

Real-life reads

Struck down on the job: Troy's high-voltage horror; Opera star's new career on the catwalk; Kiwi drag queens taking on RuPaul

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When Troy Hall was electrocuted picking avocados at an orchard, he was burnt so badly, doctors thought he'd never walk or talk again – that's if he even survived.

While working on a cherry picker in Tauranga seven years ago, the 30-year-old passed through trees dripping with rainwater. Popping up between the branches, he noticed power lines just metres away. ➔



You can stand under my umbrella, Dad! Troy credits daughter Neveah for aiding his recovery. "She's my inspiration," he says.

Moments later, an electrical arc shot through the right side of his head. The force, which burnt off his ear and caused him to black out, was followed by a second bolt through his chest. The dad-of-one suffered burns to nearly two-thirds of his body.

"I'd moved from the Kapiti Coast to work with Dad picking avos, with a goal of starting my own business," he recalls. "I'd planned to start playing rugby again and was

Training a lot, which probably saved my life because I was fit and healthy."

When Troy was electrocuted, his father John heard a crackling bang that echoed through the orchard, before looking up to see a second flash set his son alight.

"I vaguely remember being on the ground with Dad telling me to hold on," tells Troy, now permanently blind in his left eye.

As well as scorching the inside of his throat, the shocks burnt Troy's head, arms, back, chest, buttocks and part of his legs. His body swelled from the heat, blowing up to six times its size, forcing paramedics to split his neck so he could breathe better and cover him in ice to reduce the inflammation.

Placed in an induced coma, he was flown to Tauranga Hospital, then Waikato Hospital, before transferring to ICU at Auckland's Middlemore Hospital because of the severity of his lifethreatening injuries.

Troy had multiple skin grafts from his legs and parts of his stomach, with doctors managing to rescue his



mangled right arm, which they almost had to amputate.

Wasting away

When he woke two weeks later, he'd gone from 75kg to 35kg. He recalls, "I'd lost so much weight and that was annoying after all the training I'd done!"

Told he'd probably never walk or

talk, Troy refused to accept it, pushing himself to the limit in rehabilitation and slowly learning to walk.

"After six months of hospital, I was over it," he says. "I wanted to start playing sport and had to get my head around the fact I'd only be able to do limited things."

His relationship at the time also became a casualty. "We weren't working before the accident, so I told her to go do her own thing," he admits. "That was the darkest time for me and if I'm ever down, I think it can't get worse than that. It took one of the amazing nurses to talk me out of the ongoing attitude of 'poor me'."

As Troy contemplated his future, he kept his mind on the same goal that drew him to the orchard that day – opening his own avocado business.

"I wasn't put off the industry because it wasn't anyone else's fault," he says. "The morning of the accident, Dad had warned me to stay away from the power lines in case I got electrocuted. Being young and cocky, I'd laughed it off and did it anyway."

Towards the end of his nine-month stay in hospital, Troy's spirits were again lifted when he started talking to a woman on Facebook. Leaving hospital in Tauranga to recover in the Wellington region with family, Troy began a relationship. Two years later, his beloved daughter Neveah, now four, was born.

"As soon as I found out Neveah was coming, I knew I'd survived to have her," explains Troy, who is no longer with the child's mother.

It's blonde-haired cutie Neveah



Troy thinks of when he remembers the terror of the morning that almost claimed his life or brushes off stares and cutting remarks from strangers.

"She's always sympathetic, feeling

my scars," he says, cuddling the daughter he affectionately calls "honey".

"My beautiful girl keeps me going – she's my inspiration

To reach my goals."

He also has the love of his Kapiti-based mother Toni Hall, who drew on her Christian faith when she heard her son's life was hanging in the balance.

"When I got the call, my heart dropped," tells Toni, 52. "I phoned everyone at church and asked them to start praying for him. Now if he puts a status on Facebook about a bad day, I know to ring, and listen while he rants and raves. I'm so proud he's come through the dark days."

She says Neveah's birth helped heal Troy. "Seeing him become a dad was the best thing ever and she's a blessing to him," tells Toni. "He's a fabulous, proud dad, but of course he needs Mum now and again!"

This year's focus for Troy is the business he started four years ago in Tauranga, harvesting and picking avocados. He now has eight staff, although personally he stays clear of power lines.

"I hope to continue growing the business because I want it to be a success story, especially to motivate other burns survivors, who are the strongest people," Troy says. "When I look back at the photos of how bad I was, it reminds me how lucky I am and to keep going."