

amplified

edition 1 | 2020

**Personal stories
from the vault**
Where are they now?

My Diary
The Kid's Diary
for Children Living
with Limb Loss



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INSIDE

06

PERSONAL STORIES #1
Ren Gallet

11

PERSONAL STORIES #2
Rob Rickards

14

PERSONAL STORIES #3
Faye Gooch

17

PERSONAL STORIES #4
Bruce Jaques

23

PERSONAL STORIES #5
Amal Amarsi

30

My diary
THE KID'S DIARY FOR
CHILDREN LIVING
WITH LIMB LOSS

INCORPORATING THRIVE
limbs 4 kids



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Welcome to the first edition of Amplified for 2020.

As I write this opening introduction to you, I am mindful of the challenges and obstacles that many of us have already faced in our lives. I am also reminded on a daily basis how extremely resilient we, as a community, are in the face of adversity.

At present we are all sailing into uncharted waters. The impact that the COVID-19 (coronavirus) is having around the world is like nothing that any of us have experienced before. But like other hurdles that we have faced we can reach out and support one other.

It is important that we remain connected and share challenges and achievements with one another. I don't want anyone to feel alone. Connect with our social media channels, call us if you would like to have a chat or ask to engage with one of our volunteers. Our National Amputee Advisory Council members will also be available should you wish to speak to someone locally.

Let's continue to try to make a real difference together.

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Message from the CEO

As human beings we don't always manage fear very well, and that's normal. We have an in-built fight or flight response to stressful events. We either decide to face our fear and fight, or we run away and flee. If we embrace our fears, we can work towards moving forward.

Most of you reading this have faced the fear and stress of limb loss and the various challenges that came with it. But I feel confident in saying that that while you may not have always felt like fighting, you did!

When I had my accident in 2003, I was placed in a coma for 16 days. I was not expected to survive. But I did. I survived because of the amazing Lois (a complete stranger who lay beside me on train tracks and alerted emergency services) who talked to me while we waited for the ambulance to arrive, the incredible work of the paramedics on the scene, and the work of the surgeons, nurses and my medical team.

Adjusting to my amputation and learning to walk again took ten months. It was a long hospital and rehab process, but I finally got up on my 'feet' again and returned to work with quite a few battle scars. The fact that I didn't die and had come out the other side was nothing short of a miracle. The human body still amazes me; how it works to survive, heal and mend.

Three years post amputation I was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer, yet another challenge. In the same way I responded to my amputation, I decided to fight. At that time I went through the experience of surgery and radiation therapy. It is now ten years since my cancer diagnosis and thankfully I'm cancer-free.

So, regardless of what we face or have faced, we often surprise ourselves with the capacity to summon strengths and resilience that we didn't even know we had. Maybe a little bruised and battered but, nonetheless, stronger for the experience.

I just want to remind you that as a community we have confronted life challenges. While it's not always easy, the work you put in today, tomorrow, next week, next month and in the



years following makes you the incredible person you are today. In the face of adversity we are, and can be, amazing.

The current coronavirus (COVID-19) situation is presenting us all with new stresses, challenges and feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. The coming months will impact on us all in different ways, but it's important to remember that we're all in this together. As a community we can support one another and stay strong. And remember, you are not alone.

You will notice that this edition of Amplified is different to our usual publication. That's because we felt it valuable to highlight just how members of our limb loss community tackled the challenges that amputation brought, and the ways in which they 'came out the other side' afterwards. So we've dipped into the vault, re-publishing stories provided by members of our community many years ago and followed up to find out what has transpired in their lives since then.

My staff and I are now all working remotely from home, enabling us to be as safe as possible during this time. But I want to remind you that we are just a phone call away if you need assistance or are feeling alone. We're all in this together.

Much love to you all.

Melissa Noonan (Limbs 4 Life CEO)



Ren Gallet My Story (2007)

I lost my left leg below the knee in a motorcycle accident just over 40 years ago in the UK, two weeks before my 17th birthday.

Like all amputees of that era, unless there were any surgical complications, I was sent home two weeks after the operation and given a note to take to my GP as well as details of the limb-fitting centre where I was to have a replacement limb made. Amputees were not given any physiotherapy or occupational therapy

treatment, just a pair of crutches to get around on. All limbs were made from wood or pressed metal, making those types the only choices back then.

I hobbled around on crutches for six months before I got my first wooden limb. It's not until your mobility and independence are taken away that you appreciate just how much that first prosthetic limb means to you. Getting my leg meant so much to me. I could walk again, get a job and go out with my friends. Simple things we take for granted, but when they are taken away from you they become very important.

Prior to losing my leg I used to ice skate and did some speed skating, and I was quite good at it. I was told I would not be able to do these

again. And later in this story you will see the significance of this.

Back in England I tried horse riding and, except for the fact that I had to mount the horse on the opposite side to everyone else, I loved it to the point where I rode at show jumping events and also rode in four Hampshire Fox Hunts. But no foxes were caught, thank God. When I arrived in Australia, I continued my horse riding hobby but converted to western riding. And for a number of years I trained and showed quarter horses, and won a number of trophies and ribbons.

Over time though, I lost my passion for horses and took up golf and managed to get my handicap down to nine. Over the years I played in two Australian Amputee Golf Championships, two British tournaments, one Canadian tournament and one US tournament. Playing in these tournaments has given me the opportunity to meet and become friends with some fantastic people living with various types of amputation. Some have lost both arms or both legs, and seeing them overcome their disabilities and watch them play golf is amazing. The biggest golfing highlights, besides the tournaments I've played in, was playing at St Andrews in Scotland, the home of golf, and at Royal Troon. At Royal Troon I played 18 holes on the old course in the morning, had lunch with my wife, and then played another 18 holes on the new course in the afternoon. I managed to do that carrying a full set of clubs and walking the course. I must admit I was really tired and sore afterwards but recovered the next day.

Earlier I made a comment about ice skating while still living in the UK. Well returning to ice skating became another new chapter in my life, but this time in Australia. Eight years ago I took up roller blading and kept getting up every time I fell down, determined not to let it beat me. And it led me to a new passion – ice hockey. At the moment I am playing Inline Hockey in 'C' grade with the Lilydale Rats and also at Bayswater Home League division. Getting 'ice time' in Melbourne at the moment is very difficult so inline compensates. This year Canada will, for the first time, introduce amputee ice hockey in the standing position, as a demonstration sport at the winter Paralympic Games. They are endeavouring to make

this sport a permanent feature. They want Australia to put a team together and so far, with myself included, we have five players and are continuously looking for more recruits.

Although I can ski all the blue runs at Falls Creek on two normal skis it's quite different when it comes to ice hockey. With ice hockey it's necessary to be able to sprint quickly, stop quickly, turn sharply, back check as well as puck handle and shoot (while your opposition are leaning on you). In my opinion ice hockey would have to be the most demanding and hardest discipline to learn and develop. This is probably why we have found it so difficult to find new recruits. At 59 I might be too old to play in a Paralympic ice hockey team but I've never given up on anything yet. And, if I can't play, I'll help out some other way.

I hope my story will inspire some amputees (especially younger people) to never give up trying to achieve your goals, especially in sports. Whenever you're told you can't do something because of your disability, do what I did, ignore them and try anyway. And if you need help or some moral support just give me a call.

My job for the last nine years has been as a prosthetic technician. I've tried numerous components and tested them for some of the manufacturers, so I have a reasonable knowledge about what is available to amputees and what works and doesn't work when it comes to a person's activity level. I would be only too pleased to share this knowledge with any amputee and offer advice from an amputee's point of view, which can sometimes be lacking in the industry.

No one is better than another amputee when it comes to understanding a fellow amputee's needs and the psychological trauma that goes with the loss of a limb. For example, only another amputee can describe how painful and annoying phantom pains are. This is why I really believe that Melissa and her team have made enormous inroads in helping amputees to move forward after losing a limb – through the provision of information, peer support and help where in the past there was none or very little. Limbs 4 Life is a must for all amputees.

Where are you now, Ren? (2020)

When Limbs 4 Life asked me to reflect on the 13 years since my original article I thought “where do I begin” as so much has happened over that time. There’s been some life changes, personal challenges, achievements, and meeting lifelong goals.

Well, I’ve now clocked up 14 years as a Peer Support Volunteer with Limbs 4 Life. I think I’ve done hundreds of visits now and met people from all walks of life but together we share something in common – we’ve lost a

limb. It’s hard to put into words the uplifting feeling that I get after I’ve visited someone. It’s such a privilege to help someone just going through what I experienced 53 years ago. Talking ‘amputee to amputee’ is really something special. Every conversation and visit is different. It might be about prosthetics, sport, returning home, what to expect in rehab, amputee jokes or where to turn if things get tough. Peer support wasn’t something available when I became an amputee and I think it’s great that Limbs 4 Life took the charge and made it available all those years ago. I really think that without peer support some people would never have felt able to make the next steps forward in getting their life back. And I think some would have experienced major mental health issues without it too.

I retired from working as a prosthetic technician in 2008. I’m pleased to have gleaned so much knowledge and skills in a profession that allowed me to meet and support the outcomes of many amputees. Over decades I witnessed huge advancements in prosthetic technology and I’m pleased that I was able to offer personal and professional knowledge to many prosthetists. I firmly believe that prosthetists perform their best when they have insights from the actual users of products. So, my advice to anyone is to learn about technology and speak to other amputees. And never be afraid to ask your prosthetist to trial products and make a prosthesis that is a comfortable fit and meets your needs.

Retiring freed me up to assist my wife, Wilma, as her workload expanded running organisations, projects and teams, and with it a lot of interstate and overseas travel, in the not-for-profit sector. I’m not quite sure that she would agree that I was the greatest personal assistant in the world though! I’m really proud of Wilma as while holding high level roles in welfare and employment sectors, along with being a member of major government committees and organisational Boards, she also achieved her PhD. And she is now lending her skills and knowledge to the Limbs 4 Life Board too.

Back in 2007, when the original article was published, I was still playing competitive ice hockey and a lot of golf. Unfortunately I’m not





playing ice hockey anymore and rounds of golf are becoming less frequent. But that's mainly because of a shoulder injury and some knee, heart and spine surgeries. Hmmm ... maybe I went a little too hard over the years.

But before I had to stop being so physically active I did have some amazing opportunities. In 2010 I was selected to be one of two Australian amputees in an International Standing (Amputee) Ice Hockey Team and we took part in the World Standing Ice Hockey Championships in Montreal (Canada). While we didn't win, it was such an honour to be amongst the finest players in the world. It was also the first time I played with other amputees, as my team in Melbourne (as well as the teams we played against) was comprised of able-bodied players.

In 2003 I was part of Australian Amputee Golf, and over the course of a year our 10 members participated in the British Amputee Open, American Amputee Open, Canadian Amputee Open and Australian Amputee Open tournaments. During the American one I inadvertently appeared on TV there. Turned out

a camera guy actually filmed me when, while waiting to tee off, he asked me what I was doing rubbing sunscreen on my socket which had the Australian flag stuck to it. I let him know it was to stop the colour fading, which he found to be interesting! I didn't know that he had filmed me until the next morning when, at breakfast, someone told me they had seen me on TV. It was a year of experiences I'll never forget, nor the diverse and far flung friends I made over that time.

My final thoughts are that living with limb loss doesn't have to stop you from setting goals and seeking out experiences. Speak to others, explore options and give it a go. It might be related to education, employment, sport or keeping connected to your community. Consider becoming a Peer Support Volunteer too, as it will bring you a lot of satisfaction to 'give something back'.

For more about Ren's story why not check out his video - www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support/personal-stories/videos/ren-gallet



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Personal Stories #2



Rob Rickards My Story (2006)

One morning in February 1977, when I was 20, I woke up and asked a passing nurse to call the cops as "somebody has stolen my foot".

Whether this was a result of the anaesthetic or what my wife describes as a selfish sense of humour I am not sure. It did seem to set the tone for the future!

At the time I was in the Rhodesian Army and the previous day I had stood on a landmine of the 'AP' (Anti-personnel) variety. And the 4 inch device had done an excellent job in blowing off my left foot. It hurt a bit that did. Those older readers of Amplified may remember Rhodesia and the terrible bush war that came to an end in 1980 when Robert Mugabe's ZANU party took power and Zimbabwe was born.

I clearly remember a conversation with my Rhodesian Army mates some years back, early in our training, when I had boldly stated "I would

rather be shot dead than maimed". But when I sat looking at my mangled leg that day there was this immediate and total acceptance that I was now a person with only one leg. I was now "the one-legged guy". Damn. No more rugby for me. But I didn't want to be dead!

The mangled foot had indeed been expertly "stolen" by a wonderfully apologetic doctor, and what was left was all neatly wrapped up in a white bandage and there was little pain! The new stump stopped 8 inches below the knee, a fact which has been gleefully (and sometimes inappropriately) explained ever since - "You know most people average 6 inches, I have 8".

More seriously, the lack of weight was the clincher that brought home my new medical status. There was no doubt that a big part of my body was now missing. After five nights in hospital the bed was needed for someone worse off. So, 20 year old me was sent home with the comment "there's nothing much more we can do for you now, come back in three months for a new leg".

If 'counselling' or 'physio' was available, nobody told me! When I tell today's medical

professionals this they are blown away. New amputees need various supports to understand certain things in order to make the transition smooth. An example is that if someone had told me to do a few simple exercises every day I would not have lost much muscular bulk in my thigh. I did nothing and it was much harder, even impossible, to regain the same evenness between my legs later.

Mentally I was very strong because I had seen many worse off soldiers and had lost mates too. I considered myself lucky and was blessed by a good start with incredible support from friends, family and a certain girlfriend. They all helped me swap my rifle for a pair of crutches and I headed off to start my planned law course at university.

Three months later after surprisingly few visits to the 'leg place' I walked out of there with my crutches over my shoulders. Immediately my brothers then insisted that we went disco dancing at the local dive. I was a little unsteady and stumbled into this huge bloke and spilt his drink. He accused me of being drunk and threatened to clobber me. I offered to buy him

a replacement beer and he could either help celebrate my new amputee status or I could hit him over the head with my brand new 'wooden' leg - his choice.

The new leg worked really well and after a few months the realisation sunk in that I was not suited to law. I became determined to continue to serve my country in its time of need and was faced with the obvious fact that walking in the bush was out, so I thought "why not boats or airplanes?". I promptly volunteered to a 'call up' by the Rhodesian Navy, otherwise known as Boat Troop, which was run by the Rhodesian Army Engineers.

I had received a small monthly disability pension that was backdated 12 months, and provided as a lump sum, which I spent on taking flying lessons. In aircraft you use your feet extensively (rudder and brakes) and fortunately the leg proved to be no problem. Aviation became the main focus for me. I had many 'adventures' flying Cessna aircraft for the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the last year of the Rhodesian war and throughout the ceasefire and "free" elections

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years. These small beginnings led to a few years working in GA (general aviation). But after eight years flying for Air Zimbabwe (Vickers Viscount Boeing 737-200 and Boeing 707) the situation in Zimbabwe became untenable. We felt it was time to move to Australia and 17 years later I fly B737's for Qantas. I am also heavily involved in the training and checking of our aircrews, both in the aircrafts and in simulators.

Sian, my wonderful wife of 25 years, and my two great children James (25 years) and Lori-Ann (23 years) have had to put up with my silly sense of humour all these years and the expectation is that they will continue to do so!! We have all embraced our new country and love our life living in the hills on the North East outskirts of Melbourne. My 50th birthday was celebrated in style recently and my new golf clubs are still yet to improve my game! Other interests I have are home renovations, camping, kayaking, bike riding, swimming, computers, wine and beer! My 'wooden' leg has never held us back.

My first leg was not actually 'wooden' but was quite basic compared to today's models. It has been very interesting watching the technology develop over the years. This year I became involved in the La Trobe University volunteer group, which enables prosthetists of the future to 'work on' amputees. Besides meeting the young students, it's been a great chance to get a close up look at the new technology. Amputees of the future can expect great things.

I have been fortunate in that I have had very few problems and can boast I have never lost a day's work directly related to my stump. I do know my limits though and won't play golf on a 40 degree day! I am in awe of the achievements of amputees around the world as they make full use of the new technology.

For many years I have wanted to make myself available to talk to new amputees and provide support but never found any avenues to do so. Limbs 4 Life has changed that and I'm now a trained Peer Support Volunteer. I look forward to meeting new amputees and their families and helping them to realize that there is very little that an amputee cannot do and hope that the example of my wonderful career flying big fast jets can illustrate just this.

Where are you now, Rob? (2020)

In the 14 years since sharing my story in one of the earliest editions of Amplified magazine a lot has changed. But in some ways, other things have stayed the same.

I am still flying and training pilots at Qantas, a very active and diverse role I've now held for 32 years. But I am moving towards retirement later this year. As a pilot I am watching events unfold in the aviation industry as a result of COVID-19; just as it is also impacting on so many other industries, employment and our community.

I'm now the proud grandfather to three very active grandchildren, with the oldest now eight years old. I've certainly been through a few more prosthetic legs since the original article, but all have worked just fine for me. And between 2011 and 2017 I built my very own sport plane from a kit - something I had wanted to do for many years.

In addition to volunteering my time as Limbs 4 Life Peer Support Volunteer, I am now also involved with another not-for-profit organisation called 'Wheelies with Wings'.

The purpose of Wheelies with Wings is to *"offer to physically disabled people the opportunity to gain a flying experience. This allows physically disabled people to gain a sense of freedom and achievement - a stepping stone to use to further challenges"*. Amongst the various supports this organisation offers are scholarships which enable people living with severe lower limb disabilities or who are wheelchair users to undertake a motivational learn to fly course. As someone who is passionate about flying, it is a joy to assist people with disabilities learn to fly recreationally or professionally. For more information visit www.wheelieswithwings.com.au

I look forward to many more years volunteering with Limbs 4 Life and Wheelies with Wings, spending time with my now expanded family, and pursuing my many passions and interests.



Faye Gooch My Story (2013)

Ian Gooch has been a Peer Support Volunteer since the inception of the program in 2005. Over the past eight years Ian estimates that he has visited over a hundred individuals pre or post their amputations. Ian was diagnosed with a diabetic foot ulcer in 2003 and lost his leg below the knee as a result of an ulcer failing to heal. We regularly hear stories about the individual's experience of limb loss, but how does such a life changing event affect their spouse, partner and family? Faye Gooch shares her personal experience.

My husband Ian, who lives with diabetes, was injured in a car accident in 1998. Ian's only injury was to his left foot, and he was expected to leave hospital in a few days. However, this was not to be and he spent the next three months in hospital due to various complications associated with infections.

This was a very difficult time for my daughter Jayne and myself as we both held full time jobs in the city. However, we managed to visit him each night on our way home from work. One of Ian's long-time friends took on the role of visiting him every Friday night, which was a great help to us. This allowed Jayne and I to then spend Friday night either dining out, watching a film or just relaxing at home.

What it taught me was that it is essential to accept help from family and friends when something sudden, such as this, occurs.

After being discharged from hospital Ian spent the following six weeks being visited by a District Nurse every six hours to administer antibiotics, in an attempt to treat the infections. This was also a worrying and stressful time as I was required to go to work each day.

Ian had several operations and extended stays in hospital over the following years to no avail. The infections were still occurring and the ulcer was there.

Eventually Ian's foot surgeon, who had performed operations attempting to save his foot, convinced him to have the amputation in 2003. Ian's decision was stressful to the family as our son Paul was working overseas at the time. However, it was the best decision as his health improved dramatically after getting rid of the infections. But once again doubt arose in my mind, particularly whether I could continue to work and leave Ian home alone each day. We were very lucky that Ian adapted to his new prosthetic leg very well, so it was a huge relief as I felt comfortable continuing to work.

Life did change dramatically for all our family after Ian's amputation. But looking back we believe it was the best for Ian and best for the family too. We did take time to adjust and it certainly makes a difference when planning holidays, attending sporting venues and cinemas etc as we have to ensure access is easy for Ian.

The family have supported Ian's love of sport and were very keen for him to remain engaged after losing his limb. So, Ian became involved with the Eastern Ranges TAC AFL Under 18 team as the Property Steward, and the family are very grateful for this.

In 2013 Faye is a member of the Peer Support Chronic Illness Steering Committee.

Where are you now, Faye? (2020)

In my original article I spoke about my role as Ian's carer (after his amputation) and him working as a Limbs 4 Life Peer Support Volunteer. I also talked about other parts of our lives, some of which have changed quite a bit in the last seven years.

Ian is still a Peer Support Volunteer and loves being able to help other amputees. After 15 years volunteering he has noticed that people are more informed prior to a visit from him, something he attributes to all the resources Limbs 4 Life now sends to hospitals and rehab facilities. This often means that people have already read about their immediate and long-term futures and developed questions ready for him to answer. This really helps to direct the conversations. But just as it was since the beginning, most people are really grateful to meet another amputee who is years down the track and living life independently. Most like to see Ian's prosthesis and ask questions about what it's like to wear one and what to ask for when being fitted for one. Overall, Ian feels that the visits help people to understand that they can regain their life, even though it might be a little different. Ian has made hundreds of visits over the years and he gets so much out of helping others.

I've now retired from work, which means that we can spend more time together with our friends and family. Prior to retiring I found that the early starts and the travel to the city was getting quite tiring. One of my first jobs was working for BHP and I now have time for regular catch-ups with the 'BHP Girls', as we call each other, given we're all now not working.

We now have a grandson, Oliver, who we get to spend a lot of time with. He's very active with school and sports, and we try to help out as much as we can. He's only ever known his Grandad as someone with a prosthetic leg so he happily tells his friends about Ian only having one leg. In fact he's even had school friends come over to our house and he asks Ian to show



them his artificial leg, which has led to mixed responses ranging from interest to concern. Ian happily answers any questions they ask or tells funny jokes about how he lost his leg. A couple of times when Oliver was younger he even 'borrowed' Ian's leg to put his toys in!! Our children Jayne and Paul are incredibly supportive and doing really well in their own jobs and lives, and it's been wonderful to see their lives develop over the last seven years.

A big part of Ian's life was volunteering as Property Steward with the local Eastern Ranges team (Australian rules football). But as that involved a lot of travel to games in metro and regional areas, as well as being around during training sessions, it was getting hard to keep up with so he resigned from that role. Ian's now a Life Member, and we still go to a lot of games, fundraisers and functions. Being part of the team is in our blood really!

Fortunately we are both quite healthy. Although, like anyone with diabetes, Ian has to manage that condition closely. We're both very excited at the moment because he was recently approved to begin using a continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) device, which replaces him having to frequently check his blood glucose with finger pricks throughout the day. It looks like a patch which he wears on his arm, and the device does the glucose level checking throughout the day. It's pretty new and available to Ian through the NDSS. Apparently it's not suitable for everyone, but if you have diabetes it's worth talking about it with your doctor in case you are a candidate.

Finally, I just want to say that Ian and I are so pleased to have been part of Limbs 4 Life since the very beginning. We've been part of the Limbs 4 Life family for 16 years now, and look forward to another couple of decades more!

For more about Ian's story why not check out his video - www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support/personal-stories/videos/ian-gooch

Interested in becoming a Peer Support Volunteer?

Many people with limb loss welcome the opportunity to share their well-earned knowledge and experience with others just commencing on that journey. If becoming a volunteer interests you, feel free to get in touch. To find out more or to submit an online application visit : www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support/become-a-peer-support-volunteer



Bruce Jacques My Story (2011)

Although it was 20 years ago last February, I remember the way my life changed then as vividly as though it happened yesterday.

I was aged 26 and a keen musician and motorcyclist. At the time I was enjoying a fast-growing career in the maritime industry as a Deck Officer and had recently joined a prominent multi-national company operating offshore oil and gas vessels. Life was good.

On the day of my accident I had just finished a morning practice and thought it would be a nice day for a quiet, safe ride out of town. So, I settled down and had my new sensible and slower cruising bike. Half an hour later in a quiet town near the airport I was happy to see a car stop at the give way sign. Just as I was about to pass I was right in front of the car as it pulled out and collected me.

Consequently I left the bike, flew through the air, slid down the road and stopped inches from a tree. I actually landed in front of a veterinarian, which proved handy for bandages. In short, my lower right leg took the greatest impact. I still recall almost looking down at myself and thinking get back up and get on with it – clearly I was going into shock.

The ambulance took me to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. I woke in the orthopaedic ward and began to summon up the courage to look down. I experienced a full range of emotions, but for whatever reason I decided to focus on the fact that at least I was alive. I remember thinking I'd never be captain of a ship; my life's goal. Help and encouragement from my brother and the company I worked for was incredible. My parents were shattered I think and perhaps not quite sure what to do; equally devastated about my career as much as anything. I got fresh fruit delivered, ate well (challenging in hospital sometimes) and thought about all the little things that would contribute physically or mentally to my recovery.



Moving to a rehab facility after 11 days I found myself in a ward made up of people with all sorts of ailments. As many had experienced strokes and head injuries, I felt strangely fortunate. I suffered badly from phantom pain, which kept me awake a lot. Physiotherapy became a part of the day I looked forward to, something to do other than just sitting around. I would have liked more contact from people who had been down the same limb loss path as me and more information generally about all the issues of caring for my leg in those early healing days. But it wasn't available. Nonetheless rehab was generally good. The sleeping and pain issues increased and the doctors suggested a higher dosage of drugs. I suggested stopping medications altogether, initially they resisted but eventually agreed with me. It didn't improve, but one night a nightshift nurse of Chinese background suggested meditation. We went through the idea and process of meditation and I went to sleep! I felt that I now had a new level of control over dealing with things internally.

When I was ready to return to work my employer suggested that I could help out in

the office a couple of days a week. Being at work was difficult from a mobility perspective. Although healthy in many other ways I went into work on crutches and vividly remember being so very self-conscious on Collins Street with the trouser leg of my suit pinned up on one side. I was sure everyone was looking. Interim legs came with regular adjustments and difficulties initially. With no help at home during the day, I had some very ordinary days of course. Later that year I went to Tasmania's Cradle Mountain with a new girlfriend and began a short period of "look what I can do on this leg!". Having a new partner was a great support also.

I worked in many operational roles in shipping and took some senior roles over the next five or six years. I had a few brief weeks back at sea but found it a bit difficult. Simultaneously, I vigorously pursued my music technology interest and ended up teaching audio production at RMIT part-time and started a small recording studio. One evening I decided to follow the dream - quit the corporate life and pursue my passion for music full-time. By this stage my leg functioned so well I rarely thought

about it. I was married and happily battling on in the music business. My wife and children have never known anything other than me wearing a prosthesis - so support is fairly pragmatic in that it's just the way things are.

On New Year's Eve in 2004 I resolved to return to working in the maritime industry, in an exciting oil and gas project role. After that I then moved on to my present position as Chief Officer on a modern vessel that carries out all sorts of offshore construction and subsea intervention in oilfields. In August 2010 I obtained a Masters Certificate which enables me to command vessels of unlimited size worldwide. So, 2011 may present some interesting new challenges by the look of things. Colleagues are amused to have an actual pirate on board with the "ol' wooden leg". This role is a very active one where mobility is vital, so I am subjected to the various medicals required for the job. These days if my leg doesn't work well, then I don't. On a previous project I estimated that I covered around 2,500 stairs, plus all the walking around.

Limbs 4 Life has helped me to re-focus my attention and through the online forum I've learned a lot about issues that concern me and hopefully I've put up some useful posts. Whilst I am reasonably low maintenance mobility wise, it has been interesting hearing about the issues many people experience and I often identify with them. I now value my health and I do my best to look after myself. The leg is a big part of this. And having a wife and three gorgeous children who are better off with a happy healthy dad is a fabulous incentive when it comes to staying healthy.

Working four weeks on and four weeks off I have plenty of time at home for both my family and my many hobbies. I use a C-Walk foot and Delta twist ankle insert which provides some shock absorption and torsional movement. I also have a water leg, which is good for the beach, pool, and sea survival courses I'm required to do for work.

In closing, I really encourage people to take advantage of the entire suite of resources that Limbs 4 Life offers on its website.

Where are you now, Bruce? (2020)

Some might know me as the guy who posts a lot of photos of my prosthetic leg on a ship and out at sea during the annual National Amputee Awareness Week. It's not that my leg and I take a holiday that time every year, although that would be nice, it's because I'm now Captain in command of the 'Fugro Etive' ship.

In my previous article I spoke about returning to the maritime industry, after a break where I lectured in and managed the technical music production course at RMIT University. Back in 2011 I was working as a Chief Officer on a vessel, but after gaining more experience and qualifications I'm now allowed to be in command of ships of any size and anywhere in the world. I've been Captain of Fugro Etive, a specialised offshore oil and gas industry vessel, for two and half years now. Along with a great team of between 50 to 85 people on board we are capable of performing a wide range of tasks on and around the seabed with cranes and robotic submarines. This includes building oil and gas fields, maintaining, inspecting and repairing them. This is mostly done around the North West Coast of Australia but sometimes in South East Asia as well. So, many of the 'leg photos' I've put on Facebook are taken on board Fugro Etive. It's great getting the team involved in the photos too, and at times it's the first time they realise I'm an amputee! It's not that I disguise the fact I'm an amputee it's just that if I'm in pants and walking up and down all the stairs on the ship it's not evident. Summer is a whole other matter as because with the ship working in really hot conditions I generally wear shorts as part of my daily uniform - and it's pretty obvious then that I'm an amputee!

I'm generally five weeks on the ship and then five weeks home. I have a wonderful family; my wife Jill and three teenaged children. I'm so proud of my children, and all of them are very independent and going well academically at school. In her early 40s Jill reinvented herself - from working in hospitality and music, where we met, to librarianship. Jill undertook a Bachelor of



Justin Godfrey
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Information Services through distance learning at University, while working full-time and raising our kids. With that qualification under her belt she became the Library Manager at Brighton Primary School and is now a Librarian at Mornington Library. I do think it's fantastic that people, given the right support and motivation, can now up-skill and re-skill through both traditional and flexible distance learning. It might not be something that all amputees are aware of or think about in the early days after an amputation, given all the immediate issues that limb loss brings, but certainly it's an option down the track if looking for new skills or a career change.

Another major part of my life is playing the Chapman Stick, an instrument that not many people know about. I put a 'Post 50' plan into action when I hit that milestone age, with a deliberate long-term goal to achieve something unique in the arts again. So, after a lifetime of playing guitar I started learning how to play the Chapman Stick - largely through free

tutorials on YouTube and paid lessons with international musicians via Skype. The 'Stick' is part of the electric guitar family and usually has ten or twelve strings. Like a bass and guitar simultaneously, but where a guitar has both a fretboard and a body, the Chapman Stick has only a wide and longer fretboard. It's a beautiful instrument, and one you have to practice on all the time. I've now been lucky to play some gigs in Melbourne, which is a big achievement. But a major highlight was when I got the chance to jam with some serious jazz players at The BluJazz Café in Singapore; a venue I'd had drinks in a number of times but never imagined I would ever stand on its stage! Part of a wonderful online community, the instrument has also taken me to 'StickCamps' (gatherings and master classes) in Europe twice. If you're interested in learning more about the sights and sounds of the wonderful Chapman Stick visit my website -<http://www.cloudburstz.com/>

In recent years an old hobby took flight again. Literally. As a kid I was obsessed with flying

and aircraft. I actually had a basic private pilot's licence before I could drive. I even planned a career in aviation before, at the eleventh hour, in Year 12 my Dad diverted me into his industry of shipping. So, a few years ago I decided to resume building model aircraft. I'm a fastidious builder in the old balsa style and an active member of a few global Facebook groups that are keeping that tradition alive. Just as I use my ship as the backdrop for National Amputee Awareness Week (NAAW), last year I shared lots of photos of NAAW ribbons attached to my aircraft. It's definitely fun bringing NAAW to the air and the sea!

I've been a Peer Support Volunteer for a few years and a member of the Limbs 4 Life Facebook group for even longer. The ability to meet other amputees, whether in person or online, is something that wasn't available to me after my accident. Making visits in person is invaluable as it allows people to meet

someone who is 'up and about', which is really encouraging during those early stages after an amputation. And the Facebook group allows a group of like-minded people, at different stages before or after amputation and from all across Australia, to share and enthuse one another. The diversity of topics and the empathy and humour shared within the group is terrific. I do find myself reflecting often on posts, joining in on discussions or starting conversations where I can – what a great way to connect with the community.

We're definitely a special group, us amputees! Thanks to you all for being part of my journey. I look forward to coming up with some amusing photos of my seafaring leg during NAAW 2020, as well as seeing the unique ones that you create too!





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Amal Amarsi My Story (2013)

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 (RCH) 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

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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 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, 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.



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1. Miller, William C., Mark Speechley, and Barry Deathe. "The prevalence and risk factors of falling and fear of falling among lower extremity amputees." Archives of physical medicine and rehabilitation 82.8 (2001): 1031-1037. 2. Kaufman, K. Risk factors and costs associated with accidental falls among adults with above-knee amputations: a population-based study. American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association 2016. (Mayo Clinic). <http://www.aopanet.org/resources/research/> 3. Ludviksdottir A, Gruben K, Gunnsteinsson K, Ingvarsson Th, Nicholls M. Effects on user mobility and safety when changing from a carbon fiber prosthetic foot to a bionic prosthetic foot. Presented at Orthopadie&Reha-Technik Congress, Leipzig, May 2012.

Where are you now, Amal? (2020)

In the eight years since I shared my story there's been many incredibly happy and positive life changes, but also some challenges and hurdles along the way.

The most incredible event to happen in the lives of my wife and I was the birth of our son Blake. He's just turned seven, and has brought us enormous joy. Blake is a fun loving and gentle soul who is incredibly creative and positive. We are amazed by his ability to salvage things headed for the bin or recycling and turn them into something artistic and fun – such as robots to play with. Getting out amongst the great outdoors is something he loves doing with us; whether it's trekking through bushlands and looking for birds and bugs, walking the dog, or riding his bike – he is always ready and willing. And Blake's starting to demonstrate a refined pallet and an interest in cooking, which may be something he's picked up from me given my past career as a chef.

It's a very exciting time for Rachael, Blake and I at the moment, as we are expecting our second child in June. This baby is particularly special as we didn't think we would be able to have another child, following Rachael's battles with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The diagnosis was a shock, as she's always been healthy and active. But Rachael, being the determined and committed person she is put all of her energy into dealing with the exhausting treatments and the impacts they had on her. I'm so pleased to say that Rachael is now cancer-free, and the courage and resilience she's demonstrated has been inspiring to me.

When something this life changing happens it really puts things into perspective and I think it definitely influenced the decisions our family has since made – and factored into the experiences and opportunities we've sought out in recent years.

While Rachael was unwell I started running. I found that putting on my sneakers and jogging

became a way to clear my head and engage in mindfulness. It was a way for me to get some time to myself and reflect. In a way 'hitting the ground' was grounding in itself. Over time and after Rachael's recovery, running gradually became a bigger part of my routine – something I not only looked forward to, but needed. I'm happy to say that the running rubbed off on Rachael, and that together we've completed the Royal Children's Hospital's 'Run For The Kids', a fundraising event for the hospital dear to my heart; given that I spent so much time there as a child. I also found the confidence to train for and complete a half marathon at the Melbourne Marathon, an extraordinary experience and I was very pleased that my prosthesis held up over that distance!

In 2019 we ticked off an item on our 'bucket list' – a five-week holiday in Europe. We feel so privileged to have had the chance to travel to so many different places as a family. We visited Scotland, London, France, Italy, and Germany. We immersed ourselves in the diverse cultures, heritage, entertainment, and cuisines that each country offered. An illness brings home just how precious life is, and that when you can it's important to enjoy every moment and seize every opportunity. We feel so lucky to have been able to create lifetime family memories borne out of an extraordinary holiday.

Early this year I took up the opportunity to pursue a long-held career shift. Until March 2020 I had been working at NAB for 10 years, most recently in projects and change management. Working for a large organisation offered considerable opportunities and experience, and the chance to participate in some terrific corporate social responsibility activities. One example is when I was selected to volunteer at the Special Olympics in Adelaide; it was a rewarding and humbling experience to support people with a wide range of disabilities to pursue their sporting goals. Earlier this year I decided to leave NAB so that I could focus on completing my Masters of Business Administration and seek roles with more of a purpose-led societal change focus. While it was a big leap, I look forward to seeing where 2020 will take me professionally.

And I couldn't finish talking about the last eight

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years without reflecting on my engagement with the amputee community. As someone who lost my leg as a child due to a congenital tibia bone defect, I've welcomed the opportunity to speak to young people and parents also on the limb loss journey. It's rewarding to offer peer support to parents of children with limb differences who wonder what their child's outlook might be. It offers me a chance to highlight that being an amputee has not held me back from living life to the fullest, and I hope that in sharing my story they too can envisage a positive future for their child. I have found that speaking to parents or teenagers with limb differences to be a profound experience, as I gain so much from being able to interact and alleviate natural concerns and worries. So, to any parents reading this please know that Limbs 4 Life can assist you and your child to build a support network, something that wasn't available to my parents or myself when I was growing up.

While 2020 is proving to be a tough year and one of considerable change for people and society, I have no doubt that our amputee community will support and be there for one another. In our various ways we've all faced personal challenges and have proven to be a very resilient group!

Looking after your mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis is important. If you are experiencing stress or anxiety consider calling a free mental health support service:

- **Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636**
- **Lifeline: 13 11 14**
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800**

AMP-ED UP! National Amputee Conference CANCELLED

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) is having a significant impact on our community and the lives of all Australians.

Your health and safety is extremely important to us and for this reason Limbs 4 Life has decided to cancel the AMP-ED Up! National Amputee Conference for 2020.

Our commitment is, and remains, to support amputees and their families. We do understand that the news this event has been cancelled will be disappointing, but we need to ensure that our community is safe. We will go ahead with this event when we can. And we have already processed refunds for those of you who had already registered.

We are currently working on some new ideas for how we can keep our community informed and connected and will share an update with you in the very near future.

My diary

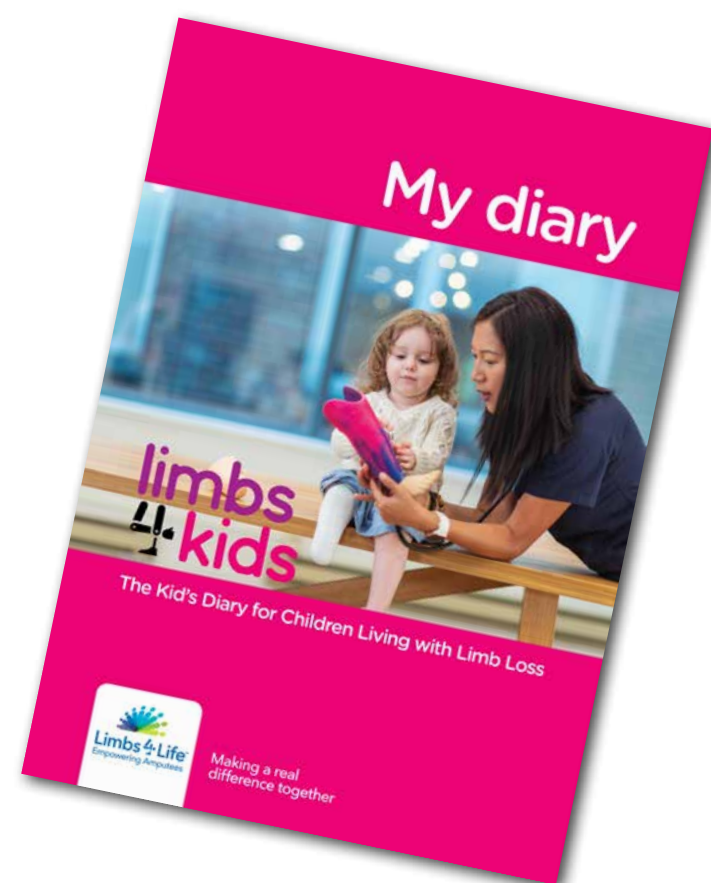
The Kid's Diary for Children Living with Limb Loss

Limbs 4 Life is proud to announce the launch of 'My Diary - the Kid's Diary for Children Living with Limb Loss'. This valuable resource was made possible through generous donations from parents of children living with limb difference and corporate supporters.

Caring for a child living with limb difference can mean attending many meetings, making appointments, preparing applications, compiling historical records, sharing information, and the collection of paperwork.

My Diary was developed to provide parents with a resource to record questions, names and contact details of healthcare providers, their child's achievements and goals, and assistive technology needs. The diary allows parents to track changes over time and house information in one central place.

My Diary is also a useful tool for parents when sharing information about their child with important others such as teachers, sporting



coaches or family members. And it can also assist when preparing applications or attending planning meetings with NDIS staff or NDIS-funded support providers.

If you would like a free copy of My Diary send an email with your name and postal address to kids@limbs4life.org.au.

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