



## Nicole McLean

Limbs 4 Life Peer Support Volunteer Nicole McLean shares her experience of the 2002 Bali bombings.

12th October 2002. It was my second time in Bali. I was 22 years old.

We had been there for about six hours. I was with my friends Natalie, Trish and Brooke. 'It's our first night here', they said, 'we have to go out'. So we did. We went to Paddy's Bar.

45 minutes later the bomb went off. The girls were around the bar, but I was on the dance floor, a metre away from the suicide bomber. I have since been told that I was the only one left alive on the dance floor. I remember a loud BANG and thought, 'it must be kids outside playing with fire crackers'. Then something hot and damned heavy hit me on my arm and sent me off my feet.

I lost consciousness for a while. I woke up and saw my right arm on the ground. It was still attached, but only by skin. I picked it up and held it across my body and tried to get to my feet, but my right leg was badly damaged. I had no choice but to lie back down. I clearly remember thinking 'someone's going to come in and get me'. I didn't know who it would be, but I knew I wasn't going to die in there.

I only survived the bombing thanks to my friend, Natalie. She climbed back over a wall and into the inferno that was still raging in Paddy's Bar. She had just escaped unscathed. Incredibly – after hearing my



screams over hundreds of others and the sounds of sirens, alarms and car horns – Natalie frantically stumbled through thick smoke to find me lying on the ground. I was covered in ash and blood and unable to move. She was helped by another man, and they carried me out of the bar and onto the back of a Ute, in which I was driven to hospital.

'I'm not in any pain', I said to Natalie. 'I have all these injuries and I can't feel a thing'. That's

when I knew I was dying. I was extremely tired. All I wanted to do was shut my eyes and go to sleep, but Natalie kept yelling at me to wake up. She screamed, 'don't you leave me, don't you leave me'.

I was registered on the first Hercules flight out of Bali, but when I was loaded on, the medical team determined that I would not survive the flight to Darwin. Blood flow in my right arm had ceased hours beforehand.



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I was unloaded for an operation which was performed on the tarmac. I was then put on the second flight out. There were 25 people on the Hercules from Bali to Darwin. We were all on top of each other, stretcher upon stretcher. I'm claustrophobic.

Someone told me in the hospital the next day that it was a terrorist attack, and I couldn't believe it.

My wounds were 50 hours old by the time I reached the Royal Darwin hospital. After they stabilised my arm, they wheeled me back onto the aircraft, this time bound for home (Melbourne). I didn't want to go. I said, 'I'll just stay here until I get better and then I can get a domestic flight home'. I was on so many drugs and pain killers that I had no idea about the real extent of my injuries.

On October the 24th, twelve days after the blast, my right arm was removed as septicaemia had infected my heart and lungs. I would spend the next two months in and out of ICU, fighting for my life.

With the love and support of my family and friends, I have tackled life head on. Sure, in the early days things were tough. My body was so tired and there and was so much healing to be done. Not only did I lose my right arm, but I had burns to my back, my right thigh had a deep wound from the explosion, so I needed to learn to walk again, and there was a shrapnel wound in my lower back the size of an AFL football.

Not once have I felt hard done by. 202 people lost their lives that night, and I was spared mine. I've been given a second chance to get out there and enjoy this life.

My friendship with Natalie is one that I will cherish forever. Not only did she pull me to safety, we relied on each other to cope with what happened that night at Paddy's Bar. The intense images of disaster and the loss of life that we witnessed is something we will never forget.

As for everyday living, there's not a great deal that I can't do. Oh, shoes laces or anything that I have to tie up, I can be there for hours. I don't wear a prosthesis, as I feel that it just gets in the way. I have a very short stump, so the prosthesis is mainly for cosmetics. Personally, I feel I can get things done a lot quicker without it.

I returned to work six months after the accident, and my employers were very supportive. I have had many operations since the bombing; mainly skin grafts and reconstructive surgeries.

Fast forward to today. Life's great! Thinking back, I remember saying to a nurse after losing my arm, 'Oh, it's not my time, I'm not ready to go yet'. She said, 'what have you got to do?', and I said, 'I've gotta get married and I've gotta have babies, that's what I want'.

And guess what? My partner Luke and I are expecting our first baby in February. I'm sure this bundle of joy will bring lots of challenges

but, 'bring it on', I say!

Nicole

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