

Warren Macdonald is a bilateral amputee from Melbourne. Now based in Canada his focus is on adventuring, climbing and public speaking.

Tools for Life



“How can we call ourselves ‘dis-abled’ if we can do everything it is that we want to do?”

I wish I'd said that, but it comes from a friend of mine, Jarem Frye, in Oregon, a unilateral trans femoral amputee who's just designed a knee he can water-ski, rock climb, and (very impressively) telemark ski with. I mention Jarem and his quote because increasingly in our society I see many people over identifying with the term “disabled”, and not recognising the “able” elements in themselves.

What's always impressed me about Limbs4Life is that it's about the “limb”, or the tool, to take part in “life”. With Limbs4Life there are no negative connotations associated with being amputee, and it's about empowering people with information, choices and support.

To me, my prosthetics are tools - nothing more, nothing less. They allow me to do whatever it is I set out to do. I still find some irony in the fact that I use my full length prosthetics less than I use my ‘stubbies’. It took me years to fully grasp this (and being sponsored by a prosthetic company did put pressure on me be ‘seen’ wearing their product), but for the most part, I'm so much faster getting around in my wheelchair or on my stubbies that I now wear the full legs less and less. I used to feel weak if I wasn't walking, using the prosthetics that I'd been given, but I just realised that they weren't the right ‘tools’ for the jobs that I do. But they are right for others, and it blows me away when I see what some people can do with their wheelchair or prosthetics, all in an effort to take part in life.

I just took part in an event in Florida called the ‘Extremity Games’ - the first extreme sports competition for amputees! Sixty (yes, 60) amputees took part in the rock climbing event alone, including three of us who had climbed routes on El Capitan, America's tallest cliff face. This experience made me realise what it was like to feel part of a community again. I don't often hang out with other amputees, so this experience really demonstrated the importance of being part of a community where no one is the ‘odd one out’.

Walking around the hotel in Florida, I found myself looking down at people's legs to see whether they were AK or BK, unilateral or bilateral, and upon seeing two ‘normal’ legs then wondering whether an arm was missing. I don't get that feeling very often, it's usually me receiving inquisitive stares from others. Feeling part of an amputee community has been a rare experience for me, in fact the only other time that I felt it was when I attended an ‘Amputee Coalition of America (ACA)’ conference in Nashville. Unfortunately, the experience was never made available to me after my

rehabilitation in Australia, because there was no organisation for amputees at that time. As rare as they are, I find these events incredibly rewarding, not just for the camaraderie and the sharing of ideas and observations, but because they push us a little harder to use the tools available to us. It gives me a sense of community that I rarely feel.

Limbs4Life is the Australian amputee community that I never had. An important organisation that aims to empower amputees across Australia and create that sense of community for those of us who, in day to day life, often feel like the 'odd one out'. Whether or not Australian amputees get involved in Limbs4Life is an entirely personal decision, but it is vitally important and comforting to know that the support is there if and when you need it.

Congratulations to Limbs4Life and I look forward to a long involvement and opportunity to connect with my Australian amputee community.



To find out more about Warren go to:
www.partanimal.com

Published September 2006

limbs  life

1300 782 231