

## **SURVIVORS STORY**

Hi All

My name is Karl Brannigan and I am a burns survivor and Michele has asked if I would share my story with you.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1972 I was a part of a Massey University Haka party enjoying the capping parade in the Square – Palmerston North.

We were all dressed in grass skirts made from dried flax that, in those days, was used to make baling twine and unbeknown to us, highly inflammable.

I can remember all lining up on the street to perform a Massy Haka when a float pulled into the curb separating two of us from the rest of the group.

The next thing I remember is my friend's skirt is on fire and as I reached over to give him a hand to remove it my skirt also erupted into flames as someone had set a match to my skirt from behind. I initially tried to undo my belt holding up my skirt but because I had the belt buckled around to my rear I could not get it released.

The fire was now so intense all I could think of was the pond in the square which I attempted to run to.

Luckily I fell or was tackled and a quick thinking student smothered my flames with a big coat.

I can still remember lying there and the intense pain of the burns waiting for the ambulance to come.

I spent the first week in Palmerston North Intensive care . The Doctors' estimated that 80% of my body was burned and I can honestly say the Doctors' did not know what to do about me.

My condition really deteriorated and one leg became badly infected and amputation was mentioned as a possible solution.

Lucky for me concerned family friends put some pressure on Palmerston North hospital to do something rather than to continue to poke me with pins.

My life was saved when I was flown to the Hutt hospital Burns unit. The staff there were just amazing especially Sister Trussler and the Chief Plastic Surgeon, Dr. Max Lovie .On my first day there I was placed into a saline bath and I think the next day was my first trip to theatre and I woke up to find myself covered from neck to toes in bandages.

In theatre they has scraped all my burns ,assessed the damage and shaved off all the unburnt skin for skin grafts that were preformed over the next few weeks.

I made an amazing recovery under their care and the biggest moment was finally getting to walk to the toilet.

I was released from Hutt Hospital later on in 1972 and continued my recovery in my home town Dannevirke.

I did return to Hutt Hospital for some followup surgery to allow movement in my hands and wrists. (Z-Grafts)

I owe my life to the Hutt Hospital Burns ward and all the wonderful staff that worked there in 1972.

In 1973, I returned reluctantly to Massey and finally completed a degree in 1975. (Agricultural Science)

Since then I have married a wonderful soul mate and spent most of my working life in the kiwifruit industry and we have now retired to Ohope.

I get reminded of my accident every day in the shower and as you progress through life you learn to live with the scars (my personal tattoos), but initially it was very difficult revealing my scars in public places such as swimming and rugby changing rooms.

Thank you for this opportunity of sharing my story with you about being a burns survivor

KARL BRANNIGAN

AUGUST 2017



# No pub for Carl

By JOHN STEED  
**CARL** Brannigan  
turned 20 two weeks  
ago.

But it will be many weeks before he will be able to have a beer in a hotel with his friends.

For his birthday nurses at Ward 4 in the Hutt Hospital decorated Carl's room with flowers and balloons.

On April 13 Carl was the victim of a bad joke.

A member of a haka party, he was engulfed in flames during Massey University's capping procession in Palmerston North.

Someone in the crowd struck a match and threw it at Carl's grass skirt and watched while he ran screaming into the crowd.

This week Carl, his right arm heavily bandaged, his shoulder badly scarred and the lower part of his body wrapped in bandages, lay on his stomach and talked about the incident.

The police had not found the culprit, but Carl was more concerned about getting up and about.

"I had some skin grafts last week," he told me. "With a bit of luck, if



● CARL BRANNIGAN — struck by a match.

everything goes well, I should be out of hospital in a couple of months.

"At the time I've skirt caught fire the only thing on my mind was to run for a pond nearby.

"I didn't get to it, I got to one of the trucks and tried to rub myself against it and put the flames out.

"It didn't work, but one of my mates grabbed a coat and wrapped me in it."

When he was first in hospital the nurses turned him from back-to-tummy every two hours. Now, Carl

said, they only had to do it every four hours.

He said no one had admitted hurling the match, but his mother, Mrs. M. Brannigan, from Dannevirke, said: "I bet that person now has a guilty conscience."

Carl doesn't particularly like being in hospital, but there isn't much he can do about it.

People have been kind. Lower Hutt Lions Club members visit him regularly and the Returned Services Association also asked members to drop in to see him.

Carl's mother was a member, and so was his father before his death in 1933.

Students and mates from Massey University also call by when they are in town.

The university had given Carl a portable television set to use while in hospital. And the nurses had been "fantastic".

"At the moment I feel pretty good," he said. "But you go through a bad depression period. I've overcome that."

## DOCTORS SEEK IMAGE

By KELVIN DICK

THE medical profession is starting a public relations campaign.

The Medical Association of New Zealand will appoint a doctor in each of the television viewing areas to act as a liaison officer for news stories.

And in the latest Medical Journal an Auckland doctor, Dr Barry Hardwick-Smith,

says it is bad that the public lacks understanding about the quality and cost of medical services.

He says it is even worse that the medical profession fails to appreciate this.

He calls for a vigorous publicity campaign.

For many years most doctors have been reluctant to talk to the press.

This is partly because they jealously protect their professional ethic of secrecy.

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