

My name is Naomi Bogileka, I am a 27 year old woman of Fijian (dad) Pakeha (mum) decent, I am the 3rd eldest from a tribe of 9...

It's 11.40pm and I randomly stumbled across the Burns Support Group Page on the net and I thought it couldn't hurt to share my story...

Let me start by saying that having personally attended multiple "burns camps" firsthand, ultimately was what laid a firm foundation mentally, emotionally and spiritually that enabled me to begin my long journey towards accepting my scars and thinking of myself as a "normal" girl. So THANK YOU. It was hard on me (not that I have much recollection from early on) but I couldn't imagine how hard the road was for my mum, dad and siblings.

Ok, so the year was 1991. I was 18months old when I slipped into the kitchen sink in my family home in Whangarei while the hot water was running. At the time there was no legal temperature requirement that household hot water cylinders had to be set to, unfortunately ours was extremely hot!! Upon arrival to Waikato Hospital, I had received 3rd degree burns to 45% of my body. My toes were dead and were amputated during my first initial surgery, I lost the cartilage and tissue that makes up the heel of the foot also. I received burns to my legs, feet and palms of my hands. In early 2015 I had my 45th skin graft operation.

Over the years I've had the lot to the full extent – from persistent bullying throughout school – to thinking and feeling I wasn't "NORMAL" because I didn't have skin like everyone else. I believed I would never have a boyfriend because I wasn't the ideal and I was gross, let alone have children of my own ever!! I did my best to hide my scars. I missed maaaaany days of school or attended school in a wheelchair because of blisters in the soles of my feet just from walking from the road to my classroom was enough to cause the skin to blister, swell into large bumps that I would have to lance daily to release the pus and fluid.

The doctors told my parents that I would never walk again because medically speaking, your big toe and heel are what gives you your centre of gravity...I have neither. By God's grace I walked alone for the first time when I was 4yrs old!! My parents took me straight up to Burns Ward at Waikato Hospital, gathered the nurses, doctors and the tea lady (she was my best friend while I was in there) they placed me in the corridor while they all watched me waddle my way around (in utter confusion apparently) as to why everyone was crying and hugging me. I proved science wrong I was told later on.

I spent my first 10-15months (if not longer) living and attending the school classroom at Waikato Hospital, having continuous skin graft surgeries to accommodate my body growing rapidly. I occasionally being allowed home for a couple hours during the day once in awhile to see my siblings. I was one of the first burns victims to receive to receive a Spot the Dog teddy from the Fire Fighters when they first jumped on board years ago, I still have the dog today!! There was even an article



written about the significance of Spot the Dog in relation to burns victims etc etc and I am sitting as a toddler in my pretty little dress, with my spot the dog as the main picture in one of the local newspapers at the time hahah...

I am now 27 years old. Healthy, walking, running, boxing, ex-competitive gymnast, high school soccer rep player, A grade student throughout school, studying to be a Civil Engineer, fiancée and mother of 2 (my daughter is 10yrs old and my son is 7). I am still as stubborn as ever to make sure I DO what I'M TOLD I CAN'T do because of how prone my feet are to deteriorate with the simplest of daily tasks like a trip to the supermarket.

It's not that I can't do it, I can and I will do it – difference being that I'll get it done with the additional zing of pain that I would refuse to acknowledge existed until I was away from anyone. I have the weird stubborn thing where I will do anything (purely because I've been told I wouldn't be able to or my feet won't handle it) without a whinge or tear or asking for special treatment in any public situation because I have scars, society classed me as disabled/physically impaired, whatever, but I've never seen myself as such, weird-gross-alienish, yes definitely. But not disabled !! And I did and will do anything to prove I can do anything and everything any other person can do, plus some! My dad refers to me as God Level Stubborn....

Attending the Burns Camp I attended when I was younger is what made me see the word in a whole new light...I always thought I was the only kid with burns, no one knew what I was dealing with etc. that was until I was on camp with kids and adults who looked like me!! It blew my mind, comforted my heart knowing I wasn't alone.. For the first time I felt like I belonged, the lady who wasn't burnt was the weird one now, I was finally in the norm group and I also learnt to stop feeling sorry for myself real fast! Because I learnt that what scars I have were sooo insignificant in comparison to many of the other mazing kids I'd met through camp, especially a guy who I became great friends with named Quinton who was burnt head to toe in a house fire..

Best times of my life were at these camps! Best lessons about self- acceptance and believing I was beautiful was taught to me on these camps! Now I wouldn't have it any other way, I truly believe if I didn't get burnt I would not have the thick skin, yet at the same time such an immense appreciative outlook on life I never take things for granted and because of my experiences through my journey, it's



moulded me into a fighter who is never afraid to stand alone or against a crowd. Being different is great!! What a blessing to be one of a kind!!

I love my life, I love myself. After year of internally battling my own self, plus society, I am content with who I am..

SO THANK YOU all for what you're all doing for the victim and their families.!! Don't ever think that your efforts and shoulders go un-noticed or unappreciated. Because I hands down guarantee you that your all pure angels to each individual and there really is no words to express the amount of gratitude that wants to pour out from their hearts!! I'm beyond happy to see this organisation is still alive and active today.....

NAOMI BOGILEKA