



Amal Amarsi



Hi, my name is Amal and I am an amputee. But does that define me? No, I don't believe it does. I am also a husband, a son, a brother, an economist who works in finance, a qualified chef, and a one eyed (one legged) Carlton Football Club supporter. None of these things define me though, at the end of the day I am just a guy looking to share life's experiences with my loved ones and live my life to the fullest.

I was born in 1983 with a crooked tibia bone. I could walk, although with difficulty and my gait was irregular. My parents travelled to various hospitals in New Zealand (where I was born), America and Australia exploring different

treatment options. This led them to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, where I had a below knee amputation as a six year old. Being wheeled into the operating theatre and looking up at the tear filled eyes of my parents is one of my clearest memories of this time. I also remember my feeling of fear and not wanting to look at my leg when my cast was first taken off.

In spite of these memories, when I think of the RCH I feel lucky and happy that my operation went well and that the follow up care was so good. The doctors and nurses would always speak to me on my level, while also giving my parents the information they needed. I was never bored in waiting

rooms as there were always good books and games to keep me entertained.

Growing up I did not have much difficulty adapting to my prosthesis and living an active life. A lot of this is due to the fact that I was so young when I started learning how to walk (again). Among other things I was involved in pennant tennis, swimming, club cricket and I even went to Mount Buller for mountain bike riding in high school. The only time I ever recall thinking that I could not do something because of my amputation was when I thought about how much I would like to bungee jump one day. Jumping off a cliff with cords strapped to my

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ankles did not seem like a good idea for an amputee! On a recent trip to New Zealand though, my wife and I discovered the tandem Nevis Canyon Swing, this is the world's biggest swing and involves a 75 metre free fall. We both fell for the idea, literally!

For me the challenge of being an amputee came in my teens, soon after I started high school. I started to realise that everyone around me was very focused on how people looked and how they dressed. What would they think of me when they realised I didn't have a real right leg? I went through many years where I would hide the fact that I was an amputee to new people and friends that I made. I was actually pretty good at hiding my amputation, although it would get slightly uncomfortable catching up with mates on a hot summer's day wearing jeans. I had many friends throughout this time, although apart from a couple of exceptions most of these friendships were not true connections because I was keeping a significant part of my life hidden.

The feeling of insecurity and isolation was magnified by the fact that (until very recently) I had never met another person my age who was an amputee. I remember thinking and hoping that one day I might meet a young amputee like myself at one of my leg fitting appointments, although I never did. I felt very different when all I wanted to be was normal, or at least to know that there were other people out there like me.

It took some time, and is not necessarily a finished process, but I have grown and become comfortable with who I am. Spring

and summer are my favourite times of the year, especially after these cold Melbourne winters, because I can walk around in shorts and my favourite footwear, crocs (I can't wear thongs). As well as the natural maturity that comes with growing up, my parents and sister were always there for me and helped this process. Another big part of my growth was meeting my wife Rachael, eight years ago. Having somebody who had chosen to get to know me and fully embraced every part of who I am did wonders for my confidence. We have now been married for just over two years, and aside from both of us working hard in our professional lives, we place a big emphasis on taking the time to enjoy life. For us this means travelling, eating out, exercising and catching up with family and friends. Trekking through the Grampians and Wilsons Prom, white water rafting in Queenstown and sand surfing down beach

dunes are among my favourite moments from recent holidays.

Last year, while reading my local newspaper I came across an article about Limbs 4 Life and the wonderful work they are doing with the Peer Support program. The goal of the program, to ensure no new amputee and their family go through this process alone, resonated with me and I was on the phone to Melissa the next day asking how I could help. Looking back, the opportunity to have a peer support volunteer to talk to, or attending social events such as the golf days would have been beneficial to me. I don't look at this with regret though. I have learnt my own life lessons and developed with the help of my own support network. What I would like to do now is help others by sharing my experiences, letting amputees know they are not alone and that there is nothing stopping them from getting out there and living life to the fullest.



First Published 2012
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1300 78 2231