

Life interrupted



Fifteen months ago, Blair Marriott was sprawled on the side of the road, looking at his amputated right leg lying next to him, trying to work out how he was going to tie off his femoral artery with his two broken arms.

The ever-practical Porirua/Johnsonville relieving firefighter talked a bystander through the procedure, borrowed a cellphone from someone else to call his fiancé, told her he'd been hit head on by a car and he'd meet her at the hospital, if he was still alive. The trauma was so massive he felt no pain, except in his broken toe.

What had started out as a ride on a new motorbike on 3 December 2010 ended up changing 39-year-old Blair's life.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

The crash, caused by a disqualified learner driver in a stolen car, left him with his right leg cut off above the knee, his left leg broken in eight places and plated back together, left femur split, right arm broken and plated, and left wrist broken and plated. For months he was unable to do anything for himself.

"After a few days in hospital, I decided I could either get depressed and start dying or get busy living. I chose to be alive," he said.

NEW JOB

Today, Blair is the national SMS administrator, based at National Headquarters in Wellington. He's responsible for fixing up the glitches in



firefighters' leave and pay entitlements and making sure everyone gets their correct entitlements.

"It's mostly computer work and talking on the phone and by email to firefighters around the country. When they ring, they never think they're going to get someone who understands where they're coming from. But I've had 16 years on the trucks so I can usually figure out what's going on."

Often, the problem will be that a firefighter has entered data, got a conflict message and just carried on. "It's not too hard to fix."

Fixing things is something of a hobby. Blair has always been keen on repairing or modifying computers, bikes, cars and other bits and pieces. These days he's also fiddling with his prosthetic leg. "I'm always trying to improve things," he said.

He's just ordered a lathe and milling machine so he can make his own parts.

Last month, the 18-year-old who crashed into him was sentenced to six months night-time only, home detention. Blair was angered by the light sentence but has made a conscious decision to move on.

"It's not worth it. I've got a lot I want to do with my wife Allana." Blair and Allana married two months after the crash.

"I gave her a chance to leave me, but instead, we pushed up our wedding date and married on 22 February last year, the day of the Christchurch earthquake."

SUPPORT AND LUCK

Blair says the support of his wife, his family and the Fire Service helped him through the past year.

"I got enormous help from the Fire Service. They could easily have 'medicalled' me out after six months. But they did everything they could to help my rehab. I consider myself very fortunate."

Blair admits being blessed with a positive attitude but he also says it was luck that helped him survive the crash. Lucky that a bystander was able to tourniquet his leg; lucky that the Westpac Rescue Helicopter was nearby at the time with the head of the Wellington Hospital emergency department on board.



There's still a bit more surgery to go with plates from his leg due to be removed this month. And he's keen to take advantage of new developments in prosthetics that are being trialled overseas. In the meantime he'll keep making his own adjustments.