



The good, the bad and the challenging



I consider myself pretty lucky. I was born with a limb difference. I didn't lose my limb in an unexpected accident, or due to illness. I was just born "different" and didn't know any better from the start.

I didn't "become different" overnight, not even when I had the amputation which led me to a better prosthesis, and better walking (ironically enough!). I thought I had myself all sorted out, together with any issues that I might have had with my body, while growing up. I thought I was pretty tough,

physically and mentally, and I was not feeling particularly distinctive from any other two-legged humans. Others might disagree, but in hindsight, I would even go as far as to refer to myself as being rather cocky (not towards others by any means, more towards my own limitations) or maybe just in self denial? That was until I met Melissa from Limbs 4 Life! That was when my own most truthful, honest and clear image of myself and my own body started to surface. Needless to say this revelation has hit me like a ton of bricks. It dawned on me

that all these years I had fooled myself into thinking that I was okay with the way my body was, or was not. Whilst I am quite happy to take my leg off when I go swimming, I am not okay with wearing shorts, skirts or any other clothing which highlights my imperfection in public. All these years I had been doing such a good job hiding my affliction and focusing on fitting into the two-legged masses, that I actually thought of myself as not having any physical disability.

I would consider it a mini triumph when someone did



The good, the bad and the challenging

NOT mention my limp, nor asked me what I did to my leg. If I had a dollar for every time I was asked what happened to my leg, by absolute strangers mind you, I'd be a millionaire! I'm sure I'm not the only one who has experienced it. I certainly used to, and still do to a certain degree, get shocked when people know or notice I have an artificial leg, but don't think much of it, and don't ask me about it up front. How very refreshing such interactions are! What I think it might all come down to is the fact that amputees and people with other physical disabilities tend to be stereotyped and stigmatised by society. The moment physical disability or any other physical aspect of a person becomes apparent and deviates from what's defined as "normal" by society, it is the disability and not the actual person that becomes the focal point of attention and curiosity, and a starting point to almost every single conversation with a stranger.

The frustrating fact is that a lot of people with disabilities are treated by others as if the disability defines them and who they are as a person. Ironically enough, I think that deep down I have in fact allowed myself to be defined by my own disability, certainly not by others, but by myself, by simply putting so much focus on trying to cover it up. How a society views physical disability really does impact our own body image, particularly as these days there is so much pressure for people's bodies to be perfect.

Well, my stump is far from being

perfect, but it's there, it's part of me whether I like it or not, and I guess it does tell at least part of my story, but most certainly not the whole story! It was only very recently I got brave enough to wear sandals without caring what other people see, think or say. However, I am yet to go commando. That's in reference to the prosthesis of course! I really admire amputees who are brave enough to go out in public proudly displaying their new limbs, without the cosmetic covers.

Hopefully one day I will be OK with my own body to the point that I will also not care whether I look part-Terminator, and whether people will see the real, vulnerable me.

Dorothy Maciaga

First Published 2011
© Limbs 4 Life Inc.

www.limbs4life.org.au
1300 78 2231