

## AT EASE

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Listen to the news and the words "financial meltdown", "climate change", "terrorism", "crime" and "scandal" are all too familiar. Alternatively listen to Nelia Diberardino and what you get are stories about "entertainment", "shopping", "short stories and poems", "family" and "friends" – words of contentment, fulfillment and someone who is at ease with life.

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Nelia was born and raised in Abruzzo, Italy and immigrated to Australia at the age of 17. "My family and I were very fortunate in that dad and my brother purchased a home in Port Melbourne and dad was working with the Tramways as a Welder and Concretor", Nelia recalls. "This gave us a solid foundation with which to assimilate and grow."

Nelia began learning her command of the English language and worked in a Tailor Shop sewing and repairing clothes. There was an enormous amount of family support and Nelia was able to spend time bush walking, at the beach and dances with friends.

Then at the age of 28 Nelia's scoliosis had deteriorated to the point where she was confronted with the possibility of permanent paraplegia. To avoid this Nelia had her spine fused. This left her bed ridden in hospital for 6 months and a significant amount of rehabilitation to get movement back in her legs again.

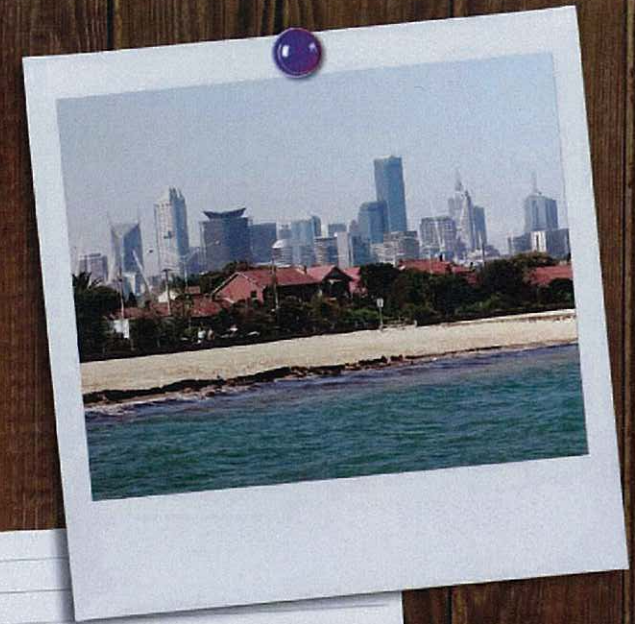
"The operation was a life changing event for me," Nelia explains. "I went from being full time employed and mobile to a reliance on a walking frame, the disability support pension and my parents for some of the everyday activities that I now could not do."

Despite the difficulties Nelia's spirit and determination emerged stronger than ever. Nelia began writing poems and short stories, several of which were published in Italian newspapers. "I gained an enormous amount of confidence from the people around me", Nelia explains. "Each day is a different day – the weather, the clothes we wear and the things we do differ every day, but you need to believe that it is different. I believed it, found an interest, set a goal and worked towards that goal."

In the 1980's Nelia and her mother moved to Templestowe, where Nelia continues to reside today. While residing at this place Nelia undertook English as a Second Language (ESL) at Box Hill TAFE. "I was interested in advocacy and shoe design for people with a disability to improve mobility for those people", Nelia recalls. "Unfortunately this never eventuated because my mother became seriously ill and I had to care for her."

Ten years ago Nelia employed DASSI to provide her with domestic assistance and community access. The relationship has enabled Nelia to do things like shopping, pay bills, maintain friendships, clean the house and engage in recreational activity. "I am a very independent person, so I don't want my disability to stop me from doing the things I love to do. My Attendant Support Worker is one of a number of enablers I use to get to where I want to go," Nelia explains. "While I have had my down times, I have had a very good life – there are no complaints. It is all about knowing what makes you happy, creating the opportunities and surrounding yourself with positive people to help you get there."

Nelia is contemplating a holiday to visit family and friends in the United States and Italy. "I haven't been overseas since I came to Australia. It is one thing I'd like to do and there is no reason why I can't do it. It's up to us and the people we are with to make our life what we want it to be."



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Disability Attendant Support Worker Inc.  
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