

Meet Limbs 4 Life Volunteer Annie Pateman

It was October 1978. I recall playing squash and stretching for a shot of the ball, falling to the floor and crashing into the metal on the wall. Bang. My knee had smashed into it.

From that day onwards my knee was never the same. It started with an annoying, incessant, aching.

Over the next 18 months, I had been treated for a number of conditions including a strained knee, bursitis, and arthritis until the ache became a lump the size of a tennis ball on the inside of my left knee. The pain was intense and I could hardly walk.



12 months after the squash incident, we moved to the country near Traralgon. I became pregnant with my second child and during the pregnancy my symptoms accelerated.

26 years old and 26 weeks into my pregnancy, I was checked into hospital and, after a biopsy on the 1st April 1980 (yes, April Fool's Day), I was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma (bone cancer) – a condition commonly found in children.

Because I was pregnant, I could not take any medication for pain relief and I found myself wishing for my leg to be "chopped off". My thoughts were that the pain will go, the baby will be born and I could then move on with my life, learn to walk, continue looking after my husband, young son and new baby.

As it turned out, my leg was amputated on Good Friday – 4th April 1980. I was told that there was a strong possibility I would miscarry due to the trauma of the surgery.

Well, the bonus we received was that our unborn baby survived the surgery. This posed a dilemma for the medical team (surgeon, paediatrician and gynaecologist). They wanted to start the rest of my treatment (chemotherapy and rehabilitation) immediately after the amputation, but they were concerned for the safety of the pregnancy.

After much consultation, it was agreed that the baby would be induced at 32 weeks. Fortunately at that time, I was ignorant of the risks and health problems endured by premature babies.

Prior to going to the Royal Women's Hospital for the birth, the surgeon arranged for a young lady to visit me. She was 19 years old, and an above knee amputee. Meeting her was a turning point. This young lady inspired me no end. She played netball and ice-skated. I was determined to walk again. I thought, "if she can do that, the

possibilities are endless for me". I was back on the squash court eight months after losing my leg.

Four weeks later, it was time to have the baby. Dave took me to the Royal Women's Hospital where, on the 8th May 1980, Jessica was born (a healthy 3½ lb and 11" long – and less than the length of a ruler). She was determined to make her way into this world.

Both Jessica and I required blood transfusions. Some time after it was announced that a new disease had been discovered called HIV, and all blood products needed to be screened. Infected blood was around at the time of our transfusions. Again, Jessica and I survived that throw of the dice.

Jessica stayed at the Royal Women's Hospital for eight weeks, and I started my 12 months of treatment and rehabilitation at Hampton Rehabilitation Centre. This was the most difficult part to deal with, leaving Jessica behind in the hospital alone, as well as being separated from Luke.

During rehab, I learned to walk with my new leg, which was made from spare parts. A trolley was developed for me out of pine, which would assist me to transport Jessica around the house. Being a new amputee, I didn't have the skills or the confidence to hold a brand new baby whilst walking, so she was wheeled around from room to room.

I also learnt domestics such as cooking standing on two legs. I have never forgotten practicing carrying two cups of tea up and down the gym during rehab.

I remember swimming successfully for the first time as an amputee. When I called my husband to tell him about this major achievement, instead of getting the words of encouragement that I was expecting, he asked me if I went round in circles. We both laughed.

Fast-forward 26 years. I work full-time for a pharmaceutical company and drive to work every day. I have been involved with the Amputees Association of Victoria, mainly through ten-pin bowling in the National Disabled Ten-pin Bowling Championships and State tournaments. I have had success in winning a number of medals in team and individual events, and meeting people with all forms of disabilities.

I have also played at Dandenong Bowls in a team with able-bodied bowlers. I enjoy swimming, have attempted golf and even climbed Mt Kosciusko.



I have just joined a gym for ladies called Curves, which I attend three times a week. This particular gym really suits my disability. My stamina, flexibility and strength have already improved in the eight weeks since joining.

My latest venture is travel. Dave and I recently travelled to England and Europe for six weeks, and I travel to the NSW Central Coast where Jessica now lives with her partner. The advantage of travelling with a disability is being treated as a first class passenger and not having to wait in queues.

The support and encouragement from my family has enabled me to achieve all that I have wanted to achieve and more. My sister was there for me at the drop of a hat.

I now look forward to becoming a valued volunteer team member joining Mel, Jacinta and the rest of the team at Limbs4Life. I hope to assist and inspire new patients to meet their challenges and demonstrate that you can live a much fulfilled life, as the young 19 year old lass (who would now be 45), inspired me.

Cheers,

Annie



1300 782 231