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Just Challenged!

John P Coutis

Don't ever say to John P Coutis that he is handicapped or has a disability.

He will jump down your throat as quick as look at you. He says, like everyone else, he has had to face a 'few challenges' in his life. The challenges have not just been physical, because John Coutis was born without the effective use of the lower half of his body.

With a positive attitude and quick wit, he has overcome his life challenges and, in fact, has used them to inspire others.

It would be fair to say that John P Coutis is one of this country's leading inspirational speakers who just happens to spend a fair amount of his time here on the Holiday Coast. John used to come to South West Rocks as a youngster with his family, and way back then struck up a friendship with Pictorial columnist and restaurateur Lou Kesby.

"I have known John for years," Lou says. "He is a great little bloke. We rag tag each other all the time."

Today, the married father of one travels Australia and the world speaking to business, sport, education and others about how to get on with your life.

"I suppose it is about getting off your backside and having a go. If I can do it so can you," he says.

John knows that everyone has problems, some more than others. "You can look around and always find someone worse off than yourself. The best thing we can do is treat today as the first day of the rest of our lives and get on with it. "This life isn't a rehearsal. We are here and we have to make the best of what we have got." This is essentially the message John Coutis passes on to thousands in his audiences around the world. He creates a huge amount of interest wherever he goes, because many people wonder how a person who is missing much of his body, actually functions.

He answers many of the most asked questions on his website www.johnpcoutis.com

One of the questions is, what happened to your legs? John answers that he was born with legs that were never formed properly and could never support them or artificial limbs because his hips are completely different to the average person.

He does not use a wheelchair, but gets around on his hands and by using his old faithful skateboard with roller blades attached - for speed. Yes, he does drive a specially converted motor vehicle, and he lists the day he got his license as one of the best days in his life.

Another often asked question is how do you go to the bathroom? He replies that it is the same as everyone else, except he sits like the ladies, do. "I am one of the few blokes who agrees with the ladies - guys will you put the toilet seat down when you have finished!" John says and does it all with a sense of fun.

In fact, he says had he not become an inspirational speaker, he would have become a stand-up comedian - "the only trouble is, I can't stand up!" (boom boom)

John admits that he thought he was really badly off in life until he met Lou Kesby (another one). Speaking at recent lecture at the Kempsey Seventh Day Adventist School, John got into Lou once again when he announced to the students that he actually owned Lou's Cafe and that all the students could claim a FREE milkshake - Lou was only slightly amused at this one.

On a serious note, whilst John's talks include a fair amount of humour, there is a serious undertone to it all. He is particularly supportive and defensive of children, and he thinks some parents have a lot to answer for. "Children need parents as role models, not as 'friends', and they need to do their job better than what they are at the moment," he claims. "There is no such thing as bad children - it is just bad parenting."

Along the way, John Coutis has achieved many milestones. He is constantly amazed at the effect he can sometimes have on people. "I am glad that my life can make a difference to others."

Just ask young Bianca Chapman from Kempsey who heard John speak at her school. "He is just amazing", she says. "I learned so much about getting on with our lives," she said. John believes he is just like everyone else, but with just a few more challenges.

He has overcome most of those. He says the biggest decision in his life came in 1984 when he had to decide whether to have his useless legs amputated or not. He went with the decision to have them removed in a 90 minute operation. "Having them removed meant that I had to learn how to do everything all over again. But it also meant that I would have more mobility, freedom and access to many more places and things. "I never had the use of my legs and now they don't get in the way." Seeing John rip around on his skateboard is an inspiration.

His challenges have not stopped him being active and from playing sport. He has been the Australian Disabled Table Tennis Champion and he was the first person with a major disability to play indoor cricket in Australia. He also played grade cricket for the famous Bankstown Club in Sydney. When Steve Waugh was Australian cricket captain, he had John talk to the team on a number of occasions and in 1994 had the opportunity to travel with the Australian Cricket team to South Africa. "When I was there I had the honour of meeting Mr Nelson Mandela.

"This was one of my greatest moments and his words 'the most difficult matter is not so much to change the world, as yourself.'" John buzzes around the world talking and inspiring. In just nine weeks he has spoken on 127 occasions. He has recently completed a series of talks at schools on the Mid North Coast, and he is about to head off to China - again!

John P Coutis is an inspiration. It has nothing to do with his challenges, but everything to do with the positive message he spreads.

"If you keep on doing what you are doing, you will keep on getting what you are getting. Get on with your life and make the best of it," he says. Inspiring words indeed!

