

Embarking on my ongoing journey as a burn survivor of over 20 years, I find it hard to articulate the profound sense of community that enveloped me during the recent gathering of 600+ individuals at this year's World Burn Congress. Never before have I encountered a situation that so powerfully conveyed the shared odyssey we all navigate, highlighting the potential to transition from mere survival to flourishing despite a burn injury.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the Burn Support Group Charitable Trust, offering me the invaluable opportunity to join a remarkable group of fellow New Zealanders on a journey to Washington (Maryland), USA, to partake in the Phoenix Societies World Congress. Thanks to the meticulous organisation by Michele (kudos to you), despite a slight hiccup involving a flight transfer and baggage confusion at an under-resourced Houston airport, our long-haul flight under the guidance of AirNZ proceeded smoothly.

Our accommodations at the Gaylord National Harbor Resort and Convention Centre for the four-day event were nothing short of spectacular. The facility seamlessly accommodated a constant ebb and flow of attendees participating in large functions and various conferences throughout the duration.

The first day allowed for connections with vibrant individuals from past congresses, warmly embracing us "Kiwis." Gratitude was expressed for the significant role played by Allan and Delwyn Breslau, with Delwyn maintaining an almost rockstar status at the event.

The second day commenced with a keynote address by Aaron Volpatti, an individual with an inspiring narrative of triumph over immense adversity through goal-setting and visualisation. The subsequent days unfolded with open mic sessions featuring humbling personal stories, a plethora of personalised learning sessions, and breakaway support groups encouraging active participation and feedback.

The day's conclusion featured an evening talent show by burn survivors, including an energetic impersonation of "Pink" by one of the key supplier partners and a dance evening where many took the opportunity to hit the dance floor.

Day four brought light rain and a change of venue, necessitating an unfortunate plan B for the Walk of Solidarity. Despite this, guest speakers, firefighters, and other event participants made the most of the program change. As always, the adaptable spirit prevailed, and numerous photo opportunities arose in front of large vibrant red fire engines.

The Kiwi delegation, comprised of Angelique, Aroha, Jane, Nick, and Michele served as excellent ambassadors for the Burn Support Group, representing our group with pride. For those among us, burn survivors or delegates of the NZ Burn Community, each took away a unique personal experience, contributing to our ongoing healing journey with the resounding message: **you are not alone.**

Richard J Younger
Burn Survivor/BSG Trustee