

A TRIP THAT HELPED ME SOAR LIKE A PHOENIX.



In Grand Rapid, Michigan, USA, 2019 – The Walk of Remembrance

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This year I had the honour and privilege of being able to attend an international convention. At the World Burns Congress, run by the Phoenix Society I was surrounded by so many inspiring survivors, many of which became part of my extended family, albeit on an international level.

Being an event for burns survivors there was a wide range of different people at this event. Some had been living for years with the aftermath of what happened to them, whilst others had been burned more recently and were still learning to accept themselves for the amazing and inspiring individuals that they are. Although different survivors at this event were at different stages of the physical and mental healing, it was a safe space for all to learn from others, bond with those that have

gone through the same or similar experiences and just feel safe and able to be one self.



Grand Rapid's Airport - Arrival

Personally for me, many things were experienced over the course of this week. For the first time since I became a burns survivor I felt completely and fully content with my surroundings and the people in it. I felt comfortable in my own skin being around other burns survivors, because I felt as though I didn't have to have a constant guard up like I do at home as I was surrounded by people who would completely understand. I felt as though I was a part of a community who understood how I felt and the mental and physical battles I had to endure from my burns. I felt supported and completely accepted. Many memories and friendships were made over the course of this week that I know are going to be lifelong and I will cherish. I also learnt various different ways of dealing with my self-consciousness, to understanding how others who aren't burns survivors view us and are often, more than not just curious rather than judging.



Pool Antics with Young Adults

Many of my friends and family in New Zealand tell me that there is no need to be so self-conscious of my scars and that I should stand tall and accept them. However as was affirmed during this event it is so much more complex than just 'not being self-conscious'. On a daily basis we as survivors have to deal with an utterly foreign image and complexion of ourselves, we have been changed from what we know to something completely different and foreign to us; it just makes it much harder when this change is attached to your body and is neither natural nor original to us. It is hard to describe and put fully into words this feeling. This process of viewing myself more confidently is going to be a lifelong one, however 'world burn' has immensely helped me with this and it helped me view myself in a different way and fully realise that my scars tell a powerful story of survival. Although I still have moments where I am overwhelmed by my previous negative thoughts to my scars, following 'world burn' I have been able to accept my scars more, and also manage these thoughts as well as see them as this powerful story that they tell to inspire others.

Some of the powerful stories, wisdom and knowledge of other burns survivors from the trauma and growth they have experienced and continue to do so, I hope to hold onto and impart to others in New Zealand. I hope to continuously develop what I learnt at this event and apply it further into my own life. This event taught me to soar like a phoenix and accept me for the powerful amazing survivor that I am. It taught me to love my self and continue to inspire those around me and those that need it most. It taught me the difference between a victim and a survivor, and that we should all strive to get to a point where we can call ourselves survivors rather than victims; I for one know where I stand and that is as a survivor.

Now that I am fully back to New Zealand life following this event, I am facing the challenge of being back in the environment I started in before this event. However this time I have a set of tools and knowledge to deal with these surroundings.



Grand Rapids - New friends - Young Adults

To conclude, this event has really changed my perspective on myself and those around me. It has given me memories and knowledge that I will always cherish. But most of all it has helped me soar like a phoenix and learn to accept me for the survivor that I am and deserve. I would like to give a huge thanks to the Burns Support Group Charitable Trust in New Zealand that gave me this opportunity. It was well worth it and I will never forget this opportunity I was given. If you as a burn survivor want to attend this event, may be think about applying next time and you never know, you could be jetting away across the globe to an event that may just help you soar as well.