

Wendy sent me her contribution to your magazine to make sure I didn't mind the story being shared and was happy for my name to be used. Being really positive about it, I wanted to add a few words myself.

What a wonderful ambassador for Australia Wendy is...we had a fabulous 24 hours. I could have been desperately upset leaving 2 of my children behind in New Zealand, but the thoughts of meeting Wendy for the first time made it easier to say goodbye, knowing that another adventure awaited me. I was so impressed with Melbourne and the fabulously warm weather. Very strange for someone from my part of the world to be experiencing sun like that in January!

But our main connection of course was our common experience of becoming amputees at a very early age, the extra awkwardness of being a teenager with an amputation, marriage and motherhood on one leg, the occasional physical difficulties encountered in over 30 years of teaching each, attitudinal changes to difference since our youth and finally the sense of pride I think we both had in the fact that somehow despite the inevitable (small) knocks we had made it, emerging as happy, healthy, wise and whole, yes whole women.

I would urge anyone who is contemplating joining a support group or reaching out to a disembodied presence on the internet, do it. There are not that many of us amputees around and while I have enjoyed the constant support and understanding of my family and friends over the years, it was fantastic to compare and contrast literally everything with Wendy. Never before have I spent time with someone who understood that yes, we can wander around an immense city like Melbourne and enjoy it, but we will enjoy it all the more if we make sure we don't take silly wrong turns and waste valuable steps!! No, honestly...I am not tired; I am sore! No really, I can't wear those shoes because the heel is a tiny bit too high and I am being thrown forward. And no, I can't wear flip flops either because that strap can't go in between my (non-existent) toes!!

And for anyone who is slightly fearful of a long flight, don't be...it really was a piece of cake. I was a regular flyer anyway but most of the flying I had done previously were short hops round Europe and I was a little bit daunted by the thoughts of the globe trotting I planned...Dublin, Dubai, Melbourne, Wellington and return....I did think about asking for special assistance but didn't in the end. I did though carry crutches (which in truth I almost never need or use) but their visibility elicits a kindness from fellow passengers and airline staff and I got bulk head seating on almost every leg of the journey, which allowed me to stretch out the prosthesis and in the end I'd say I was no more uncomfortable than anyone is on a long flight.

I truly hope to do the journey 'downunder' again in the next few years and Wendy, meantime, the invitation to visit us here in the Emerald Isle stands. Go for it girl :)

Lots of love, Mary