

NEWS

## No boundaries, no limits



Sue Gardiner | 10h Oct 2014 1:22 PM



Former Paralympian Tracy Barrell shows off her gold medals.

IT'S not politically correct to say so, but it would be easy to find Tracy Barrell annoying.

That's because the Banora Point resident, who was born with no legs and just one arm, renders many of our most common life complaints as weak as a limp lettuce leaf.

In a society where body image crises are seemingly epidemic, Tracy's Teflon-like confidence despite standing just 83cm tall is a revelation.

Do you find motherhood exhausting? Well, try raising two sons single-handedly, literally, princess.

Are those aches and pains stopping you from getting fit?

Well, Tracy has dual Paralympics swimming gold medals, slacker. (She was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 1993 for her "outstanding contribution to sport" to boot.)

It's fair to say that Tracy is a one-woman reality check, so it's little wonder that she's also building a career in motivational speaking.

She takes the observation about some people potentially finding her achievements annoying in her stride.

"When I was doing a presentation at a school one of the kids did get up, and goes, 'Isn't there any disabled people who just do nothing?'" she recalls with a laugh.

You can understand the kid's exasperation. People like Tracy can make the rest of us feel inadequate.

Since the Tweed Daily News last caught up with her, she has almost finished a biography of her life, with the working title *From Medals to Motherhood*, which she's shopping around to publishers.

She now works three days a week as the volunteer co-ordinator at On Track Community Programs in Tweed Heads, which provides services to people with disabilities.

She turned 40 in June and says she's loving life more than ever and has never been more comfortable in her own skin.

She has raised her two boys, Bryce and Oscar alone after splitting with her partner.

They are now aged 13 and 10, a time when many kids start to feel embarrassed about their parents.

But Tracy, who scoots about on a skateboard, says there's no sign of that happening.

"If anything they really do look up to me because they do notice the difference between other able-bodied people not giving their full effort as opposed to what I can do."

So how has having a mum who looks so different shaped them? "They're very sensitive," she says.

"They see the people, they don't see the disability."

Tracy credits her inclusive family environment for giving her the ability to embrace her differences.

Doctors blamed her genetic mutation on an anti-morning-sickness pill her Mum Terri had taken.

Her family were advised to put her in an institution, but instead they treated their "little Trace" like a regular kid.

"I was never the family dirty secret," she says. "I've never felt embarrassed for who I am."

"A lot of the time people are shocked when they see me but I don't take that on board."

Ironically, while people are inspired by Tracy's achievements, she's amazed at how "regular" people manage.

"I watch people with two arms and legs I seriously think, 'Oh my God', by the end of the day people must have such headaches thinking (about) what their hands are doing, what their legs are doing."

"I can't fathom how you guys do it, I just think that's a nightmare."

What if there was a medical breakthrough tomorrow that allowed her to look like everyone else? "I'd say 'No thanks'."

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