

thrive

Living Well
with Limb Loss

ISSUE # 22

BODY IMAGE EDITION

TALLI Osborne

Labels are
for Boxes

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Body Positivity

*The Movement
and the Message*
.....

**The Beauty
of Aging**
.....

**Low-Down
on Liners**
.....



Changing the lens

An interview with **thrive** publisher Jeff Tiessen.

Talli Osborne

Focuses on

Positivity

Punk

&

Personality



Three-foot-tall **Talli Osborne** is never short on words and life experiences to sagely share. From adoption to girl guides, to speaking and music hall stages, and on to the Punk Rock Museum, it's been a life lived through a **lens uniquely her own.**

Born without arms and bones in her legs, a very atypical family and childhood upbringing didn't so much tell her that she could do or be anything she wanted, as much as it reinforced in her that **she was different.** That was a gift to her. And **embracing that is everything to her.** And to others too, as **Virgin's Sir Richard Branson** said himself in his endorsement of Talli in his **Top 10 Most Inspirational video blog.**

thrive: *There's a saying about how it's not how you start but how you finish, but your life is very much about your start isn't it?*

Talli: You could say that for sure. I was put up for adoption immediately after I was born because my birth parents didn't think they could take care of a child like me. I lived in a hospital nursery for 13 months before I was adopted by the amazing Jean and Ray who are incredible people. They never planned to have a lot of children but they just kept seeing babies up for adoption that weren't perfect white ones. They kept adopting and adopting and adopting and ended up with 22 children. Yup, I have 21 siblings.

thrive: *I've heard you say that dinnertime at your house was like a United Nations summit.*

Talli: You've got that right. About half of us have special needs – from prosthetic wearers to wheelchair and scooter users – and half are able-bodied. My siblings are White, Black and Asian. Lots of different nationalities. Being part of a family with such different abilities, ethnicities, and body shapes and sizes, was a really cool place to be brought up because it was so different.

Looking around the kitchen table I knew that I was adopted. My parents never had to sit me down and tell me that. It didn't matter because we were all very, very loved. We were wanted. Really wanted. Nobody lets two people collect 22 kids. There were a lot of people against it and against my parents. The neighbours would call Children's Aid on my parents all the time.

thrive: *It's hard to imagine how your parents managed. Then consider 11 kids with disabilities and the extra attention that would take. How do you remember it?*

Talli: I had an amazing upbringing. My parents didn't coddle me. I had to contribute to household chores just like anyone else. Everyone did. My mom made sure that if I couldn't do one, I'd better figure out how to do another. It's truly why I am who I am today. I live independently, and it is challenging every day, but it's a mindset.

You know, I've often wondered, "what were my parents thinking?" I had two step kids in my last long-term relationship. That was hard. And financially? It's hard to imagine how my parents managed. We were all legally adopted. They paid for us. They weren't foster parents. We weren't rich. My dad was an electrician.

I remember my dad just kept building onto the house as my parents got more kids. It started as a small house in Hamilton and ended up being pretty huge with 11 bedrooms. It was our mansion.

My mom couldn't work because we were always going to different medical appointments. Three of us wore prostheses. But all kinds of medical appointments all the time. They just made it work by stretching every dollar.

thrive: *Hearing all of that, what kind of kid were you?*

Talli: I was a typical kid. I was interested in a lot of things and joined them. Girl Guides, school band, little league, camp, and even a wilderness school. I figured out how to help carry a canoe, and start fires with my feet. I was a Girl Guide until I was a young teen. I loved the community that these activities brought me.

I always wanted to be involved and do things. I remember thinking that if I want to go to sleep-over camp or sleep over at a friend's house, I need to figure out how to dress myself, put on my pajamas and take myself to the bathroom. And I did.

It's important to understand that in my mind, I didn't, and still don't, see myself as disabled. I've worked really hard to get on board with the word "disabled", but I just don't buy into that label. The world is what's not on board. It's not built for me. Today I live in an apartment that I put together where I can do everything. I definitely am not disabled in my apartment.

thrive: *You're not a prostheses user anymore, but do you identify with the amputee or limb loss community?*

Talli: Everyone's experience is a different experience. I had no trauma. I was born this way. I have friends who are missing limbs, but we have more in common than just that. All of my life, people have been putting me in a box that I fight to get out of. I don't like labels that restrict me. The only label that I put on myself is Punk Rock. Because I am punk rock.

I wasn't amputated. That's a different experience completely. We all have our own story. We don't have the same story because we look like we have similarities.

thrive: *Everyone has tough days. And those with disabilities can be pretty good at putting on a brave face. What do you struggle with?*

Talli: My life is challenging, and I'll never pretend that it's not. Right now, what I'm challenged with is not driving. I worked hard for five years to get my car, and license and getting it modified. I'm in Las Vegas, but my car is still in Canada. I just want to drive so badly. I've lived independently for 20 years and I'm having to rely on people to drive me places. I'm driving along eight-lane highways on my scooter right now. It's really scary. I've been hit by six cars in my lifetime and I don't want to get hit by a seventh.

thrive: *The little that I know about punk rock is that it really celebrates difference. I know that you're high profile in the punk community. Let's hear about your new job.*

Talli: This job is all about who I am. I manage the new Punk Rock Museum in Las Vegas. I'm the face of it. It's the most comprehensive punk rock museum in the world. For my whole life I've been trying to prove that I'm just as good, if not better, than the average candidate. I was never really seen for my true value. This one I didn't even apply for. I was poached for this job. I finally feel seen in my job. This job is all about what I offer with no arms, not in spite of having no arms. I'm known as Nubs in the punk world. It came from a song that was written about me. You don't pick your nickname. I sang in my own punk band for years, performing in Toronto mostly. The nickname gave me an insane amount of confidence. Not in a cocky way. But in a don't-cover-up-who-you-are way. It's me.

thrive: *You talk a lot about confidence and you exude it. But for those who are underconfident, what do you share with them?*

Talli: It's a journey. You can't just buy it at a store or pull it out one morning over coffee. For me, it was about accepting who I am and accepting me for me and not just being neutral about who I am. I attracted so many really cool people by just being me. That gave me confidence.

I was insecure before. And I was attracting other insecure people. But positivity is in my core. It's a gift. Everyone does not have that. It's not just my pink hair. Being me, three feet tall with no arms. I wanted to fit in all my life. I think what people appreciate is that I'm standing outside of that box now.

There were times in my life that I needed to make changes that made me feel more comfortable, like for example, not wearing my prosthetic limbs when they became more of a burden to me than helping me.

thrive: *What do you mean, more of a burden?*

Talli: I always tried to fit in by wearing prosthetic legs. I'm grateful for my mother for giving me the opportunity to wear them, to see if that worked for me. It didn't. And if I was a parent of an amputee child I would do exactly the same thing.

I'm not anti-prosthesis, but for me I was wearing prosthetic legs for everyone else and not me. They actually made my life harder. I wore them for society. I wore them for my peers. I wore them for the school system. I wore them for my parents. I wore them for everybody who told me I had to wear them.

There was a lightbulb moment for me. It was at university and one of my new friends, who only knew me



Photo by Michael East

without prostheses, saw me struggling in them and asked, “what the hell are you doing?” I took them off that day and never put them on ever again. That same day I went out and bought new clothes that accented my short body, how I wanted to look, and my style, and my sexuality.

thrive: *In your public speaking and media interviews you talk a lot about body positivity. It seems you’ve really embraced it. What does it mean to you?*

Talli: Doing the work that I do [public speaking] I see so many people who don’t love their bodies. Most people don’t. I do. Not every day. But I find that putting out body positivity really affects people in a positive way.

I love shock value, so I posted some naked hula hooping during the pandemic. I got so much positive response. Of course, there were trolls. But it wasn’t sexual. It was nudity, not pornography. I was showing the world that I love my body. It was about helping people get to a more positive space with their body. We can’t get out of the body we live in so why not embrace it?

thrive: *You challenge the cliché of inner beauty. Why?*

Talli: As someone with a different body growing up, people would say to me, “you’re so beautiful on the inside.” “Look at your inner beauty.” “Boys are idiots.” “Don’t worry, someone will see who you are on the inside one day.” It made me feel ugly.

I look in the mirror and I think I’m beautiful. If someone is going to be attracted to me, it’s going to be the whole package. To say that it’s just on the inside is bullshit. It makes that person feel badly about the outside of them.

People who are attracted to me are attracted to everything about me, my body and my personality and my good heart. Be real, physical attraction is part of life.

It’s not a good way to raise children: “You’re ugly on the outside but someone will someday see your inner beauty.” Of course inner beauty matters, and it does trump all, but it’s the whole package that matters. We need to embrace everything about ourselves to feel happy on this planet.

It’s not about how I think you look; it’s about how you feel. People don’t feel beautiful just because someone says so. It really has to come from within.

thrive: *Last question. Do you ever think, “what if things were different?”*

Talli: I know that I’m different, but we are all different. I am very able. I just moved me and my cat to another country by myself to start another career. I love who I am and I wouldn’t change it. I don’t ever think about, or wish, that I had arms. Well, honestly, maybe every blue moon I wish I had just one hand, even for just five minutes. And then they can take it back. Ha!

