



Mr Muhammad Fazli Hasri was devastated after his right leg was amputated due to a car crash in 2015, but he pulled himself together with the support of family and friends. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Generation Grit

Lost a limb at 28 and now strives to help others like him walk again

Married and a father-to-be, Muhammad Fazli Hasri now works in a prosthetics department

Goh Yan Han

In his dream, Mr Muhammad Fazli Hasri was in a white car spinning around in a washing machine.

When he opened his eyes, the car he was in along with four friends had flipped and he was trapped in the back seat.

It was the beginning of one of the longest years of his life.

In August 2015, the then 28-year-old was travelling back to Singapore from Melaka with friends after attending a Vespa scooter-related event. The passengers were asleep when the driver dozed off and hit a divider on the North-South Expressway.

"I couldn't feel the lower half of my body," said Mr Fazli, now 32. With the help of a friend, he pulled himself out of the car, but was shocked at the sight of his right leg.

He had suffered a compound fracture of his shin and only his calf muscle was holding his leg together.

After a week – first in Malaysian hospitals and then Singapore's National University Hospital – and despite doctors' best efforts to salvage his leg, he was told he should have it amputated below the knee as it had been badly ravaged by bacteria.

"I made the decision myself, without telling my parents," said Mr Fazli, the second of three children.

The day of the surgery remains a blur to him.

"All I remember is the doctors telling me, 'Don't worry, Fazli, you'll be fine, everything will be

okay," he said. "The next thing I remember is being on the bed and my leg wasn't there anymore."

What followed was one of the darkest periods of his life, as he struggled to find meaning.

"I couldn't face anyone, I refused visitors. I cried so bad, I kept thinking of the life I had before and felt depressed," said Mr Fazli, who had been an active cyclist and surfer.

In addition, he could not keep his job as an oil rig inspector, losing a substantial source of income that had provided for him and his parents. His mother, 53, is a housewife, while his father, 55, is a packing supervisor.

Mr Fazli now lives with his parents in a four-room HDB flat in Bukit Panjang, together with his wife and his younger sister, 25. He also has an older brother, 33.

When he was growing up, the family lived in a three-room flat in Bukit Batok.

"My dad sacrificed a lot, he worked really long hours. I didn't know it, but we were struggling then," said Mr Fazli.

After the accident, it hit him that he was no longer the family's main breadwinner. For a year, he struggled to come to terms with his disability.

"The dreams I had with my fiancée – they were all gone. We had wanted to buy a condominium, travel, have a certain standard of living," said Mr Fazli.

On top of all that, he lost all hope that he would ever ride another wave. In 2012, he drove some friends who wanted to surf to Desaru, Malaysia. He had not

intended to surf, but needed little coaxing to paddle out on a board.

"After I caught my first wave, I was addicted," he said.

But with the support of his fiancée, now his wife, and his family, things began to look up again. He realised his original dreams could still come true – but would take a little more time.

"My wife told me then, 'You used to do just anything you want and you still can, you just have to be patient and pick things up again,'" said Mr Fazli. Those words, coupled with his mother's unwavering support, helped him be more positive.

He also realised that "my parents were in their 50s, but still had to take care of me. I was motivated to start taking care of myself".

With this drive, he put effort into learning to walk with his new prosthetic limb, without crutches.

A year after the accident, he got a sales job at a sports shop in Kallang. It paid less than half of what he had been earning before, but he did not complain.

In 2016, during a check-up at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital Foot Care and Limb Design Centre in Novena, a clinician recommended him to take up a job there.

Mr Fazli sent in his resume for a role as a technical assistant in the Prosthetics & Orthotics Service, to make and assemble customised prosthetics and orthoses.

He had previous experience in a workshop setting, having completed a Higher Nitec course in mechanical technology and electrical engineering.

Happily, he got the job and is now a senior technical assistant. "I wanted the job because I wanted to help others like me to walk again and lead better lives," he said.

Apart from making prosthetics,

HIS LOWEST POINT

I made the decision myself, without telling my parents... All I remember is the doctors telling me, 'Don't worry, Fazli, you'll be fine, everything will be okay.' The next thing I remember is being on the bed and my leg wasn't there anymore... I couldn't face anyone, I refused visitors. I cried so bad, I kept thinking of the life I had before and felt depressed.



MR MUHAMMAD FAZLI HASRI

them and sometimes, he can empathise better with a patient than a clinician can."

And in what felt a little like déjà vu, Mr Fazli again drove his friends, using a device that allows his left leg to press on the accelerator easily, to Desaru for a two-week surfing trip in 2017.

Again, he had no intention to surf, but his friends suggested he try it. It took a few hours of learning how to surf with his prosthetic limb – and several failed attempts – but his patience paid off for a brief, exhilarating moment.

He said: "The three to five seconds I was riding the wave were just amazing. It doesn't mean because I'm an amputee that I cannot do what I used to do. I love surfing and no one can take that away from me."

Before the coronavirus outbreak, he went to the gym regularly, played badminton with colleagues and also jogged slowly with his wife, Ms Neni Farahin, 28, an administrative employee at Netflix.

He is looking forward to moving with Ms Neni into their Build-To-Order flat in Tampines this year as well as starting a family. The couple, who married in August last year, are expecting their baby next month.

While worried for his wife, as her immunity has been low during pregnancy, Mr Fazli said he reminds his family about the importance of personal and hand hygiene, and takes vitamins regularly.

"I am extra careful now whenever I am around her or back home interacting with my family," he said. Smiling from ear to ear, he added: "I'm blessed every day that I have my family and friends. Without them, I would just be staring all day at the ceiling, with no motivation to work or do anything."

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Amputee helps others walk again

SCAN TO WATCH

<https://str.sg/fazlihasri>

he also gets to chat with patients.

Ms Tabitha Quake, a senior prosthetist and orthotist and assistant head of the department Mr Fazli works in, said he is good at explaining to patients what to expect and they are generally more willing to

accept his explanations, knowing he speaks from personal experience.

Mr Fazli and Ms Quake are involved in patient care.

She added: "There is common ground for understanding between

Mr Muhammad Fazli Hasri, a senior technical assistant at the Prosthetics & Orthotics Service department at Tan Tock Seng Hospital Foot Care and Limb Design Centre, pours plaster into a cast to make a plaster mould. He finds his job fulfilling as it helps others like him to lead a better life. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



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