

# I'm a

# TRANSFORMER

Robot arm - NZ PDF Approved

I had so many dreams. No way was I letting anything hold me back

Korrin Barrett, 38, New Beith, Qld.

I pulled on my running shorts, jogged out the door and began pounding the pavement.

But after just a few minutes, pain in my abdomen forced me to stop. I was doubled over, it was so bad.

I was a super fit gym bunny but lately bowel problems and tummy cramps were ruining my work outs.

I hated to quit - but my partner, Craig, and I were planning a trip to New Zealand to bungy jump, so I wanted to make sure I was up to it. "I'm going to get myself checked out," I told Craig after I hobbled home.

A colonoscopy showed I was suffering from inflammatory bowel disease and I was put on steroids and pain meds.

The drugs didn't help much, though. Just two weeks later, the pain was so severe that Craig had to rush me to hospital where a scan later revealed I had a perforated bowel.

"You'll need emergency surgery to repair it," the doctor said.

It all happened so fast and before I knew it, I was taken down to theatre. When I woke up, Craig

was by my side holding my hand. And before I could ask any questions, a doctor came in looking grave.

"I'm so sorry, but we had to remove 90 per cent of your large intestine," he said.

I was so shocked, I couldn't even cry when he told me I'd been fitted with an ileostomy bag that I'd have for the rest of my life.

"Why me?" I wept to Craig later as the news sunk in.

I just couldn't get my head around it. I had to remain in hospital to have a procedure to flush the toxins out of my body.

It was only supposed to be a 30-minute surgery but when I came to after the operation

feeling groggy, I just knew something had gone wrong.

"I almost lost you," Craig wept, explaining that nine



I'm going to do whatever it takes to live my life exactly how I want

Blood clots cut the blood flow to my limbs



days had passed.

I listened in shock as he told me I'd stopped breathing on the operating table. Doctors had performed an emergency tracheostomy and put me in a medically

induced coma. From there, I'd developed sepsis and my organs

started shutting down.

"Three times the doctors told me to say goodbye to you," Craig choked.

There was more.

Blood clots had formed throughout my body blocking blood flow to my hands and feet depriving them of oxygen.

Doctors did all they could but eventually there was no other choice but to amputate both

my legs below the knee along with my right hand, as well as all the fingers

on my left hand.

Waking up and realising just how much I'd lost was a huge shock.

Craig held me in his arms. I put on a brave face for him,

but when I was alone I just cried and cried.

The days that followed were a blur of grieving for what I'd lost. Would I ever be able to walk again? Would I even be able to take basic care of myself? My life had changed forever and it was so hard to comprehend.

My boss came to see me and handed me a giant card with the tree of life painted on it. On it, it said: *Believe you can, and you're halfway there.* I knew then I had three choices.

"I can either give up, give in, or give it all I've got," I said to Craig.

"And which do you choose?" he asked.

"The third one," I replied, managing to smile.

I had to learn how to do everything again, starting with things as simple as lifting my head and sitting up. A month later, I was fitted with prosthetic legs and with help I took my first steps on them.

"You're amazing!" Craig cried, hugging me.

I grew more determined. Using my elbow to type on my iPad, I made a list of all the things I wanted to do.

"I'm starting small," I said to Craig. The first things I wrote were washing my hair and doing my make-up.

Then I added walking again, followed by snorkelling and a bungy jump.

Finally, after 233 days in hospital, I went home. Four days later, thanks to my

amazing workmates and modifications that were made to my office, I returned to work as a traffic and transport manager for a gas pipeline project.

As the months passed, I began going to the gym to rebuild my strength.

I walked on the treadmill and rode the recumbent bike.

As I got stronger, I became more active. Soon, I needed four

different sets of prosthetics - active ones for walking, wet ones for swimming, an everyday set, and cosmetic

legs that looked real.

With the help of my wet legs, I managed to go snorkelling with Craig in Indonesia.

I also did a bungy jump from the famous Kawarau Bridge near Queenstown wearing a special harness, completed the Bridge to Brisbane walk, and joined a disabled surfers' group.

Working my way through the list helped me to remain positive.

Anything is possible, became my motto.

My story had been in the news, and soon I was being invited to give motivational talks. Over time, I turned it into a business.



"My life had changed forever"



The first time I stood unassisted

Through my hard work, I raised money to pay for osseointegration. This is a process in which an implant is inserted into the femur or tibia which allows for a simple and safe connection between the stump and the prosthesis.

It would mean that Craig wouldn't have to help me put on my prosthetics and I could be more independent.

After two surgeries to get fitted, I could stand for longer periods and walk without pain for a lot longer.

Then I got a bionic hand equipped with electrodes that power the hand movements.

They are very robotic and can't mimic the fine motor skills of a real hand. But I can easily slip it onto my right arm, and use it to pick up and carry things.

Whenever I met school kids, they were fascinated by my prosthetic legs and bionic hand.

"Are you like a part-robot?" one young boy asked.

"Yep," I said with a grin. I quite liked that idea.

I still need help with lots of things. Dressing myself, making dinner and putting on earrings, for example, are still impossible.

But I can do so much more than I ever thought possible in that first terrible moment when I woke up in hospital.

Recently, Craig



Craig, our pilot and me after our amazing flight

Going bungy jumping was on my bucket list

surprised me with a helicopter ride. We were soaring high when suddenly, out of nowhere, he produced a giant, inflatable diamond ring.

"Will you marry me?" he asked. "As you've got no fingers, this was the next best thing."

I couldn't stop smiling. "Yes," I said. "I'll marry you."

With that, he placed the inflatable ring on my arm, and we fell about laughing.

We're going to get a customised engagement bracelet made soon.

I may be part-robot but with Craig by my side, and my own determination, I know I'll live life to the full.

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