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Interview with Dean and Coralie

Dean: "I love going for walks and when I walked down to the beachfront that morning I had no idea that I was going to lose both my legs"

Richard: How would you feel if you suddenly lost both your legs? What changes would it bring to your life and relationships? Today my co-host Celia and I are talking with Dean and Coralie. Dean woke up from an induced coma in a Queensland hospital, to discover he'd lost both his legs. Stay tuned to hear their story, and how they're coping 3 years down the track.

Celia: Thanks for joining us Dean and Coralie. You normally live in Adelaide, how did you end up in a Queensland hospital?

Dean: We were planning a holiday for the Easter break and Cairns was the location because our daughter lived not far from Cairns. It was going to be an enjoyable time but it didn't turn out quite like we expected. And that's the thing about life isn't it, you know the unexpected thing that just comes along and plucks us all out of the air and we don't even have time to prepare for these sorts of things properly. I certainly wasn't prepared for this incident to happen. It was a surprise to me! When I walked down to the beachfront that morning I felt quite sluggish and lifeless. I had no idea that I was going to lose both my legs.

Coralie: And I said to the kids in the morning your Dad's not well. He thinks he's got a flu but he doesn't want to see a Doctor.

Dean: Like most blokes you know, you don't want to go to the doctor unless you really have to.

Coralie: And it was about mid afternoon and Rachel said "Mum, Dad's face is a funny colour. He needs to see a doctor." Bec drove us in and fortunately she knew exactly where to go. She said "Mum you go into emergency and get a wheel chair for Dad to wheel him in" and he said "No, I'm walking." And he did!

Dean: That was my last walk actually. They put me in and I met a doctor there. I remember lying down and I had stuff which was oozing out the side of my leg. Look it was nothing, not a real deep cut or anything but stuff was oozing out of it and it was horrible, I've never witnessed anything like that in my life. To be honest with you that was the last time I can really recall, they had me in an induced coma for 2 to 3 months.

Coralie: Bec and I were in emergency till 2 o'clock in the morning and they founded the diagnosis really fairly quickly. That was the first time I had ever heard of the word Necrotizing Fasciitis. No antibiotics would touch it. It's an aggressive flesh-eating bacteria and they basically didn't think he would survive Easter Sunday. It was late that night at the place where we were staying, Bec took a phone call in the kitchen and she said "Oh no. oh no." That's when they were making the decision about his legs being amputated. And Mum and I rang everybody while I just texted everybody I could think of "Please pray that Dean won't have to have his leg amputated" And then when we went in the next day they had already marked out the second leg.

Dean: When I came to after the induced coma I suddenly reflected and pointed down that I had no legs and I was over anxious and despaired I guess was the word. Coralie couldn't tell me that I'd lost my legs and she virtually ran out and went up the causeway from Cairns there and was broken down with it. I can't tell you a lot other than I had crazy thoughts and dreams and I guess its all the drugs they induce into you. I was in there nearly 8 months in hospital but 3 months in Cairns and it was a part of my life that just has got zapped out of it, that I can't recall a lot about.

Then a month after that I remember lying there in bed and a couple of these senior nurses said "don't underestimate Dean you'll be able to do more than what you really think you could." And I said well I can't even get out of bed here. How am I going to get out of bed?

Celia: Dean, some people couldn't imagine living without their legs, did you ever feel that?

Dean: Yes I did. I had a nurse there whose husband lost a leg and he ran in marathons and stuff and did things, he had an artificial leg. And unfortunately I didn't want to have an artificial leg so she encouraged me and she was fantastic. I just listened to those sorts of people who gave me encouragement and I thought well the end is not really here and I'm around. One of the great things of being a Christian and having belief in that recovery process near the end, was so important to me. I can tell you that the support that I got from people from within our own congregation was just wonderful. One thing that stands out is I used to get phone calls from various people and pray for me over the phone in the morning you know after you had your breakfast and say they hope you're well and pray for your recovery and such. And can I just draw a comparison. I've been on lots of various other committees in my work. My workforce has always been good and very supportive of me as a Christian.

Coralie: Mmm they've been wonderful.

Dean: They know there's something different about you because you've got Christ as the centre of your life. And I believe when I was in the hospital the people could see that you had that strength. It was God that was sort of guiding me within and I had that physical strength of determination.

Richard: You sound like you took it all in your stride so to speak? (laughter) Are there times when it gets you down?

Dean: I do get depressed at times and think "Lord why did this happen to me?" Sometimes I wheel up our long passage here and I think God how many times have I walked up here over the years, now I'm wheeling up here you know and it's just frustration. I drop a paper on the floor off my desk and go and pick that paper up, alright I can bend, from here to there but it's a bit of a risk. I've got to hold onto the side of the chair to get to it and I hopefully don't fall out of it. Just to strive to do those things sometimes becomes frustrating to me and I do despair occasionally. Not often but I have laid on the bed and thought Lord why has this happened to me?

Richard: Did you ever doubt God?

Dean: No, not really. But as I said sometimes I think why does this happen to me as an example but then you know I see such misery around the world and I look at what happens on the news currently and everyday I'm blessed that I'm still here.

Richard: I was wondering are there any other moments on your journey that you can reflect on now that gave you hope?

Dean: Well one of the things that did give me hope when I was doing rehabilitation, I had no idea what a slide board is. It's like a little surfboard and I can put my behind on the surfboard and slide from this chair into the car and I can do other things. I can get onto a bed and slide off the bed and I recall when

I was at the retraining and having that first moment of trying all these things. The thrill was to know that I can move from one point, you know we reflected earlier of getting out of bed, and that was the way I did it you see. I could slide off onto a board and get into my chair and I do that today. I lie in bed of a morning and then I decide to get up so I slide onto this chair which is alongside the bed then go to the shower chair which I got, sit on the shower chair, go to the toilet or whatever you have to do, then wheel it underneath the shower myself, have a shower and then wheel it to the bed and my clothes, my good wife leaves my clothes there and that was another thing, just getting dressed, I thought, I remember saying to the nurse how am I going to dress myself? She said, you'll be able to wriggle into your pants and put your t-shirt or shirt on over the top because it's all body exercise from the stomach muscles. One of the difficulties when you're sitting on a bed I've found was lying on a bed on your back and trying to get up from a soft bed, because its not firm, and you sink into the bed. But how I overcome that I got like a rope ladder - a small ladder that I have alongside me in bed and I pull on that and that pulls me upright then. When I see my grandchildren, little grandchildren now from 3 to 4 and I think gee whizz I went back to a stage virtually like that and today you know I had to go and retrain myself to do all those sorts of things that have been part of our health and well being. These little things I'm telling you about make my life fulfilled. And I know I take probably 3 times or 4 times longer than I normally do to get dressed but you know I get there.

Celia: And you can do it yourself.

Dean: I do it all by myself yeah.

Celia: Has your relationship with God changed?

Dean: No, I think its become closer. There is a greater depth of understanding and want to learn his word a little bit more than I have. Often in a service I can feel it even through the music sometimes. I'm a bit more conscious of the wording of words in the phrases of songs even. That really hits you and gives me a sense of warmth inside and I feel a bit better about myself.

Celia: You've mentioned faith in God and prayer as important. How does that help?

Dean: Its the reinforcement of it - isn't it Coralie - of the things that you virtually said that do happen as a result of that.

Coralie: Yeah. I think for me it's just being consistently in Gods word and we did a study on Isaiah and I drew on a lot of God's promises from Isaiah.

Celia: What were some of those promises?

Coralie: Fear not, do not be dismayed, I am with you, I am your God. I will help you, I will uphold you with my omnipotent right hand, was one that was a constant with me. I always wanted to believe that God would get us through. God was a good God and he had good plans and all of those things. That he would get us through somehow, get Dean through somehow, and get back home again.

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