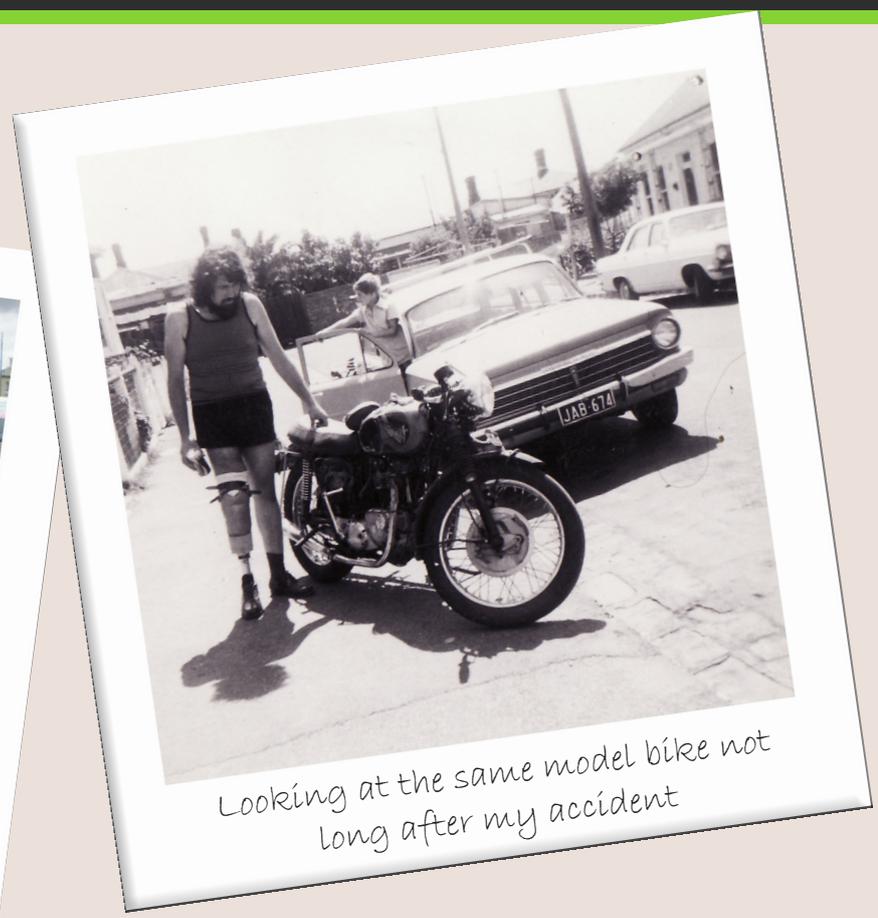


# Alan Buchanan



*admiring one just a short time ago*



*Looking at the same model bike not long after my accident*

I am 60 years of age this year, 2010. My life changed in 1972 following the amputation of my right leg.

Let me explain. Prior to 1972 I was a Biker, riding in what is known as a Biker Outlaw Club. My life was oh...so very exciting, fast and full of good times. I felt unstoppable, so up in the world that nothing could ever touch me. "Live fast, die young...I'm bullet proof". That was my attitude then.

October 22nd 1972 was the date that changed all this, crunch time had arrived. On my way home from a friend's house, a car made

a right hand turn into me. His defence was he didn't see me or hear my motor bike. He didn't even see my headlight shining oh so brightly. Such is life!

I knew instantly that I had lost my leg and was so very scared. I woke up in hospital taking stock; I remember thinking of what my future was going to be. Never work again, never to marry or have a family, rejection from my friends. I even felt that I had let my family down. I could very easily have ended it all there and then. I suppose I was a little delirious. I don't know if this was soon after or days later, when I awoke to my mum and dad comforting

my crying girlfriend who I soon rejected and pushed away as I felt that I was no longer any good for her. As much as she had tried to persuade me otherwise I had made up my mind. I wanted her to have the life I felt I could no longer offer her.

I was angry with myself and the world. Luckily my family were there for me. My family and a handful of my closest friends visited twice daily. Without them I would have gone crazy, back then there was little support in the area of amputation. I was resigned to the fact that I had to get through the trauma for them, so I told myself "Get over it fella, you've



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got to play the hand you've been dealt". Physio was trouble-free in hospital with friends and family backing me up. In the six weeks I spent there I had two skin grafts due to ulceration of the stump. I had a horrible time in Rehab though, with insecurities surfacing at every turn. I felt very alone and lost, depression set in. I was a mess.

It was tough because in those days we didn't have the peer support volunteers. I felt cornered, I was isolated and anxious. This is why I recently joined a peer support group at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Ballarat, and where I first met Melissa from Limbs 4 Life. Perhaps I could make a difference to someone who is faced with the challenge of an amputation. No one should go it alone as I did all those years ago. Talking can help, experiences lead to answers and recovery.

I met my first wife in hospital. She was a nurse and she was the reason I made it through the ordeal of the amputation aftermath. If a peer support group was around then I believe my mental health would not have suffered so much. To have the opportunity to speak to someone who shared the same experience would have been invaluable. The first day I stood up on my prosthetic leg I did not want to take it easy, I did not want to give it back for adjustments, but of course I did. All I wanted to do was get back to work, marry my girl, have a family and restore my life back to its former glory. I foolishly pushed myself too hard

- I should have given myself more time. I hated being in rehab, I wanted to get out and get on with it. I was back at work in 6 months, I even got married which I am sad to say only lasted 18 months. Following this I had numerous jobs, a few relationships, started playing music in a band and met my present wife. I retrained and took a course at TAFE and achieved my chef certificate as cooking was my real passion and I enjoyed it immensely. I worked in this field for 10 years, but chronic back and neck problems together with a re-occurring sore stump forced me to give up work, as it was all getting too much and I was taking far too much medication just to get through the day.

I am now retired and feel fortunate to live on a wonderful rural property with my wife and our many pets, we are looking forward to the arrival of our first grandchild very soon. I rely on the caring staff from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital who look after my needs for my prosthetic leg. The staff at the Queen Elizabeth are truly amazing, and when I was asked to join the Peer Support Volunteers stationed there I welcomed the opportunity to help out, as they have helped me so much.

I am also a member of a Men's shed (Ballarat East) which is a Beyond Blue initiative, and I contribute monthly columns to the local gazette which allows me to have a rant and share a recipe or two. I have occasional setbacks with corns, phantom pains, skin

irritations and keeping my weight down. (Impossible!)

In closing, I say no matter how bad the hand you've been dealt - you can get through it. Speak to an amputee peer support volunteer if this service is offered to you, because talking to someone who has experience may set your mind at ease.

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1300 78 2231