almost every second year. Last year I rode my bike 1000km up the coast of Western Australia. Of course, in the meanwhile, I have built my home-based interior design business. Now, I can say I have 16 years experience as an interior designer. Based on this experience, I have been developing a kit to assist the DIY-er, called the 'Designer-in-a-Box'. We Kiwis seem to have DIY in our blood, and I receive plenty of cries for help from the DIY-er who has got in over her head!

My philosophy is that good design does not have to cost a lot of money, and it is important for everyone to have



Photo: Scott Cossey

pleasant surroundings. But you need a bit of know-how to create a successful design. So I created the kit to satisfy this need. Used correctly, it is a foolproof route to a professional result.

The last 16 years have flown by and, like anyone who has taken the self-employment route, there have been painful lessons when I have thought, 'if I'd known this was going to be ahead of me I'd never have started!' Then again, there's the satisfaction of being the captain of your own ship and the freedom it brings. I also look around and see the most wonderful supportive people coming into my life all the time. My colleagues are great to work with, my suppliers are supportive, and I have clients who take it upon themselves to make sure I have on-going work by passing my name on to friends, and friends of friends." 

For more information visit: [www.onlineinteriors.co.nz](http://www.onlineinteriors.co.nz) or phone Kerry on 021 240 5365.

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