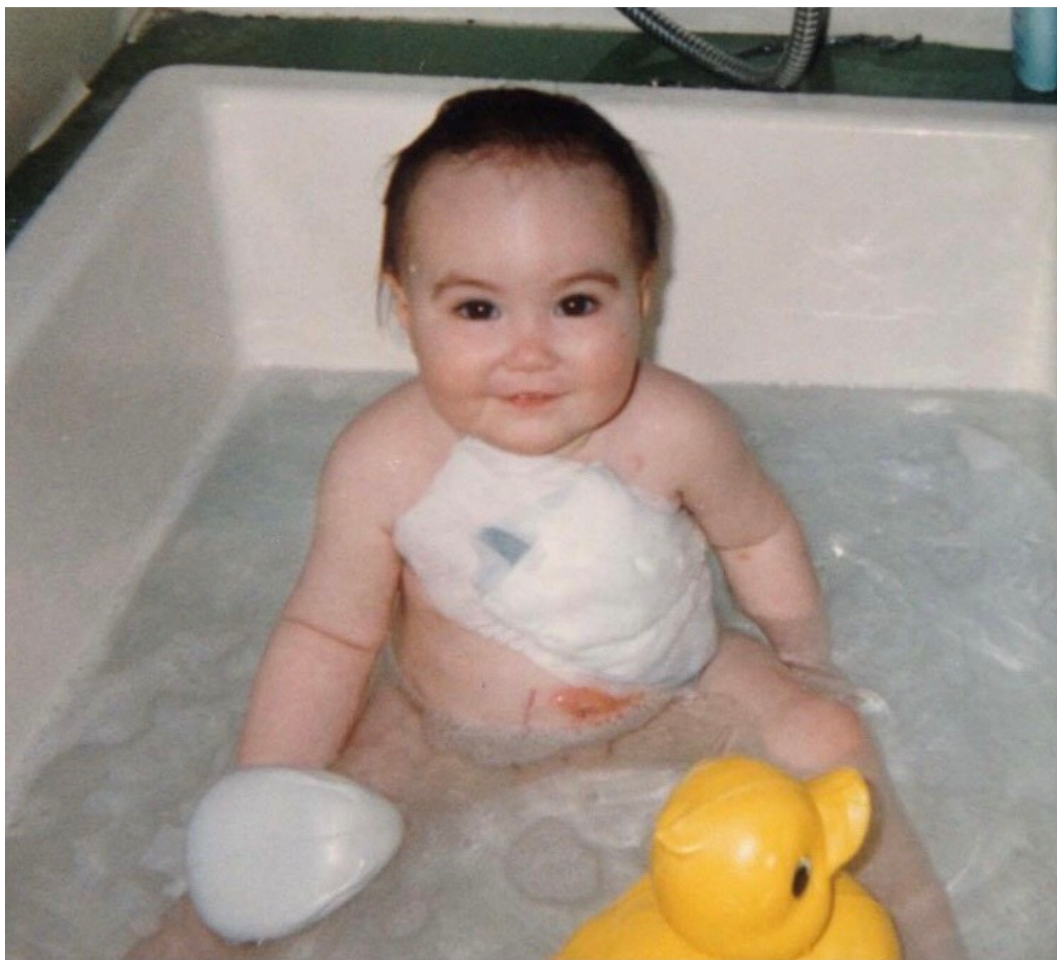


My name is Holly Timms and I was born on 31 July 1994. My dad was a fisherman, so in August 1995 my mum and dad travelled to Picton for him to go fishing - we rented a holiday house. My mum had checked all the cupboards and made sure they were childproof - unfortunately, she missed one - a small cupboard in the kitchen. While my mum was busy making dinner, I crawled into an open a cupboard where I found a glass bottle, with no cap, no labelling and filled with an enchanting pink liquid that was actually a commercial caustic drain cleaner - as a curious one year old, I proceeded to drink it. My mum said she will never forget the sound that followed, my cries of pain as she looked down to find me screaming holding the bottle, as she held the bottle to her mouth it burnt instantly - she rushed me to the sink and rinsed water down my throat, as she called the paramedics she held me tightly next to her chest. My mum had not realised I had spilt the caustic soda down the front of my chest and when the paramedics arrived, as they pulled me away from her my clothes had completely disintegrated and my chest was completely black - still no one knew exactly what I had drunken. I was then rushed to Blenheim's Wairau Hospital and from there I was flown to Wellington hospital. There, I was assessed by Dr Kevin Pringle and was put in an induced coma and spent 12 weeks unconscious in intensive care.



Dr Pringle was a paediatric doctor, and I am so lucky for him. He had assessed that the liquid had burnt out my oesophagus, which lucky for me he had just learnt a new technique in Chicago which allowed him to inset a tube into my oesophagus to keep it open and fed me through a tube in the stomach wall, allowing it to heal without long-term problems. From there, as I laid in an induced coma the stent in my throat, the feeding tube and on a course of steroids it helped open up my throat. I then spent a further three months in hospital in Wellington, where I had countless skin grafts removed from my buttocks and as I had little skin to be used, they also used pig skin

and grafted this onto my chest. My parents spent three months in Ronald McDonald house while I recovered. **I suffered third degree burns to the entire left side of my torso, from just below my neck, around my back just past my belly button**

I was alive, I recovered from my burns and I am so grateful for that, but little did I know that was just the start of what would be a lifetime of mental turmoil, further surgery and recovery.

I lived a pretty normal life, but I always knew I was different. Around age 10 that's when it all started - I wasn't happy with how I looked, I wasn't happy with being different and I was bullied at school and made to feel different - I needed something done. My mum moved schools away from the bullying and took me back to my original surgeon, Dr Langley, in 2004, and she assessed me - there was a lot she could do, but unfortunately, I had to wait until my breasts started to grow. So, in 2007, back I went! I underwent my most major operation in 2007 since 1995, Dr Langley reduced the size of my scar at the top of my chest (the piece everyone sees), she had to release my breast from the tissue below which was not allowing it to develop normally, she took a skin graft from across my abdomen to put this underneath my breast, and she removed my feeding port which was still on my stomach. This led to months of recovery, but finally I was happy. Until I wasn't again. I then started high school during high school I underwent 2 major surgeries, these were mainly cosmetic. Into my working life after school since 2012, I have had 5 surgeries - this includes reconstruction of my breast, removal of scar tissue, removal of excess skin, tidying up, fat grafting, skin grafting, releasing skin tissues, evening my breasts and removal of excess tissue under my breast.

Do you know the messed-up thing though? Half of these surgeries, I wouldn't have had if I hadn't suffered mentally from it. Our own minds are such a powerful yet cruel thing. It is within our own minds that we tell ourselves "you are not good enough" "you're different" "you're worthless" "you're unlovable" - when in reality NO ONE thinks any of these things!

I have had years and years and years of mental health issues from the trauma I experience as an infant. When I looked in the mirror, I saw a disfigured reflection staring back at me, and it defeated me.

My first session with a psychologist was when I was 12 years old and as a 12 year old, I couldn't comprehend why I was different and it was ok to feel the way I felt, because it's part of the healing process you go through when something traumatic happens to you.

When I was younger, we were so focused on repairing the "physical" aspects that we forgot about the most important thing, the "mental" aspect - it was kind of just swept under the rug. But once I started seeing a psychologist, things started to change, I started to feel happy again and began to accept myself for who I was. I continued seeing a psychologist through high school, but then stopped - as I thought I was "over the hill".

Slowly, an old friend started to creep back - thoughts of worthlessness, feeling different and unaccepted. I began seeing another psychologist one year out of high school - there was lots of unresolved trauma for me that hadn't actually been

addressed. I was started on anti-anxiety medication, and a mild anti-depressant and that was used in conjunction with regular psychologist appointments.

Finally, a light at the end of the tunnel. I began to love myself in its entirety. I realised that some things you cannot change and it is a part of who I am. I realised those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter! When I see myself in the mirror now, I see how far I have come - it's no longer the same disfigured person I once saw. Yes, physically I have changed but mentally I have overcome that wall as well. I think if I was still how I was mentally 10 years ago, even with all the physical change I would still see that same disfigured ugly person looking back at me.

My life has changed so much since working towards this change in mindset and within myself. I have just recently had another surgery, I was hoping that was my last one, however, things haven't gone the way we anticipated.

I am hoping by contacting you I may be able to be put in touch with other people who have burns who may experience the same troubles as I do, as I have never had the chance to meet anyone who has suffered similar challenges.

Thank you so much,
Holly Timms xxx