Posted on:
1 October 2020

At just 26 years old and 26 weeks pregnant, Annie Pateman had to make a decision no expectant mother would ever want to make – keep living with a deadly bone tumour growing in her left leg or undergo an amputation and risk the life of her unborn child. She chose the latter.

By this stage Annie had been living for 18 months with severe pain in her swollen knee and had finally undergone a biopsy after convincing her doctors it was something more than a bad sprain.

“When I woke up in hospital after the biopsy my husband David was at my bedside and he gave me the bad news,” Annie says. “Then the orthopaedic surgeon arrived with the rest of the medical team to tell me they needed to amputate my leg and that due to the trauma of the surgery it was unlikely my baby would survive.

“I’m not a religious person but I certainly prayed. My next door neighbour gave me this little St David’s medal and I hung that up on the bedhead and prayed for all I was worth.”

The amputation took place three days later (on Good Friday, 1980) and when Annie came to, “I’d lost my leg but my baby had survived – miracles do occur!”

Forty years on and the unborn baby is now her happily married adult daughter Jessica with two children of her own, Annie’s grandchildren. Annie lives in Garfield east of Melbourne with her husband and son Luke, is a participant in the National Disability Insurance Scheme – and is also a first-time author.

The trauma of surgery is one among many life challenges she has faced and overcome, and they are all laid out in her autobiography ‘The Strength Within’. But life and its various twists and turns had not quite finished with Annie.

After five years’ hard work, she was all set to launch her book in late March this year when along came COVID-19 and the country went into lockdown. However, as her story shows, Annie is made of strong stuff and a little thing like a global pandemic was definitely not going to stop her publicising her book.

“I’ve entered a book competition, been in the local paper, done radio interviews and ‘virtual’ author nights, and also put a lot of content up on my website,” she says. “I’ve been getting the word out on social media and my LinkedIn account now has 800 followers and growing!”

Annie’s book charts her battles to rise above life’s hurdles, beginning with her early childhood as the daughter of Jewish immigrants growing up in Melbourne’s inner north, starting work in in the early days of feminism when women were beginning to stand up for their rights, raising a

family as an amputee and much, much more.

“For me, the main thing is to give people hope, not to give up and that there is a great life after amputation,” she says.

“The NDIS has definitely been the best thing that’s happened for people with disabilities in this country.”

Annie’s NDIS plan funds an array of personal supports and she recently received a high-tech prosthetic limb and knee, which she describes as “going from a Holden to a Mercedes Benz.”

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