

Phoenix World Burns Congress 2019

When I applied to be a participant to attend the congress I wrote about wanting to 'Rise like the Phoenix' just like our King, Alan Breslau stated in the book named "The Beauty of Disfigurement", and that was what I was set out to do. With my life events getting in the way I came close to pulling out however thankfully my Fiance' encouraged me to attend to fill my cup up and experience this once in a lifetime opportunity!

Fast forward....

Walking towards the back of the Hilton Hotel I was a little confused as in what we were meant to be doing however as we all filled in lines behind the Phoenix Societys banner for the walk of remembrance, the bagpipes and drums started rolling. Rightfully we followed our very own Queen, Delwyn Breslau and other deserving individuals whom were holding or walking alongside the banner to honour this occasion. We walked to the well set up podium in front of the Anaheim Convention Centre with a waterfront directly behind the podium. There were about 100 plus servicemen of the Fire Brigade that stood on either side of the area in respect of those who have fallen and those present. The formalities started and we were surprised by a Helicopter flying above our heads. When observing the crowd there were many people from all different walks of life surrounded together with one thing in common – Burns; whether they were survivors or family of survivors. This walk alone was so touching both emotionally and spiritually. I do not think that there was a dry eye present.

I attended many workshops and a couple of support groups that I thought I would get the best out of, which I actually did. 1 I attended was out of my comfort zone however it was so relaxing listening to the himalayan singing bowl.

I will share a few experiences I had during this congress that really stood out to me to give you an idea of how touched/inspired/empowered I was there.

The goosebumps and the relaxation of normality feeling occurred during different aspects of the 'Healing through our stories – open mic' sessions. I got more than I bargained for. People shared their stories of how they gained their burns or where they are up to now. With relating to many of the stories the tears flowed freely, and my heart sank a lot of times too. It was amazing to me that there were so many people that walked similar journeys, this made me feel so many emotions which I can not actually pinpoint down to 1 word to give it justice. It sure did feed my soul!

Prior to the very last open mic session I had been thinking about why I wanted to be selected to attend the congress and if I had achieved what I wanted and put on my application. Whilst I did in some aspects I realised that I could only get so much out of the congress if i'm going to be a silent participant and if I wanted to 'Rise like the Phoenix' then I had to stop being kind of shy and awkward. So at the very last open mic session I experienced a nudge within to speak. Pending the situation I struggle with sharing my story, I choked up whilst doing so, however, I did it and it felt empowering! I also informed those whom were listening about my fire within was barely flickering prior to attending the congress, but since being amongst them all, hearing their stories etc my fire was burning within again. I struggled with speaking even though there was no judgement at all, I am glad that I did this as again it was empowerment and I felt replenished, just what I had needed!

On a break I spoke with a lady whom was a survivor, wife of a survivor, a mother to 2 survivors and a mum to a deceased young man from a single house fire. We got to talking and man was I blown away with her story from the 1 incident that affected her whole immediate family. The tears and hugs that followed this conversation were unreal. The empathy I felt for this lady, the confusion and the emotions we shared with each other was not normal considering I just met her. As I gathered myself together I was late for the guest speaker as I was too busy being a blubbering mess with her. Yes I was annoyed that I missed some of the talk however I definitely wouldn't change it!

The 2nd most important workshop I wanted to attend (after the open mic of course) was the 'Creative Cosmetic: Image Enhancement tips and tools for Burns Survivors' session where Suz accompanied me. I volunteered to be a test dummy and I whipped off my sock, the Cinemas secret makeup was applied to my scars and straight away I was crying. I haven't ever seen my scars 1 colour before and I was in disbelief. I tried to purchase the products utilised on my scars

however they had none for sale and the company did not ship to New Zealand. I was gutted but stayed back to try speak with Barbara (Barbie). In the end Barbie gave me their tester pottles and only asked that I donate towards the Phoenix Society instead. Once again I was in tears because of her generosity, understanding etc. I did make a donation and I realised if I want to 'Rise like a Phoenix' then I need to change something, so I made a conscious decision that I will no longer hide and I will get some sandals to wear with my dress for the last night, no excuses!

The last night arrived and with my nerves everywhere I got ready to embrace my burns and wore no socks or covered shoes in public for the first time in 20 years! Thankfully I was around a supportive lot (NZBSG) plus being surrounded by fellow survivors I had the courage to accomplish this. I got dolled up, I rocked my afro hair and Brianna's sandals with my dress and felt so much emotions it wasn't funny. To name a few feelings I felt; scared – courageous, embarrassed – proud, unsure – Proud! Both my family and myself were so proud of my accomplishment.

We ate, we danced and we scanned the room where everyone was as 1 big family. Everyone was smiling and having the time of their lives. There were younger survivors present, some of who taught us some dance moves. This was an awesome time letting loose with everyone.

Regrets and where I would improve whilst at the congress: - Be more outgoing

- Stop being shy/stand offish with strangers at the congress
- Take each opportunity to network, enjoy, conversate etc (As stated by Michele, I should have entered the talent night - she was right)
- Venture off with fellow participants to build a rapport etc
- Stop relying on others (NZBSG) to help me feel comfortable
- Enter talent night to share some Kiwi singing etc
- Be confident as I am

- Be confident when I speak

If my experience can be an example to future participants or even myself if I am lucky enough to be chosen again to attend then my advice to them/myself would be look at the my regrets list and make sure I/they work on that list (if they can relate to it of course) to get the best experience out of the congress. I now wish that I had of done all those things whilst there and not sat back now to think about it all. Should I get another opportunity, I know that I will be making sure that list is adhered too!

In conclusion, the Congress was such an amazing experience and only positive things came out of it! I want to thank the NZBSG for accepting me as a participant to attend the Phoenix Society's World Burn Congress 2019, I am truly grateful, humbled and empowered because of this life changing experience! I went from strength to strength, my confidence was built up and also overwhelmed with finally Freeing myself of my hidden burns! None of this would be possible for me if it wasn't for you all at the NZBSG!!

Thank you so much NZBSG!

Love, Light and Blessings to you all!!

Nga mihi nui ki a koutou katoa

Shari Kauri