

Triumph Beyond Trauma

Episode 50

Carmen Butcher Transcript

Rosie Skene: Hello and welcome to episode 50 of Triumph Beyond Trauma. I am your host, Rosie Skene and I'm beyond thrilled to have you here with me today as we celebrate 50 episodes of the podcast. Today's episode is the ultimate lesson in resilience. The journey that Carmen has been on is nothing like I have ever heard before.

I definitely want to preface this episode with a couple of warnings. The first one being a very strong language warning. The episode has been marked explicit for good reason, and the second being a content warning. I know that I have shared journeys on the podcast before, but this one is both incredible and traumatic.

You will definitely have to manage your own capacity to listen to this episode today. Please pause it, stop it, come back another time if you feel the need.

Today I'm honored to share the journey of someone whose story is raw, powerful, and unforgettable. Detective Sergeant Carmen Butcher of the Northern Territory Police

in 2006, Carmen was on a police study tour in Egypt when tragedy struck a bus that killed six people and seriously injured many more.

Carmen was one of the seriously injured, but even in the chaos, she didn't freeze. She went straight into action trying to help others. Unfortunately ended up being crushed under the roof of the bus while doing so. Her injuries have been life altering. She was told that she might not walk again, but Carmen doesn't do things by halves.

Not only did she walk again, she went back to work, back to service, back to showing up for people in some of the toughest situations, including child abuse investigations and working with vulnerable communities. Her courage hasn't gone unnoticed, and in 2018 she was awarded Police Officer of the year for Northern Territory by the Rotary Club of Darwin, which is phenomenal when you hear her journey and just an incredible testament to her character.

This conversation isn't just about what happened on that day in Egypt. It is about what happened after the recovery, the questions of purpose, the moments that she probably never imagined she'd get through, but did anyway. It was. An absolute honor to speak with Carmen. She's a true salt of the Earth woman, and I know that she's still walking through some pretty tough terrain, different from Egypt, but no less challenging, and she does it with the same grace, grit, and heart that she always has.

I wanna send her so much love today and in her journey ahead. I hope that you all take something really special from this episode. For me, it's a reminder that if Carmen can get through what she's been through and still keep on and still keep laughing, then so can I. It is my absolute privilege to bring you this very, very special episode 50 of Triumph Beyond Trauma.

I.

Welcome to Triumph Beyond Trauma, the podcast that explores journeys of resilience and hope. I'm Rosie Skene a yoga and breathwork teacher and founder of Tactical Yoga Australia. As a former soldier's wife, mom to three beautiful kids and a medically retired New South Wales police officer with PTSD. I understand the challenges of navigating mental health in the first responder and veteran community.

Join us for incredible stories from individuals who've confronted the depths of mental illness and discovered their path to happiness and purpose, as well as solo episodes and expert discussions. Together we'll uncover the tools to help you navigate your journey toward a brighter, more fulfilling life.

Whether you're looking for helpful insights, practical tips, or just a friendly reminder that you're not alone. Triumph Beyond trauma has got your back. You matter and your journey to a happier, more meaningful life starts right here.

Carmen welcome to the podcast.

Carmen Butcher: Thanks.

Rosie Skene: So good to have you here. , Yeah, like I was just saying to you before, I've read a bit about your story and listened to a podcast that you've done and there's, it's intense and I can't even begin to fathom what you've been through. But I'd love to start how you came to join the Northern territory police and how that came about for you.

'cause it's a little bit of an interesting story. It

Carmen Butcher: is. So I grew up in South Australia. I was a country kid, grew up on farming community of about 800 people. Went away. I went to Adelaide to school and then I went to Whyalla and started a hairdressing apprenticeship. I broke my jaw playing softball, so I been working part-time.

And my mate, my best mate down there was an electrician who got retrenched. So she was in the job job find, job seeker place, looking for jobs. And I went in there one day and I was in one of my hyperactive, happy, annoying moods. And she said to me, leave me alone. Go and find jobs. So I just went around and wrote down every hairdressing job there was.

And when we left, she goes no, go to the counter, and I said, oh, I'm not really looking for a job, I've got one here. And she said, oh, go take it in there. So the lady's oh, this one's interstate, this one's interstate. I was like, look, I don't really care. Just, write one down, whatever.

So she wrote, she goes, oh, this sounds like you happy, bright, bubbly personality and in Alice Springs. I said, yeah, beautiful. She goes, here's the address, uh, send your resume to them. So I walked outside, screwed it up and threw it in the bin. I was I was 20 and I went back in a few days later with my mate 'cause she went in every day and the lady said, oh, I've been trying to get hold of you.

Don't worry about the resume. I've booked a bus ticket for you up there next week for a job interview. And I just went, you are? So I said to my mate, you are coming with me. I had never left South Australia in my life. I was 20 years old, never been on a train, never been on a plane, never been overseas, didn't have a passport, nothing.

And here I was on a bus and my hairdressing apprenticeship I did with my mom and you could say, we clashed to be nice and I couldn't wait to get out. And I was just like, wow. So we jumped on a bus. My mate, snores like a freight train.

Rosie Skene: So we got on

Carmen Butcher: a bus in Port Augusta and it was a 21 hour bus trip.

I had the window seat. She had the aisle and she slept and snored the whole way. I had a Walkman with a cassette in it. That's how you know I'm, and I had Priscilla queen of the desert of all tapes. It's the only one I had that I had to listen to for 21

hours to drown out her snoring. So I got here, I did the job interview and thought, wow, you're just like my mum.

I don't wanna work here. But we were decided to stay the weekend in a backpackers and, 'cause we didn't have much money, we stayed in a communal room of 11 people. So there was two girls and nine boys on bunk beds. And of course she was on the top snoring with all the men. And I was laying there going, what have I done?

Yeah. And then I found the job advert in a window, in another hairdressing salon. So I went in there and I got that job. I got the other one as well, but I didn't wanna work there. And I got that job and I went back, I had a jaw reconstruction. I packed my gear up in my car, put it on the train, and I moved to Alice Springs.

Wow. Knowing absolutely no one. And my mate was still in Whyalla. So yeah. So, and then I cut hair here for, I think it was three years. And I cut a gentleman's hair one day, who had just graduated from the police. Oh. So before I left South Australia, I applied for SA Police.

Rosie Skene: Okay.

Carmen Butcher: And I got the letter to say that I'd been accepted in for the testing and everything when I got here.

And I thought, no, I've left. I've made the break, I'm not gonna go back. So this guy came in and he had his hair cut and I said, oh yeah, I applied for South Australia police, but I moved up here, blah, blah, blah. He came in, that was a Tuesday. He came in on the Friday with the paperwork and said, fill it in.

I will be picking it up on Monday. Completed no excuses and walked out. I filled it in and yeah. Next thing you know, I'm, uh, in the police. I was 23, so Wow. I got accepted. I did all the testing. He did it here. And then I I had just agreed with the boss, the owners of the hairdresser salon to stay there for another six months.

'cause it's hard to get staff here in Alice for some reason, even back then. And when they said I'd been accepted, they said, you have to start right now. And I said, no, I can't. I've just my, my word is as good as a written contract.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: So I said, I can't. And they said, well, you have to go through this again.

I said, look, if it's meant to be, it's meant to be. Anyway, they rang me three times trying to get me to go, and I just said no. Anyway, then I started, I was meant to start in the January and in the December. In December or November, I went rollerblading around the park and I fell off. And smashed my knee.

Oh,

Rosie Skene: yeah. And

Carmen Butcher: I ended up having both my knees operated on about five weeks before I joined the police training. And I had to try and hide it to do all the physical. So, but I got there and I got it done.

Yeah. So yeah, did six months of training up in Darwin and I stayed in Darwin for for nearly four years.

And then I went out to a very well to a remote community called Wadeye, Port Keates. It's sometimes on the news, it's probably the most violent community. In the Northern Territory there's three and a half thousand indigenous, and there was about 80 Caucasian people when I was there. And four police and you blocked by road in the wet season for anywhere up to six months.

So yeah, it's, it was different. But I loved it. Beautiful people, beautiful place. And, I sort of try and, you ingratiate yourself into the community. I played softball with the girls and had a rule that no, no school, no softball. So all the girls had a hundred percent attendance rate for two years, and three of them are now qualified teachers.

So yeah I really enjoyed it. There were good people, lots and lots of work, but it was, yeah, it was good.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Yeah.

Went flat bikkies Yeah. Where'd you go from there?

Carmen Butcher: Uh, so then I went from there to a place called Tent Creek. Yeah. Which is about three and a half thousand people as well. It's 500 kilometers north of here.

And I did just over two, nearly two and a half years there. And I did my detective training when I was there, and then I ended up being a detective in charge of the dete. Like I was the, there were two detectives there, so I was sort of the second one. And then I was in charge probably for the last 14 or 15 months as the acting sergeant there.

Also busy 'cause you cover all the surrounds of it as well. And then I booked this trip to Egypt and they wouldn't give me the leave. So I said, fine, I'm leaving. I've done my tenure and I applied to come to Alice, back to Alice Springs because they wouldn't give me the leave to go on that trip to Egypt.

So I left I left tenant and I really enjoyed that too. And I moved back to Alice. I bought a house and my first day here, there was a murder. And I spent 13 days working 16, 17 hour days on the murder. And then I opened up a couple of my boxes 'cause everything was still packed in boxes in the house and took some clothes out of it, put 'em in a ba in a case, got in the car, drove to Darwin, and got on a plane and went to Egypt.

And I didn't see my house again for 10 months.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Wow. That's so intense. Yeah. So that was nearly 20 years ago, right?

Carmen Butcher: Yeah, it was 19 years ago in January. Yep. Yeah. And what was the trip for the, it was the it was a police study tour, so it was for police employees, their friends and family.

There was a guy in Victoria called Steven Sef who he was Egyptian born but lived in Melbourne. And he ran these tours and. Two friends of mine, police friends of mine in Darwin were going on another ones that said to me to go and I invited a friend of mine from Tenant Creek, who was a nurse whose husband had passed away 12 months before.

So I thought, given that's the anniversary, take her out. And she took her two adult sons with her. So there was four territory women, her two adult sons, and one of the ladies that I was with, her 12-year-old daughter. And that was who was there from the territory. And then there was, majority were Victorian.

There was some Queenslanders and new South Wales people in there as well. And so basically you took your police uniforms. 'cause we we did a visit to, if you wanted to wear it, we did a visit to the police academy and the like fire and all

that for a day. You wear a uniform, I believe they say then it's tax deductible, but I wouldn't know because it'll turn bad.

Yeah, it didn't get that far. So we had a, I think it was 28 days we had, 'cause we were supposed to go to a place called Sabar on the way home because the flights didn't work out. And yeah we did, I think it Singapore on the way over, no, it wasn't Singapore. I can't remember where we stopped one night on the way over before we on the trip there, and we were only there three days when the that was it.

So it was a very, it was cut very short.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. And I, I remember listening that you actually got to see the pyramids. Yes. So we did

Carmen Butcher: go to the police academy when we got there that we had this, it was very weird. We had this timetable and we had this five star accommodation. When we got there, we were in different accommodation, which was average to say to be nice, not five star.

No. Five. So we had to hand our passports into this travel agent, which I was like, and the whole itinerary changed. So everything that we were meant to be doing was all swapped around. So we did get to see the pyramids. I would've been pretty annoyed if we didn't. And the Sphinx. And we did go to the police academy.

And, it was amazing. They bought out these beautiful horses that they used for policing. They bought out the, their dogs. They put on this wonderful show. The police academy's got gold trim everywhere. And I think at the time there were 10 female Egyptian police officers that had just been through, and that was it for the whole of the country.

Rosie Skene: Wow.

Carmen Butcher: And we went to their first response and they had all this amazing equipment. For fire and rescue and all the rest of it. And I'll tell you what, we didn't see one piece of it after the crash, not one show. Yeah. And then we went to, that day we went to Ella Main and Alexandria and it was on the way home from there.

So that was our three jam packed days. And that was, yeah.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. And that's something that came up later too, isn't it? Like how busy your day days were and how long the days were, Oh,

Carmen Butcher: horrific. And those poor bus drivers, 'cause there was one driver per bus. And they so they picked us up, we got there, it was night was late.

They picked us up, took us back to the hotel. We had this meeting where we handed our passports in, and then they have to go and clean the bus, fuel it, and then they're back there at six, seven o'clock the next morning to pick you up and you're out all day. And then they have to, and who knows where they live in comparison to where we were staying.

And on that day, the driver that crashed actually fell asleep in the, that we went into a supermarket thing or stopped , to get some food or something. And he was sleeping on the on the steering wheel of the bus. And Sue-Ellen who I didn't know her before the trip, her and her mom were on it.

She's now the godmother to my daughter. She her and her mom offered him some chocolate and some food, and he, I don't know if he took it or not, but he commented that he was tired. I mean, we were knackered and we were getting more sleep than what they were.

Yeah, we were absolutely knackered and we, when we finished that night, we were meant to be going straight back. But then this, Steven decided that we would be we'd go, everyone wanted to go to a smoking house and do this, so we went and did all that.

So we got back even later. Well, we were heading back even later than what we were supposed to be. I think by the time that the crash happened, we should have actually already been back in the hotel.

Rosie Skene: Well,

Carmen Butcher: by that time. So, yeah, it was all, it was kind of a bit like, here's your itinerary. It all looks great and when you get there, this is actually what you're gonna be doing.

So, yeah, it was, but they text the whole time, uh, talking and overtake each other and race while they were driving. Yeah. And we, we had plain clothes, military police on the bus as well with us. And I speed I'll be honest I like driving fast. But safely, I like to go out and I race, go used to race, go-karts and that sort of stuff.

So I've got that little bit of a, but you this is a really big bus. Yeah. You are sitting there sending a text message, swerving all over the road. The speed limit I think was only a hundred. They were doing probably at least 120, 130 most times on the bus. And Yeah, just overtaking like they're playing a, a computer game with each other.

It was, it was ridiculous.

Rosie Skene: . Wow. And you were saying that a lot of people had fallen asleep 'cause it was so late on the bus. Yeah. But you hadn't,

Carmen Butcher: we went,

we went for dinner and , we didn't realize the first night that we went out and had dinner, we were buying beers. 'cause I love a beer.

I'm a cop who doesn't love a drink. Yeah. And then we realized I'm non-alcoholic and I'm like, why am I spending my money on this anyway, I think it was some sort of holiday was on that you couldn't drink alcohol. So. This particular night when we went for dinner in Alexandria we could buy alcohol.

So Helen and I bought beer, and Jeanette and Mary that, so Jeanette and Helen were the two police officers from Darwin. They were both superintendents at the time, and Mary was the nurse. And Mary, Jeanette and Mary bought a bottle of wine. And I, I, not a big wine drink. I'll drink anything, but, wine's not my first choice anyway, so I'm having my beer and it's all nice, and the wine comes along and other people had already ordered it and taste it and said it's gross.

But

anyway, Jeanette pours it and she sips it and she says, Carmen, you've gotta have a glass. And I said, no, I don't. She goes, if you are a true friend, you'd drink it with us. We've all gotta have. Two glasses each. You, Mary and I'm like, why doesn't Helen have to have any? So I'm like, all right, whatever.

So I just literally picked the glass up and threw it back. And it was like I had drank toilet cleaner mixed with chlorine. Oh, it horrendous. It was the most disgusting thing I think I've ever drank. Anyway, it, I don't know what it did, but my pupils ended up like pin pricks, and I went to walk to the toilet and I was just, it was awful.

So by the time we got on the bus, everyone was asleep and I was just, I wouldn't say I was pinging, that's the wrong word to use, but it was just, it was weird. I wasn't drunk, but it just, I don't know. It felt like I'd been poisoned, I think, but not, I didn't feel nauseous from it. Yeah. Dried down my glass.

Jeanette and Helen are like, oh, we are not drinking it. So I'm like, oh yeah, good on you guys. But we did go to the smoking house after that. So I had a fair bit of time to work off before I got on the bus. And by then it was kind of just it is like when you eat something really disgusting and you just cannot get rid of the taste, it was like that.

And I, I actually thought that it was, gonna start eating away my esophagus and my stomach because it was such, it had to have some sort of chemical or something in it. It was rank. So yeah, that was the interesting part of it. And then we, when we got on the bus, it was late and, 'cause we were doing six o'clock mornings to do breakfast and then get on the bus, everyone was asleep.

I think, apart from, well, I hope our driver was awake. He hadn't crashed, but Helen was awake and I was awake. And everyone else was either asleep or dozing that, and I'm not, I'm pretty sure no one else was awake. The military police officer may have been awake, but they didn't really converse that much with us.

They had their little small semi-automatics, uh, under their suit coats. And, so, yeah, we were sort of sitting there just watching the buses and they started playing their game of overtaking each other and it was wet, started to rain and yeah. Then the other bus stayed in front and our guy didn't overtake him again.

And yeah, next minute I Helen's like, oh shit, shit. And I look up and just, you just see the bus just driving off the road. And we were 50 kilometers from Cairo.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: At that point in time. And they have they have these little huts, buildings. You don't really call 'em a building that's not that big with an ambulance every 50 or 80, a hundred kilometers along this road.

So that's, I think it's quite well renowned for accidents of some description. But when I say that ambulance I use that term very loosely. It's more like a moving van.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: We'd passed one a while 10, 20 Ks back anyway. You just, I just watched it. It is weird. I think at that point in time I'd been a police officer for maybe eight or nine years and you see, as a police officer you see horrific things.

You see horrible things. You go to crashes all the time and, but you always see the result after. Yeah. You never see it happen. And these are people that you're starting to get to know, that, you are in a, in a tour group with and you know, you've all got sort of something in common in your sense of your work and you, your country of origin and Yeah.

So this bus just starts curve off the road and we were probably, I'd say estimate we're doing probably 120, 130 at the time.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: There was a big sandbank on the side of the road and it just sort of plowed into it and just flipped. And it just, it flipped and hit the ground. It flipped and hit the ground.

It flipped and hit the ground, and then it came to land facing the wrong direction on its side, off the side of the road. And you could actually see people being thrown out of it as it was flipping through the air. And like I said Helen's going, shit, oh shit. And I'm just, I think my jaw was probably just sitting on the ground at that point in time and I just, you know what you're seeing, but you can't really absorb it.

You can't really, I guess, it is that's our people. That's us. Yeah. It's yeah, it was weird. It was weird's the wrong word. It was horrid, but it was kind of, yeah, it's I dunno, you don't really think anything. It's like time sort of stands still other than what you're watching and then it's, yeah, and it was our, our bus driver pulled over and um, yeah, we got off straight away.

The four territorial women got off. That was it. No one else.

Rosie Skene: Which this blows my mind. 'cause you in a, I guess if there's family there of first responders or whoever, you've got their cops and everything. I get that the families don't get off. Are the other first responders on your bus not getting off though?

Carmen Butcher: There was a firefighter on there. Other people and I don't know if they were still waking up or I think I just, my brain just clicked. Turned over. Yeah.

And everything shut down except for we were running down there and Helen's my height, so I'm nearly six. Oh, I'm six foot tall. But Helen's, she's a.

Like her stronger build, she looks a stronger build than me. And I always used to be a bit scared of her as a boss until I got to know her, because she always seemed really imposing one of the softest, loveliest people that you'd ever meet in your life. And Jeanette and Mary are both really short.

So we are getting off, and I, we were running towards the bus and I don't remember saying it, but Helen said to me later, she said that I was running along, going right, let's do this, let's do this, let's get this sorted. Like I was obviously just psyching myself into back into a work mode, I guess. Yeah. And trying to depersonalize it because, there were 30 odd people on that bus, so you knew it wasn't gonna be pretty at all.

It was, yeah. And when we, pardon me, when we got to the first person and he'd gone through the windscreen and he was passed. He was a copper from Victoria. And we'd sat with him and his wife for breakfast that morning. And it's actually a bit ironic that was the first person we saw.

Then we saw another copper from another fella Ashley, a copper from Victoria, and he had a really bad leg injury. And Jeanette and Mary stayed with him. And then I saw another lady stagger around the bus looking for her daughter. They were actually, she, her husband was actually a plastic surgeon from New South Wales.

So him and his wife and daughter were on the bus and he was on it because he had given Steven Thief's wife, he'd done her plastic surgery, whether it was engaged for the trip or whatever. I don't know. So he was the only one that wasn't really related to any police or yeah. Responder family in any sense.

And then I thought, okay, Helen rang back to the bus to get curtains, first aid kits, try and get more people to get off the bus. And that's when I went, okay, I'll go and help someone else. They've got him under control. That person's passed away, I'll go and see what else I can do. And the ironic thing is that it was not ironic, but as I'm running the bus is LA on its side, and as I'm running down the side of the bus and it was just pure luck for her, I guess that I just see a hand, just a hand scratching, sticking out of the sand, scratching and you kinda I'm in Egypt.

Is this a mummy? Yeah. You're just trying to work out how, and from this crash, I mean, like I said, you see lots of crashes and lots of weird things, but you don't

really this has really shown me what the human body is capable of and what can actually happen in a crash that is you wonder how the hell that ever happens.

How was it ever possible? Anyway, so I got down and dug the hand out, and it was Lynn and it was her husband that had gone through the front windscreen and passed away. So Lynn was, so that was the husband I found first, and then her, so it was kind of a bit ironic in that sense. And, so I was digging her head out so she could breathe because obviously her head was under the sand.

She was suffocating. So when the bus had rolled, she'd gone through the window and got buried in the sand. Wow. And it was, you kind of like, how does that happen? But it happened, anyway, so when I, once I got her head out and her shoulders out, I sort of thought, oh, I said to her, I'll leave you now.

I'll leave you and I'll go and help other people. You can breathe. You're gonna be okay. And she's like, don't leave me. Please don't leave me. 'cause she's still stuck, only her shoulder and her head. And one arm was out of the sand. There was diesel running down the bus, stripping in the sand, splashing.

And I thought, well, if this was me, I probably wouldn't want to still be trapped in there either. So I knelt over her head with my butt in the air, so the diesel was hitting my back. Okay. To keep it away from her face. Yeah. Rather than sort of splashing in the sand and splashing onto her. And so I had my bum in the air, which was a really good target and was then bending forward, like just digging out the sand to get her out to try and dig her out.

And I mean, little did I know now, little did I know then, sorry. And I know now that her foot was actually crushed between the seats and , no matter how much I dug, I probably never would've be able to get her

Rosie Skene: out,

Carmen Butcher: pull her out. But at least then I, I was, I. Uncovering the rest of her because, if you've only got your head and your shoulders out, you kind of, you'd still be feeling pretty freaked out, obviously after being, throwing around like you're in a tumble dryer.

And yeah, while I was digging out that roof just fell and, uh, hit me fair and square in the backside. So it was I was digging and then next minute I was flat and it was dark and I was eating sand and I just it's a really stupid thing to say, but I could feel that I couldn't feel my legs.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Something was wrong straight away. And because it had hit me in the back, I mean, we are talking about the roof, the air conditioning system of a tour bus. That has just literally just gone, smashed straight down and my lower back backside has taken the full force of it. And you're on

Rosie Skene: your knees too, weren't

Carmen Butcher: you?

Yep. Yeah. Yeah. I was laying there and I yelled out, get it off me. It hurts because I couldn't, but then I couldn't breathe properly 'cause I chronic pain in my chest, which I realized I'd broken ribs as well. And Lynn, then I could hear Lynn under me. She's saying, what's happening? Get it off me.

Get it off. Get off me. And I'm like, oh, she's still alive. No, I didn't hear her at that point because I was laying there thinking this. It's really, it's weird because the things that go through your head, I'm laying there thinking holiday of a lifetime. My ass here I am 30 years of age eating sand in the Egyptian desert and I'm gonna die.

And if she doesn't live, this wasn't worth it. I was actually, and then I heard her yell and I thought, okay, she's alive right now. And then I thought, I'm gonna die. I can't breathe. I'm trapped under this Bus There was four women who helped, and I was one of them. There's no way they're gonna lift this off me.

Yeah. No way at all. And I just accepted that, I'm not religious in any way and I'm not against it. I just, I don't have it. And I'm not really superstitious. Maybe some, a few things, but not an overly superstitious person. But I do believe we're all put here for a reason, whether it's this big or this big.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And whatever that reason is, it. I know. I thought, well, maybe this is what I was put here for. I've done it and but I'm gonna die. I'm 30 and I'm to protect her. Yeah. Yeah. To save her and. I thought, oh, well, okay, whatever. At least I've done something useful, and then I don't have any, I don't have any idea how long I was under there.

And the next thing I remember was being held under my knees and my armpits screaming at them to put me down because it hurt. Because at that point in time, my femur had gone through my hip, through my pelvis and smashed my ribs right up here. And so I was kind of, some random guy was holding me, was an Egyptian dude.

And I was like, wow. And I've since had a conversation with Jeanette and Helen in Darwin. I went to visit them and with my partner, and they were talking about it. And I've talked about it with my psych that I don't remember. I remember being under there. I remember thinking and feeling that, and then I remember being held, and I always thought.

That when they finally lifted it off, God knows how long it was and pulled me out. I must have passed out. Yeah.

And I

was talking to Jeanette and Helen about it, and every now and again, we have very in-depth conversations about parts of it and the psych had offered to, help me try and remember.

And I said, look, my brother out for a reason. Yeah. I don't need to go back there. But Jeanette and Helen said that I was awake and I screamed blue murder.

Yeah. But I have absolutely no recollection of that at all. And quite frankly, I don't want it. Isn't that incredible what your brain does to protect you?

Amazing. Yeah, absolutely Amazing. It's just yeah, blew my mind. It blew my mind when they told me that and they couldn't really give me a time of how long I was trapped under there because my biggest thing was struggling to breath.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Because of the broken ribs in your lungs, obviously. Yeah. Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And the weight on top of me. Oh yeah. It's yeah. And. And then, I'm screaming at this guy to put me down. I mean, I'm not little, I'm a six foot I'm pretty heavy. I play rugby. Yeah. He walks over to this ambulance Van and tosses me in a, and so Sue-Ellen was already in there.

Sue Ellen's mom was in there and Sue Ellen's mom had a open brain injury and she also had a really smashed arm. So she was asleep on the window with her elbow and it went through and absolutely obliterated. Oh. And then the plastic

surgeon's wife was in there, and it's funny now, and I found out later, she was thrown out of the bus and hit one of the very few random light poles along the way.

And it actually had dented her backside, like an actual Wow. concave dent in her backside. And I think she had a broken nose. And there was one other person in there. Now their ambulance is a van with two molded bench seats. There's no stretches, there's no equipment, there is nothing. And if there's a second person, they sit in a little wooden box in the back and talk to the driver through a little hole in the wall.

So I remember being thrown in there and I was on top of Denise and she was, she was conscious, but she's got this open brain injury and she's all over the place.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. She's,

Carmen Butcher: And everyone was scared. Everyone was, what the hell? Anyway next minute I just roll off the bench and I've hit the floor and I'm like, I'm hanging on what's happened?

And Sue Ellen's sitting there and she's you've shut our legs in the door. You've shut our fucking legs in the door. So they'd slam the ambulance doors and my legs were hanging out of it. Oh my God. The big up and feel, 'em, I didn't know, but it just made me roll off the bench. So they literally, I opened the door, shove my legs in, and then slammed the doors shut again, and we're driving back to Cairo.

So we got 50 odd Ks and then however far it was to this hospital. And, uh, it was horrific. And I'm laying there thinking, this is a bad dream. I'm gonna wake up any minute now, and this is not gonna be real. There's, but people are crying, they're screaming the, there's six of us in this ambulance and we are just, everyone's a mess.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Anyway, we, we get to this place, this hospital. And look, I live in Alice Springs. I've lived in Northern Territory for 30 years now, and everyone knows that we have a really bad, have a lot of problems with indigenous up here. And some of the standards that they live in are really poor and the camps are really poor and they're filthy.

They're filthy. And this hospital was like going into one of those camp houses.

But when

they opened the doors, I just literally felt myself go funk, funk. So they'd grab me by the legs and just pulled me out. And thankfully for me, I couldn't feel my legs, but, with my ribs, because I couldn't sit up, I couldn't take breaths.

Anyway they put me, grabbed me out, grabbed me by the wrists and the ankles, and dropped me on this bed and wheeled me inside and they just put me in this room and walked away. Anyway, there was a, an Arabic man at the other end, probably 10 meters away, and he was looking at his eye in the mirror and there was no one else in this room, no other beds, nothing.

Anyway, you're sort of sitting there and so you can't walk. You can barely breathe. You can't really move. You can't sit up. You're in agony and there's no one around you and you have no idea exactly where you are other than you're in Egypt somewhere

Rosie Skene: in a foreign country. Yeah. Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And then weirdly, I'm like, shit, did I tick the travel insurance box on that?

It's weird. What goes through your head? And I'm like, and then I couldn't remember and I'm like, oh my God, I hope I have shit, shit. Because I thought this isn't something I could just walk home and get treatment for. No. Anyway, thankfully I had,

Rosie Skene: oh, thank God. Yeah, because you do, when you get those little popups, you're like, ah, do I dunno?

So I,

Carmen Butcher: this script, there's actually, it was actually a form you filled in of everything and there was a box you ticked and then it's did I tick it? Did I tick it? Because I'd been, by the time I went to to Egypt, I've been overseas a few times. I'd played rugby in the Australian squad and I played state hockey and state softball and.

I had traveled, I'd been to Bali, I'd been other places. So, and I never, ever took out travel insurance ever on any of my trips.

Rosie Skene: Wow. That's

Carmen Butcher: why I was second guessing and doubting myself. Anyway, yeah. So then this guy comes in dressed in white, and I said to him, can you help me? Please do something.

I'm in pain. And he picks up my pants. I had long pants on. He picks up my pants by the knee of my right leg. The one that I went through and he said, and he picks it up off the bed and holds it up. And he says, good. And I said, it's a bit better. Yes. And he said, good then. And then just let it go and walked away.

And I was like, ah. And I've got a fairly high pain tolerance, but by God that tested it.

Rosie Skene: And you hadn't had any pain relief either, have you? I hadn't had anything, no.

Carmen Butcher: And then Sue-Ellen walked through and I said, Sue-Ellen, can you take this? I gave her my jewelry and my passport. Why did I have my passport back?

Did he give it back to us that day maybe? No, it wasn't my passport, it was my wallet with my money. I said, can you take this? 'cause I have no idea what's happening to me and you can at least walk anyway. I was there for, I don't know how long, and then they came in and they said, oh, we're gonna take you.

They didn't speak very good English. They're like, x-ray, x-ray. And I'm like, yep, whatever. So they wheel you through and there's this bench there, like a, just a flat bench and this archaic looking machine next to it. And the bench had sand all over it, so I knew I wasn't the first one to go in there. And they said move.

Pointing to the get over

Rosie Skene: to the thing. Yeah. Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: That I can't move. I like, I couldn't use anything from the waist down. It was not, it was dead. There was nothing there. And they're like, move. And I said I can't. So wrist, ankles pick up, drop on the bed again on the bench. And then fi, they finish it, pick you up, drop you back, and then they're wheeling me off and this guy comes up and he goes, your hip dislocated.

No, your hip dislocated. And I said, mate, I think there's a bit more than the dislocated hip going on here. And he goes, oh, we must fix it. I'm like no. You no. Neck minute injection in the back of my hand. And I wake up being wheeled into a room by two men slamming into walls.

And every time they hit the ball with a bed, the bed, you're like,

Rosie Skene: oh,

Carmen Butcher: we get into this room, my leg is banded, my pants are off, my legs bandaged, and there's this red plastic, it looked like a car oil bottle. Oh, yes. Yeah. With my legs. They push the bed in, they pick the bottle up and throw it over the end of the bed.

So my leg goes, whoop. And that I figured that was my traction. That's how that, yeah. Oh my gosh. No, nothing's gentle. And I just laid there and laid down just like. The fuck is this? Like seriously, there was blood and feces smeared on the wall. There was a cat sitting in the windowsill, meowing its guts out.

There was crap all over the floor. And I'm just like, oh my God, I'm gonna die in this place. This is not hospital, this is not hospital's asshole. Anyway, I laid there, I dunno how long. And then in the end I'm just like, oh my God, help. Is anyone out there? I could hear other people yelling and crying and screaming and I'm like, is anyone there?

Please? Is anyone there? And Sue-Ellen again, bless her, she came in and she said, and she'd seen it and she actually had a collarbone injury and a lip, and she actually got a pair of nail scissors out of her bag and trimmed her lip herself so that they wouldn't touch it. That's how bad. Oh my God.

She came in and she said, what do you want me to do? I said, can you find Jeannette and Helen do something? And then she said, all right. And she left. And then I'm like, why did I do that? Why didn't I just tell her to stay here anyway? Bless her. She came back and she sat there and she said, what do you want me to do?

And I said, just talk to me. Just talk to me. And, that saved me from going insane. It saved me from God knows what. And it probably helped her because she went into the hospital with her mom, and mom was bleeding from the ears and the head, and they wheeled her mom into ICU, shut the doors, and she hadn't seen or heard anything since.

So she just sat there and told me her life story basically while I just laid and listened, because it took my mind off what was going on. And, you know, I was, I was so grateful. And we forged an amazing friendship as a result of that. Hence the reason she's my daughter's godmother, who's, my daughter's now.

13. So, yeah. But we and. And then Jeanette and Helen finally came into the room. And by that point in time my bladder felt like it was the size of a football field. And I said to Jeanette, I said, I need to go to the toilet, I need to wee. And she said, just do it. And I said, I can't. She said, just do it doesn't matter.

'cause it was cold. We're in Egypt, but it was cold. And she said, just do it. Just don't worry about it. Don't worry about the bedding And I said, no, you don't understand. I actually can't. So you still had

Rosie Skene: no feeling from your waist? Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. I can't make anything work. So she trots off up to the nurses station.

She says it was a nurses station and there was three nurses and a doctor or someone in there. And she said, this person needs a toilet. So they handed her a bedpan. She said, how the fuck do you think she's gonna be able to use that? She can't. She can't use anything. And she comes back. Then this guy walks in, he says he is a doctor.

And he says to me. Toilet? Yes. And I said, yes. Okay. And he is got this tube and he said, are you a virgin? I need to put catheter in. And I looked at Jeanette and I said, Uhhuh, what the fuck has being a virgin got to do with putting in a catheter? I'm scared. And Jeanette's don't worry about it. Just fucking hell.

Nick minute I could thank God. Thank God I couldn't feel anything because God knows what he did. But he eventually, it ended up where it ended to end up,

Rosie Skene: oh my days.

Carmen Butcher: So I was just like, and I was like, oh fuck. Anyway, then Danette and Helen said, look, we're gonna go off and see other people. Don't let 'em take you anywhere.

We'll be back. So they left. And then however long later, they came in and started wheeling me out of the room again. And I'm like, no, stop. You can't take me in. No,

you go. You go. And I'm like, no. Where are you taking me? No, you go. You go. And I'm like, and I said, and I yell out, Sue-Ellen, so, and tell Jeannette and Helen, I've gone that way, right?

Because I still can't sit up and I'm trying to, when I say yell it's a loose term when you've got busted ribs and

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Had any, but it's pretty hard to get any strength out of anything coming from your chest. Anyway, as we get to the end of the corridor, we turn to the right, and I look left and Jeanette and Helen there, and I'm like, Jeanette.

And she's like, oh. Anyway, she comes running down and we go into the lift and they go over the yeah, actually had a lift, surprisingly this hospital, but you go over the lift where the door's, and it's like Kato, and you're sort of like, that hurts. And they get in there and they're in there talking gibberish.

And we get out and then there's this other dude there, and he pulls the stretcher out, Kato again. Then they have an argument, the stretcher gets pulled back into the lift again, then it goes out again, then it goes in again. And I'm just like, stop. Because every bump was killing me. Yeah. And it turned out that they were having an argument because they'd done x-rays and I had one of their gowns on, they wanted money, but we couldn't understand anything that they were saying and we didn't know.

And it was an ambulance that had come to pick me up. 'cause in the meantime, Jeanette and Helen had rung one of their really good friends back in Darwin, who was the commissioner's staff officer here. They rang her and told her, and he was the one that then got us all transferred to a military hospital.

And we, so we finally get into this ambulance and another one. But I was on a stretcher this time. Anyway, Jeanette came with me. Helen stayed there to help others, and Jeanette came with me, which I was eternally grateful for. And my phone was ringing. I had my mobile phone over there, and she, I could hear someone hysteric on the other end.

They're like, no, she's all right. So the news had reported I'd been killed. Over here in Australia. So someone had rung my phone and Jeanette's like, no, she's alive, she's banged up, but she's alive, anyway, she gets off the phone and it was freezing in this ambulance, and this guy's sitting there in his little wooden box talking to the

driver, and Jeanette's she was holding my hand, and then she was holding, she let go.

She was holding the bed. And I still can't sit up at this point, and I've still had no pain relief. I've been knocked out for, to do whatever they did to put that water bottle, that oil bottle on there, but still no pain relief. And we'd hit 10 hours by now since the crash. And Jeanette says to the guy, excuse me, and she's gone like this with her head, and she's mate, excuse me.

And he goes, ah, and he gets off his box and the driver slams the skids on, and you can hear the doors slam shut. So the doors of the, but the doors

Rosie Skene: open.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. The doors of the ambulance were hanging open. Jeanette's holding the stretcher in the ambulance. He gets up and checks and he is like, ah, yeah, good now.

Good now. And off they go. So when we get to this new hospital, I'm just like, and Helen had beaten us there. God knows how old she met. I don't know. Anyway, they come and they pin a number on me and they go, here's your patient number. Like, Clip it on my, and I pick it up and look at it. It was number 13. And I thought, it's fucking, of course it's fucking, of course it's, what else would it be?

And then I got a jab in my leg. It was my first pain relief. I've got a jab of morphine. And that was the first pain relief in over 10 hours since then. Wow. And it was just like, fuck, it was so much nicer. So I went in for more X-rays and, but they ran outta beds in ICU. But I found out that in Egypt, if you don't wail, you're not in pain.

Rosie Skene: Ah, okay.

Carmen Butcher: See, when I'm in pain I clench down. I say nothing. I go silent. And so I was sitting there and I was in and outta consciousness just from the pain knocking me in, knocking me out. And they still didn't speak very good English there. We had to pay to have water.

Rosie Skene: Yeah, right. And

Carmen Butcher: pay for stuff.

So the consulate brought in boxes of water and toothbrushes and toothpaste and then they finally, Jeanette, I mean, Helen had nothing. Like I said, Helen's very imposing, especially when you're over there, you get a woman that big, it's not, not that common. And, 'cause I, I, I was laying down, no one could see what size I was.

And like she's not, I'm not saying she's fat, she's just a solid bone structure.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And she, she went out there and she just ripped them a new asshole and basically said, this person's been in pain the whole time. You've done nothing. Oh, she not, she's not wailing. She's not wailing.

And she's and so anyway, after she'd ripped them, that asshole, they came in and gave me one of those PCA machines. I literal yeah. My eyes rolling around in my head. I was having a ball, but I couldn't feel anything. I was happy. And then they flew in the doctors from from Australia to come in and assess us all, and they were talking about giving me a hip replacement, and I was 30.

And I said, you what? And they said, oh, maybe we will, maybe we won't, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, they come over and assess it, but they don't do the surgeries. So I had to have my surgery in Egypt in that hospital. And when I came out of it I don't react very well. I get cold and I start to shake like I have epilepsy and , when I sort of was coming to, there's all these gloves filled with warm water, like making a human.

Lines keep me warm with blankets on me. And it's what had happened. When I got back to the room, it was really early hours of the morning so that the hospital was locked after a certain period of time at night and no one could come in and visit. So Jeanette and Helen and that couldn't come in and visit.

And my sister had got a phone call from someone in Egypt. She was here in Alice saying that the surgery hadn't gone well and I wasn't in a good way. So she rang my mom and told my mom, and mom said, I'm gonna ring Jeanette and Helen. Renee said, don't they'll ring us if something's wrong. I'm just letting you know what I've been told.

Anyway, my mom rang them. So Helen broke into the hospital. They broke in through a window and she came in and she's sitting there and she's I'm like, what are you doing? And she goes, so you're alive. You're right. And I'm like, yes. And she

just burst into tears because they had been. They were the carers and the contact and the go-to runarounds for everybody that had been in that crash.

And there were 28, there were six killed and 28 injured. And they were like the mother Theresa's, so to speak. I've got a of Helen, when I got to the uk, one of my mates from Darwin was working over there and she came in to visit me and she brought me in some English flag undies and some Australian food like lollies and a, a red teapot and just some stuff to cheer me up.

And I've got a photo of Helen with a plastic black bobby hat on my English undies over a shorts and a cape pretending to be Superman, which they were just I wouldn't, would never, I would not be where I am without them being there for me. They were like my family. So the insurance company flew family over and I didn't want my mum there at all.

And. So they, I just said, they can be my family, that's who I want. And so after I'd had this surgery there, they said, we are gonna fly you to the uk. So they flew the six most serious injured in one Lear Jet Austrian lit medical jet over. But we stopped in Austria on the way and I had a what do you call 'em, an epidural after the surgery.

So I was okay, but because we stopped in Austria, by the time we got to the uk the medication had gone off and oh my God, it was only eight hours after the surgery that we got on that flight. And I'd had two plates and 13 screws put in my pelvis. And I was fucking in pain. I was cranky and rank, and I got off that plane into an ambulance and they gave me a cylinder of that gas and.

It was just like, give it to me, give it to me. Jeanette and Helen had flown on a normal flight and we were all sent to different hospitals when we got there, the six of us. And there was one lady who was really badly injured. She was flown on her own because she needed like three nurses. Yeah. Anyway, when we get to the hospital, Jeanette and Helen got in there and they were tired and they'd had some issues at the airport, nearly missing the plane, and they still had Helen's 12-year-old daughter with them.

And they get in there and they expect to see me all comfortable. And I'm there and I'm like in absolutely agony. And Helen lost her shit. Yeah. You knew she was coming. You were meant to have this bed. You were meant to have this, get her pain. And she ripped them, but it worked. And then the doctor walked up to Jeanette and said, I think you might wanna take your friend sight seeing tomorrow.

Keep it away from the hospital. Yeah. So, and yeah, so I spent, 10 days there. Then I was flying to Sydney and spent three weeks there, which meant to be three days, and then finally back to Darwin. So it was a long process, a very long process to get back.

Rosie Skene: That's incredible. , From the military hospital.

When you had your surgery, did anyone else do anything to you after that, in all those hospitals or they just keeping an eye on you?

Carmen Butcher: No, so when I went to Sydney, it was, so when I had the surgery, I got my, when they finally took the epidural out, yeah. I had my left leg back, but I only had my right leg to the knee.

Oh. So the bottom of my right leg didn't work. So I had foot drop. So what the reason I couldn't feel my legs was when , when my pelvis smashed, my hip smashed, it crushed my satic nerve. Oh. And that stopped any of the feeling. And I had some. Ligament damage in my back. But overall lucky that it didn't completely shatter my back probably 'cause my ass was in the air and it took the brunt of it.

But so the Sydney assessed that and said there's nothing we can do. And then I was flown on a stretcher back to Darwin and they basically said, you need to give it 12 months and see if the nerve grows back, which they don't. And see what happens. So by the time I spent three and a half months in the hospital in Darwin with Jeanette and Helen coming in every day but yeah, we um, so I, I didn't have any more surgery then, but I had, I went to, we all had a, we all got together in Melbourne in the September. I got outta hospital in August July or August, I can't remember.

Wow. I spent three in the hospital in Darwin. And I've been, no, it must have been, I don't know. I can't work it out. No, it must have been earlier than that. And I went and lived with Jeanette and Helen while I recuperated. 'cause I was still not really walking when I, I had a splint like a some of my foot wouldn't drop.

And I, but I still had to use, I had a wheelchair majority of the time, but I could get around a little bit with crutches until I got more strength. So Helen was showering me at home too, and she's if you need a shit, you do it before I get in here. Anyway. Bless her. And they have had a, this EBalineseE retreat style home.

It was just beautiful. It was the most amazing place to recuperate. Anyway, we all went over to Melbourne. The commissioner paid for us to go over, and we all got together. And in that time, I hadn't spoken to Lynn, the lady that I dug out at all. So when she rang, I would be asleep. Or if they rang Jeanette and Helen rang her, she'd be asleep.

Now. She had to. So she, we were flown, we were on the same jet flown to the UK, but different hospitals. We left the UK on the same day. Our ambulances were parked behind each other. She flew to Melbourne. I flew to Sydney. Jeanette and Helen went from Sydney over to Melbourne for her husband's funeral. He the one that went through the windscreen.

And I was really scared to meet, to see her because I was struggling, I was told in the UK that I would probably never walk again. I didn't really realize until I saw the first x-ray of all that metal in there and I went, holy fuck. How the hell is that ever gonna work? Yeah. I was a person who played sport.

I played rep sport, I loved my sport, I was an active person. I didn't sit still and I was 30 what the fuck was I gonna do with the rest of my life if I couldn't work or walk or anything? And then I was like, if I go and see Lynn, 'cause I'd learned that she lost her leg. So she actually lost her leg from the knee down and she was the one that was

Rosie Skene: trapped in the seat.

Yep. Yeah. And she

Carmen Butcher: was also a paraplegic and she'd lost her husband. And I thought if she tells me that she wishes that I'd let her die, this is all for nothing. And I'm not gonna cope with this at all. I'm, it's gonna really fuck with my head. Anyway, we went to this reunion and we all caught up and.

I was walking on crutches with my beautiful leg splint by that time, and other people still had, some injuries. And Lynn was there in a wheelchair, and it took me ages to talk to her. And I finally went up to her and I'm like, Hey, how you going? And she said, good. And she, and I said, I've been, I've actually been really worried about talking to you.

And she's like, why? And I said, because Lynn, I'm I've been a bit scared that you're gonna be angry at me, that, 'cause your life's changed so much. And she said to me, Carmen, she said, my husband died, lost my leg. I can't walk. She said, but I'm

alive because of you. And she said, yeah, my life's gonna be different now, but I'm alive.

And you did that. You saved me. And that was probably one of the best things that she could have said to me. It really helped me. I had a few days here and there where I'd be a bit depressed and feel sorry for myself, but. Generally I was okay. Struggling, but Okay. But I was on some horrendously heavy drugs, and when I found out I was taking 120 milligrams of Oxycontin a day, holy shit.

With 10 milligram not top-ups whenever I wanted it. Plus I was on Tramadol plus I was on tum, which is a brain nerve, like a brain sense drug that stops some of your nerve sensors to try and help with the nerve pain, gives you short term memory loss. And I was, and I was on like other nerve drugs and all sorts, and like I was, I've literally taking about 35 pills a day.

Rosie Skene: Wow.

Carmen Butcher: And there, and then I had 10 milligram popups, whatever I, as many as I wanted whenever I wanted them. And when I went to my pain doctor and I said to him, he goes, I said, what does this equate to in morphine? He said, Carmen, you're literally on about probably 200 milligrams of morphine a day. And I said, what?

And I said, I don't want this. He goes, no, you need it. And I said, no. I don't want it. I want you to stop it. And he said, you can't. You're gonna have to come off it really slowly, or because you've been on this for a long time.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Said,

Carmen Butcher: no, you watch me. So the next day I took 80. The next day I took 40.

And the next day I took none. Because my thing was, how the hell do I know if I'm getting any better, if I can't feel it, feel any, and I know if I'm not pushing it too hard because I can't feel it. So that was it for me. I was done, I was off those drugs. I didn't wanna be a wasted space cowboy. And so I came back to Alice Springs in the October and I still had a splint.

I was off the crutches and the commissioner was really good. He offered to move me to Darwin. I said, no, I chose Alice for a reason. I bought a house. My sister moved in and unpacked it all for me. 'Cause I had a dog and a cro, pet crocodile

and all sorts of stuff. She had to look after for me. Of course you have a pet crocodile.

Oh, it was dead by the time I got there, but it used to stalk her up and down the tank and she said it got full filter. Yeah, right. Anyway, I taught it to jump for its food. Maybe that's why she didn't. Oh yeah. Anyway I went back and I went back to work and it was weird because I wasn't me.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And I, when we were in, when we were in that that reunion in Melbourne, I went and saw a neurologist and he did some tests.

He said, if you wait a full year, your nerve's not gonna grow back. It's healed and it's not gonna grow back. He waited a full year. Your leg is gonna waste. Because you can't use it. He said, you need to go and do something about it now. So I got a referral to this guy in Adelaide, which surprised me 'cause I thought it would've been over in Melbourne or Sydney or somewhere.

. And I went and saw him and he basically broke my ankle, took a piece of bone outta my hip and wedged it in there. Put two screws that long straight up through my heel. Wow. Took the tendons and ligaments outta my four smaller toes and transferred them into my ankle joint. And, uh, Bob's your uncle.

Now I can walk. Wow. So that was in the, that was in the February.

Rosie Skene: 13 months after.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah.

Rosie Skene: Crash.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. And so I it was a massive setback because of the tendons, all that stuff being transferred, I was not allowed to put any weight on it. Now I lived on my own. I had a dog and I got back to Alice after the surgery and I'd make food and then I'd be like, how am I gonna take it to the table?

So I had to lean on my crutches and eat it at the kitchen bench. Oh. If I made a hot drink at the first day, I tried to feed my dog. I faceplant it because I was not allowed to put any weight at all. Then it got an infection and I'm like, oh my God.

'cause if the infection went through the transfer of the, tendon ligament stuff wasn't gonna, it was not gonna take.

And so I had to go out the hospital and get the plaster, had square, cut out the plaster because there's this big infection hole in there that they had to sort out. So I went back to Melbourne and then I got a moon boot so I could treat it properly. And I ended up staying over in Melbourne for a while with Sue Ellen because I was really depressed because I'd actually started to ride a bike before I had my foot done.

And I used to get a shoelace and tie my splint foot onto the pedal and then ride this bike. So, 'cause otherwise my foot just slid off the pedal all the time. So I just tied it on there and hoped the best that I didn't ever have to. But being my dominant side, I had to try and learn to, and it was like when I learned to walk again it was the weirdest thing because I couldn't feel my foot at all, had no feeling in my foot.

And you are watching your foot touch the ground, but you can't feel it. Yeah. And it's this is a fucked up. This is really weird shit. And you'd overcompensate 'cause you'd keep going and going. Waiting to feel it. Waiting to feel it. And you couldn't, there was nothing. It was, it took, yeah.

It was weird. Really. And I had, my old granny Zimmer frame that I was walking with so that I could at least go to the toilet. 'cause I got sick of using bedpans and my sister visited me once and decided it'd be funny to put it in backwards. So I'd overflowed and filled the bed, bless a little cotton socks.

And so, yeah, , so I was walking again and I was riding a bike, albeit tied to it. And now suddenly I couldn't do anything again. And I plummeted. I plummeted, I did. It was such deep depression. It was, feel it was bad.

After I saw the doctor in Adelaide, I flew over to Melbourne and stayed with Sue-Ellen for an I said, I'm here's my bag. I dunno how long I'm staying. And I caught up with a few people and I looked at them and I went, you know what? I'm actually doing okay. But what I've been through, I'm actually, I'm doing okay.

But when we. When I got off the plane, Sue-Ellen met me, and Lynn came and wanted, and she wanted me to go to her husband's family for a meal and meet them. And so, so Lynn's family they couldn't do enough for me because I, yeah, they're grateful.

Yeah. But I was embarrassed by it to a level, and I, when I went to George's family, they had a closed coffin. So I sat on the couch and Sue-Ellen was with me. And then they said, we didn't get to see him. What did he look like? What did he look like when he was dead? And it was awful because What do you say to people?

What do you say? It's, and it's like, well, he looked like he was asleep. Because his eyes were closed and you can't, it's really hard. And Lynn was in the kitchen and she didn't realize that, asking me that. And then she comes in, she's like, do you want a beer? And I said, yeah.

And brought me in a vb. Well my god, I have destroyed about three and a half million cans of VB in this town, in this state, in my years as a police officer and is the rankest most disgusting beer that I associate with filth. And that's what they bought me. At least it was in a bottle. And I'm just looking at it and I'm like, you know what?

Rosie Skene: Fuck it. I need a beer. I'm just gonna drink it. That's so funny you say that about vb. 'cause I feel the same. One of my very good mates who's a cop, I was a cop as well, she calls it Dirty Swamp Water. It's just it's rankest beer.

Carmen Butcher: . I was never that desperate, but that day I drank it. I was just like, fuck this. But yeah, so I had that done and I had another 10 months off of work after that. And I went back to work and I finally got cleared to work and then they decided they weren't happy with the clearance and the boss was here and they pulled me back into the office and said, you can't leave the station.

And then I plummeted again. Yeah. Really depressed again. And then they stuck me in this house where they were doing surveillance on some bikey druggies. And there was a laptop in the house that showed the video feed. There was no phone, there was nothing. And I wasn't allowed to go to the station. I went to that house and did 12 hours, and then I went home.

I had no contact with anyone, and I laid on the floor in that house for days and cried. And cried. And cried and I had my mobile and people would ring me and I just, I couldn't answer it. I couldn't talk to them. I was so depressed because I'd worked so hard at walking, when they said, you probably won't walk again.

I'm like, you watch me. Because the worst thing, or the best thing you can ever do to me is say you can't do something. And I'll say that because I'm a stubborn bitch and I'll admit that to anybody. And it just, it broke me. I'd worked my guts out to come back to work and I was treated like shit.

And it was just, it was awful. And I, it was so, and in the end I just, I had to take some time off because I actually thought that I would go there one day and just lay on the floor and, take the 300 packets of Oxycontin I had left, take a lot of them and not wake up and would not, I would not have given a shit.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And they didn't care. They did not care. They just, I, to them I was a liability. The commissioner was fantastic, but he had no idea what they were doing Down here. Alice Springs is a completely different police force to Darwin.

And it was awful. It was really awful. And then I went and I sat my sergeant's exam and I passed it.

And then they put a guy that didn't pass it as acting sergeant over me, and they just, they smashed me. And it turned out that they were pissed because I'd come down here, I'd taken a position in crime as a detective. I'd only done one day, shy of two weeks, gone on holidays. Oh. And then you were off, had nearly had two years off.

And they couldn't replace me because I was on sick leave, so they couldn't get another person in. And they had the shits. It's gee, fuck, I'm sorry I planned to go on a holiday and let a fucking bus fall on me and crush me. Yeah. Sorry for that. Next time I'll, the worst thing is it was all through the papers about the NT coppers and we were heroes and we were this, and, Jeanette and Helen were heroes.

I wasn't a hero. I ended up getting hurt and I was just as much of a burden as everyone else, and I felt really guilty for that as well. I can sit here and say, yes, I saved Lynn's life, but then I became a problem as well. Yeah. It's not like I was on a holiday drunk skiing down a slope and smashed into a tree.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: I was actually doing something and the put the NT Police in a good light, we were getting the police were getting letters from police stations in America and everywhere about it, sending stuff through. So, it actually painted us as, instead of being the outback hillbillies, we were actually, a good bunch of people who had done a really good thing, but no, no way.

Not down here. It just, they smashed me and I thought, no, fuck you. You can get lost. Anyway, I finally got put into a they needed an active sergeant in a job and I

got put into it and I busted my ass. I worked my ring out and, and the boss was really skeptical. Really? I know.

So before all that happened, that's right. One of my previous bosses, he said, look, he'd gone to act somewhere in a different area down here. And he said, I know you're getting a hard time. He said, we need an acting sergeant out at Yulara at Ayers Rock do you wanna go and do that? And I said, yes, get me the fuck outta here.

And that was probably the best thing. I took my push bike out there and I had to have special pedals on my bike because when the way they did my ankle, I couldn't turn it enough to get it out. I had to have these eggbeater things put on. That helped me. Turn my foot, just that slight, 'cause I can't turn, I can't turn my foot sideways.

It's like

Rosie Skene: fused to the front sort of thing.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. So my foot, my ankle's been fused still. Now it's fused. It won't move side to side. And it moves limited up and down, but it works. Yeah. So, so I took my bike out there and I worked out there and every day that I could, I got on my bike and I rode from the police station in the resort out around, there's rock and all the way back, a 70 kilometer ride.

Wow. And best thing for my head space. Yeah. The best bed just over, I think three or four months out there. And I went back and then they were like, okay, you can go and act in this position here in property crime. And I'm like, fucking beauty, locking up kids, breaking into houses and went whatever. But it was a chance and I busted my ass and I busted it and busted it and we fucking smashed em

And after about two months, the boss comes to me and he says. And he was one of the ones that was pretty mean before. And he said, you don't have to prove yourself anymore. You can stop. But my work ethic is if the work needs to be done, it needs to be done. And I did it. And then there was a job I got put over in, they, we just started up a child abuse unit and I got put over in that and they said I applied for the job and I didn't get it.

No one got it, but I was acting in it, so, they said, wait 12 months, and it came up again and people, and I thought they said, wait 12 months, so I'm not gonna apply

for it. So other people applied, no one got it. And then I applied again after 12 months and I got my promotion into that and everyone's mindset turned around.

It's funny because, you sort of, I sit you thinking about that. And when I went back to, I went back to work in Darwin for a couple of weeks before I came back to Alice, after I got out of the initial. The first part, the first 10 months of the crash, just to see how I went. And the NT Police are such a bunch of smart people.

My first day at work, I was sent there to go into crime to help with a guy who was doing a child abuse investigation on a remote community. So I go in there on the first day and the boss comes up to me and she says, Carmen, we haven't got enough members. I need you to go and witness an autopsy for me.

I'm like, okay, whatever. This is my first day back after all of this. I go over to autopsy and what do they bring in a motor vehicle accident? And I just stood there and I'm like. And the funny thing is, I had the clown shoes because this is when I still had my foot split. So I had to buy bigger men's shoes to fit this fucking split tin.

So I was tripping over everything anyway, and I'm standing there looking at this poor guy on the slab, and I'm like, are you fucking, are you, is this for shits and giggles or are you testing me or is this, you guys are fucked? This is, let's ease it back in gently. Let's just go and throw her straight in front of a fucking dead person that's been smashed in a car accident that after what she's just been through, that'll see.

Let's see how tough. She's I couldn't fucking believe it. And then they get, I get a phone call and go, oh look, the members can't make the next autopsy. Can you stay for that? A five day old baby? Oh yeah, great. This, oh my God, what my head and my trauma. This is fantastic. Because I don't talk to people, I don't talk to counselors.

They're a bunch of waste of fucking time as far as I was concerned. I have a psych now. And when I was in the hospital, this guy came to see me and I actually opened up and told him what had happened. And then he turned around and he was the police psych. He turned around and said to me, yeah well I'm talking to Jeanette and Helen as well, so I can't do it with you as well 'cause it's a conflict, so I'll have to get someone else.

And I went go fuck yourself. So did Helen used to pick me up from the hospital, wheel me into the, in the wheelchair, wheel me into the appointment, shut the

doors, and I would sit there and stare out the window for an hour and not say a fucking word. Wow.

Because

my trust had been breached. You wanted me to open up and then you turn around and say that to me.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: It took me ages and ages and I don't think it was until I came back down here to Alices and my sister had stored stuff under my bed when she unpacked my house and I'd ring her up, where's this? And she goes, it's under your bed And like I, I still had the Dicky splint on and I up and down was, I was still a little bit stiff.

Wouldn't say that I was moving like Wonder Woman. I went to get under my bed. I couldn't crawl under it. I could not crawl under a dark space with something on top of me. Oh,

Rosie Skene: yeah.

Carmen Butcher: So I made a counseling appointment. I went there and she said to me, Carmen, okay, let's be reasonable about this.

Let's think about what are the chances of the bed actually falling on you? And I said, well, that's fine. I said, but let's think about this. What are the chances of a fucking bus roof falling on you? But it happened, didn't it? Yeah. He's okay, fair point. I don't crawl under I, I did a, I had to go under a house last year.

I was doing some gardening for someone and they needed a solenoid system. Why? I put in, and I kept putting it off and putting it off and putting it off. And I'm thinking, why don't you just do it? And then I went to go on and I went, my brain had been telling, making all these excuses, because I couldn't do it.

I could not crawl under this house without feeling. Like massive anxiety, panic, CLOs. Not even, it's not claustrophobic. It's just scared. Yeah. Scared that was gonna fall on me and I was gonna be trapped again. Like it's fucking, it's weird what it does to you. It's just weird. But yeah, so it was interesting.

But, if that keeps on giving and, since then I've had I got a bone infection, when I was in hospital in Darwin, I was getting really bad infections and I ended up spiking a temperature of 44 1 night.

Rosie Skene: Oh my god.

Carmen Butcher: They were trying to feed me medication and I was just throwing it up and I ended up with an, 'cause I'd had the surgery in Egypt, I ended up with this infection in my hip and it was fucking nasty.

And so I had to go and have these radio like special scan things on it where they put all that radioactive shit in you.

Rosie Skene: Oh, you have to drink. Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. And, so it turned out that there was this infection in there. There's probably some little scab beetle running around, having a little good old time in me.

And I had travel insurance and the minute you land in Australia the minute that plane will Oh yeah. First bit. Fuck you. Yeah, you're back on the deal because I, you choose where you go and I wanna Darwin and they said Sydney. So they agreed that I paid for everything in Sydney, but they would pay for me to fly back to Darwin.

And that's why the three days turned into three weeks. 'cause they wanted to wait till I could sit so they didn't have to pay for a stretcher. Guess what? Assholes I didn't sit for about three months, so they had to send me back on a stretcher. Pontus were fantastic. Anyway, I I had private health insurance luckily, 'cause I was in the private hospital.

My hospital bill alone in Darwin was like \$29,000. Yeah. Wow. But my health insurance were like, well, so when I had these scans, they go, oh yeah, we pay for them. If it's an inpatient thing, but we pay at the hospital of admission. And Sorry, but your hospital admission was Egypt, not Darwin. So these scans were over a thousand dollars each.

And Medicare, pops up about 120 bucks. Yes. I paying handover fist for this shit. And then I went to hydrotherapy, recommend it. Anyone that's got any sort of injury, fucking magic, magic shit. I walked in water, not on it in it, long before I ever

put my feet on the ground. Yeah. So they took me to the pool and they put you in a little sling and put you in and you'd stand in the pool and hold yourself.

And there was this dude there with this helmet on and I'm like, oh yeah, he was from East Timor, he was a copper over there, off duty. Gone into work, pick up his pay, there's a riot, someone cracked in one. They flew him to Darwin to treat him. Then they flew his wife and kid over and put them up in accommodation.

And the government paid for everything. And here I am as an Australian citizen. I was overseas doing the right thing, saved a lady's life, get flown back, and I paid for everything outta my own fucking pocket. I could not believe it. Nothing against that dude. I'm glad he got the help he needed, but why the hell are we paying for our own in our own country when everyone else is getting it for free?

Yeah. I couldn't believe it. So there's a lot of things that sort of, you know I think I ended up spending about 45 grand outta my own pocket as a result of this happening. And yeah, then I get this bone infection. Well, I get this bit of a pain and I started getting numb spots in my legs.

So my foot still is dicky. I still don't have any feeling in parts of my foot. I still can't feel my big toe. It's, and it changes, like it's so you could run a tissue up my leg and it's someone's cutting it with a knife. I can stand on a piece of glass and have no idea it's happened.

Rosie Skene: That's

Carmen Butcher: incredible.

Rosie Skene: Yeah, it's weird.

Carmen Butcher: And it, learning to drive, again, everything, climbing, ladders, everything, it's through your knee. It's not through your foot. So if you, if your leg can't go any further, you know you're there. And I so I getting these patches, so I went back to the pelvic specialist down in Adelaide and he took an X-ray and one of the screws had come out, popped out, and he said to me, you got two choices.

I can take the screw out, but if I hit your nerve again, you will not walk. That is it. But if I don't take it out and you fall over and it hit your nerve, you won't walk. I said, well, you're not gonna hit the nerve, are you? And he goes, I can't promise you that. So I went and bought myself an R six Yamaha, R six motorbike, rode fast motorbike, and then booked in and had the surgery done.

But when he opened it up, I had the worst bone infection. Yeah, there was pus coming outta my pelvis everywhere apparently out of all the screws and everything. Anyway, I remember waking up thinking I am gonna throw up. Every time I turned my head I just heaved and I had this red rash. 'cause I've got a scar on my ass that's about a foot long.

And I've got a scar on my other ass cheek from when I was a kid where I had a skin cancer or birthmark cut off. And that's, that was 23 stitches. So that's a decent one. So I tell everyone I was bitten by a shark or a crocodile and that's why I've got scarred ass cheeks. I don't wear bathers or anything anymore.

So I was in the, I got been moved from the, orthopedic ward, down to the infectious diseases ward, which is next to the morgue in the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Down in the basement. So I wake up and I'm like, where the fuck am I?

And I've got this fucking rash growing around my leg, and it's growing. You can literally watch it spreading and they're like, oh, you've got an infection. And we don't know what it is. We've taken, a sample. We just need it to the culture to grow. And we are treating you with broad spectrum antibiotics.

I couldn't move. I just vomited. . Anyway. It took three days for this culture to grow. And meanwhile I thought my, uh, lady parts was gonna be overrun with this rash, and it was gonna start eating me. And they finally, and then they said, all right, you've got the superbug.

Rosie Skene: Oh,

Carmen Butcher: what's the superbug? Anyway, they said, all right, we're gonna take you down. We're gonna have to put a pick line in. I didn't know what a pick line was. Never heard of it. So I go down there. So they put that little strap on your arm and I think, oh yeah, you beauty, they're gonna take some blood. No, they put a hose in your inside, your, in your arm.

In your inside your bicep. Yeah. And it travels through the vein all the way down into your heart. Yes. Yeah. And they hook the bottle up and they start pumping shit into you. And they said, oh, this will get changed every 24 hours. And it was called Vancomycin. And I said, all right, tell me about it. And they said, well, it's kind of like the medication that's one step off chemo medication.

, So you're gonna have to have blood tests every three days. 'cause it, it messes with your liver. So I come back to Alice Springs, I'm back on crutches. I've got an

ass full of stitches again. I've got this bumba on with this bottle and this tube hanging out my arm. And I'm like, oh I'm the picture.

But no, I went back to work 'cause I'm a twat and I went back in there and they were coming in hospital, in the home. So, okay, I get outta hospital first. I come back and I was meant to go into hospital here. No one picked me up at the airport. There was no ambulance. So a mate had come to pick my bag up and I'm like, the fuck.

So she drove me to the hospital. I go in there and said I'm meant to be in. They said, oh yeah, sorry. We forgot. We don't actually have a bed for you at the moment, so you're gonna have to sit in a e. So I'm in a e in a bed with a curtain around it, two beds with a curtain around it. And I've got this really lovely lady next to me all over the floor.

And I'm just like, I have got a super bug. I've got a thing going into my arm that's an open wound. I've got a wound on my ass. And I am laying here in a curtained off area full of spit and phlegm. No thank you. And then they're like, oh, sorry, we don't actually have your medication. I said, you knew I was coming.

Yeah, we've got no bed. And I said, well, why did you agree to take me? Why didn't I just stay in Adelaide? Yeah. And I said, you gotta get me outta here. I don't wanna be here. And they said, oh, you can do hospital and the home, but you have to spend 24 hours in the hospital first so we can assess you. I said, get me out of here now.

I want to leave. We don't have the medication. You'll have to come back later on. So we can mix it up. So I'm like, fuck you. So off I go. I go home and then I go back and I go in there and they're like, oh yeah, just sit here. And I said, do you think I can sit? I've got an ass full of stitches. Love. I can lay on my left side or I can stand, take your pick.

All right, well we just need to swap your bottle, mix it up and swap your bottle over, blah, blah, blah. So then they came and did hospital in the home. So every three days I'd come in and now giving blood is like trying to get blood out of a stone. Yeah. I don't have veins, I have nothing. Anyway, they, after three times, hospital home, said, sorry.

We're not doing your blood anymore, we can't get it. You need to go to the oncology at the hospital. So I go in there 11 times, 11 sticks in me before they finally get the blood outta me. So when I come in now everyone's I'm going to lunch, I'm

gonna lunch, I'm gonna lunch. So in the end, they got the chemo nurses and the pediatric nurses to come in to try and get it.

And I'm like, this is awful. And this is every three days for fuck's sake, because they have to adjust the levels they give you or your liver. And I'm surprised I had a liver left anyway, at that point in my life, have given, have the amount that you drink Anyway, so that, that was pretty funny.

That was, uh, interesting. And then I went down to Adelaide, back down there to the infectious diseases to have follow up and they took it outta my foot because they couldn't get outta my arm. And I'll tell you, that fucking hurts that. Have you ever had blood taken out your foot? Never. Jesus Christ.

Don't do it. Okay. Anyway, I'll make, they, let me have the PICC line pulled out. And they pull it out. They don't numb you, they pull it out. So there's this tube coming outta your chest all the way through your shoulder and down out your arm. And it's and then they said, all right, we're gonna give you this, these tablets.

And one was for, one's for a bone infection, one's for tuberculosis, and they mix 'em together and they said, your the liquid that comes outta your body will probably be orange. And I thought, oh yeah, if you drink a Baraka, you know it's difficult. No, I was crying and peeing Fanta. Oh wow.

For 12 weeks. It was ridiculous. And it went away. , I just kept going along and putting up with it all and the nerve pain has been horrific through my whole life. And then maybe three and a half years ago, I went and saw a neurosurgeon in Adelaide and they put a neurostimulator in my back.

So I Battery they put in with wires that runs to an electrode on your spinal cord. And when you. Your brain sends messages down to your leg. This or your, sorry, your leg, your nerve sends messages up to your brain to say, I'm hurting. It scrambles it.

Rosie Skene: Oh,

Carmen Butcher: . So I had that done and then my body rejected it and pushed it out.

So then I had it done again a year later and put in the other side of my back and my body's rejected it and pushed it out. And so I'm going back next week to see him again and they probably have to put it in my stomach.

Rosie Skene: Oh wow.

Carmen Butcher: So it's kind of been, Egypt's, I guess, kind of been the gift that keeps on giving.

Rosie Skene: Right. That is incredible. The amount of shit that you've been through, like just one of those traumas would mess a person up.

Carmen Butcher: It's I call it character building. It took me a long time to go overseas after that have been. And the first time I went was mates with mates to Bali a few years later. Then we got on there and they're like, oh, there's a bag that's been put onto the plane, but the passenger hasn't, so we've gotta get the bag and take it off the plane.

So mate's oh fuck, someone's probably gonna blow us up. I'm like, can you just shut the fuck up? 'cause I'm feeling really sick right now. Yeah. Like I'm kind of a bit of a shit magnet, really. And it's, yeah. But yeah, I mean, I look at it that I've made some really good friends out of it through a horrific experience.

And, I had my days where I wished to God that I had just been killed in it. I wondered how I would ever live my life if I didn't walk. And that's why I was determined to do it. And, I was 30, what are you gonna do with your life? It was a whole different, and my life has been different since, and I was told never to play sport and I waited five years.

And then I started playing again. And because that was what my life was. And I went back to work, and now I've been a cop for 27 years. And you're still in now? I'm having a mental health break at the moment 'cause I've just done 12 years of child abuse. Yeah, fair enough. And yeah, that shit messes with your head too.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. I can't imagine. I never did that. I couldn't do it. No way. I think anyone that works in that area is,

Carmen Butcher: well, it's got a shelf for two years, but no one wants to do it. And my forte was talking to kids. Yeah. I didn't find that part. I saw those images, the pictures, you can't unsee them. They're disgusting.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: I met someone after the crash a couple of years later, we got married.

I've got two beautiful kids out of it. I had foster kids for seven and six years from birth, and then the department took 'em and put 'em back with family and they got. Beaten and traumatized and starved and neglected. And then they rang me up two years after that and said, my partner and I split up in that time that they were gone and said, do you want them back?

And they came back and lived with me for two years. Uh, that, so that was just over a year ago. They left, they went, and now they live one's in Darwin and one lives here, but the trauma to them was too much. What had happened to them in that two years. Like we battled through it for two years, but as a single mom with four kids who

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Two other kids as well to, but

Carmen Butcher: we couldn't do it. My kids couldn't cope with it anymore either. It was, uh, the young boy was trying to stab me, trying to stab his sister. He ended up holding someone up at knife point to steal their handbag. And, but he's the most loving, gorgeous little man, and I still have him every second Sunday.

He comes over when and hangs out for the day and yeah, he's just, they just got fucked up. And if they'd left them. But because we weren't indigenous, they weren't allowed to stay, but they ruined them. Absolutely ruined them. So yeah, it's been a bit of a shit fight with that too. But yeah, we got there, right?

Rosie Skene: There's so much. But do you know what, like you've been through these most horrific things and you're still laughing like,

Carmen Butcher: well what's the saying? If you don't cry, you gotta though.

Rosie Skene: Exactly. Right. And through this whole thing, like just watching your face and if you don't laugh, you would cry. Yeah.

It's incredible.

Carmen Butcher: It took me a long time to be able to talk about the crash. Oh yeah. And then I kind of looked at it and went, you've gotta see the funny side of it. It was literally a comedy of errors.

But a comedy of errors that fucked up, really fucked up some people's lives. Yeah. Like Sue Ellen's, Sue Ellen, her mum they came over here and I took 'em over to the Rock.

Before I had my ankle done, and her mom had something like seven or eight surgeries on her arm before she could ever use her hand again. And she obviously had a, an acquired brain injury from the thing, but she passed away maybe two or three years ago now. So she, and quite a few people have passed since then.

And whether it's, at an age where they shouldn't and whether it's, and it's some of the people that were on it, like there's a lady and who got hardly any injuries, but emotionally and mentally, she suffered a lot from the

Rosie Skene: trauma.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. And there was a young police lady on there called Christie Olson who worked in Moi, I think it was Moi or in that area.

And she was a single mom of a 10-year-old boy, and she'd never been overseas. And the girl that I was just talking about said, come on, come, just come. And she was killed in it. And I think that's where the emotional trauma came into it, was because, one of the deceased on there was a 12-year-old boy.

And the bus landed on him. So he was actually they had to do DNA just to make sure it was him, because it was just, yeah. It was just so, it's so horrific. And people, I saw some people in the airport a year after it happened and they're like, oh, what happened to you? And I said, oh, that crash.

And they're like still. And it's you know what? It happens and people go, oh yeah, that's bad. And then everyone's life moves on. And people don't realize that this is something that affects you forever. Like it's 19 years and I'm about to go and have another lot of surgery Yeah. Related to it that I don't wanna have, because every time I have surgery it does , send me a little bit downwards.

But it's it doesn't go away. Just because something else has happened since then, or, it doesn't leave you. And especially, I get outta bed every morning and go, holy fuck, I feel like I'm 98. Because, my hips are, my hips sore, my feet foot and it is one foot sore, in my back.

I have issues with my back. And, it's sort of, it's, you find that, 'cause you can't use your right leg, so you rely on your left leg the whole time so you fuck your knee on

your left leg because your right leg doesn't work. So why you are compensating for other injuries, you end up with other injuries and it's, you've just gotta grit your teeth and blow through it.

And I had a mate who sent, rang me up one day and he said, look, I've got a friend who was in a parachuting accident. He broke his pelvis. He won't do his physio, he won't walk, he won't do anything, would you have a chat to him after what happened to you? And I said, yeah. And I said, but. It's about your head space.

If your head space is in the right place and you're determined enough, you can do it. I could have quite easily taken a payout, like taken workers' comp from the at 30 and sat in the corner and cried and felt sorry for myself for the rest of my life. What's the point? What's the point? What enjoyment am I gonna get outta that?

Don't get me wrong, I have my days where I just wanna lay in my bed and cry, but that's me and by myself on that. And I have one or two days here and there, and then I snap myself out of it. And, but you've gotta, you've gotta want to, you've gotta want you life back. You've gotta want to, I look at it that what happened was shit.

I got I got vilified quite badly by a couple of bosses that were like, she's not a hero. What about safety first and incident management? Did she take that? And I read it and it was in the paper. They put it, wrote a letter to the editor in the paper, and I read it and I'm like, oh, sorry, excuse me.

I didn't go and test all the joints on the bus roof after it crashed, before I dug someone's head out because they couldn't breathe. Go fuck yourselves.

How dare you? You weren't there. You were not there. And I say to people, you've not, you've never walked a day in my life, quite frankly.

I don't think you'd survive a day in my life. And but you, you're quite happy to judge and make comments, and I look at it and go, I should have died. I didn't die. I shouldn't be walking. I'm walking. Yeah. I'm playing sport. I've got, I couldn't have kids as a result of the crash, and that did destroy me.

But my partner had them and I don't see them as anything other than, they look like me, the poor little bastards. Not so little, my daughter. But I'm lucky. I am one of the lucky ones. Unlucky in a lot of ways my life. They say they keep throwing shit at the people who can take it, who can take it.

Some days I get there and go, how much? More before I don't get back up, stop. I've had enough. I've proven myself, leave me alone. Just stop. But it's yeah, it's just one of those things that's, and I've sat there now and thought I'm probably gonna die from a cut finger or something pathetic like that.

And then I also wonder if that's not what I was put on this earth for, then what was I put here for? Because by God it can't be any worse than that.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Oh my gosh. It's just so much what just keeps you going? Like how do you get yourself outta that head space of I just can't take it anymore.

'cause you said that happens, but I reckon it that would have to happen a lot, well, it do. I go

Carmen Butcher: through patches? Yeah. Majority, I'm probably 80% good. When I have, when I get a down patch, I can have a really down patch. And if things start going wrong around me, it sort of, it implodes.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: My children, my daughter is 13 and my son is eight. My 13-year-old daughter is nearly as tall as me with size 11 feet. But she has the same personality and soul as my father. Now. My father was one of nature's gentlemen. He is one of the most beautiful men, and he died. Seven years ago. And that was a really low patch for me because he kind of held the family together.

So outta my family, I have a brother and sister, and my mother left and my brother and I haven't spoken in three years. My mom and I have a strained relationship and my sister and I get on very well. So that's pretty much what I have left. But my daughter, she was seven when my dad died, and they got on like a house on fire.

They used to go fishing together and everything. And she just loved him. And she's so much like him that helps me. But those two kids is what I live for. That is my, they are like the love of my life. And my daughter has often said to me, mom, if you died, I'd die If you weren't there, I wouldn't cope.

. So when I'm feeling really low and feeling those times where I wish I wasn't here, I think of those comments and go, what would that do to those two little human beings?

And I can't do that to them.

Rosie Skene: Yeah,

Carmen Butcher: that's, they are what keeps me going. They are my lifeline, basically. And you know my daughter, 'cause she's a teenager now and she had a go at me the other day and I cried and she said, mom, 'cause they have a very open heel. They can express their feelings and I, because they need to be able to, and it's sort of a bit more repressed and the other house.

And she said, mom, I feel like I can't be angry anymore because you cry. Oh. And I waiting, I was already feeling a bit low. And I said, the reason I cry is because I love you so much that when you say certain things it hurts. And I. I come across as the big tough asshole, but I'm just that soft, mushy, marshmallow inside that I don't tell anyone.

And I said, so let's make a deal. You can have your anger, but just be careful the words that you choose.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And she's okay, that's fair. So we have a really good open relationship like that. So, sometimes it doesn't bother me at all. I'm like, oh, here she goes, teenager. But overall, we have very few moments like that with her at all.

Like she's just, I went and did her parent teacher interviews on Friday and every teacher, oh, Maddy, she's such a beautiful kid. She's, I love teaching her. And it's she's actually the same at home. She's not one of these kids that's an angel at school and then turns into the terrible at home.

The devil at home. She's a beautiful, so, and my son is just the most beautiful little man. Like same, he's the most loving, kindest little dude. And I just, yeah that's what does it just, and I look at it and go, i've got a house, i've got a family and i've still got a job and i'm lucky.

Yeah. I'm luckier than a lot of other people like you. You've gotta look at it that way. And so many people take so much in their lives for granted and your life you take for granted. But, that opened me up that day that, that, well, that, that trip opened me up. But it's like you can't keep taking shit for granted.

You can't put stuff off and wait and use it on a special occasion , because tomorrow could be your last day. You just don't know.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And it, it could be from anything, anything at all. So yeah I've learned a lot. Have I applied at all? Not all the time, no. I'll never say my life's perfect and rosy 'cause it's fucking, it's far from it.

But I can sit here when I'm in a good place and say. You should be proud of what you've achieved, you should be proud of where you've come, where you've come, how far you've come from, from what's happened. I've had one of those police careers that shit magnet thing has kept happening I was involved in a shooting when I was out in that, a police shooting when I was out in that community.

And it, it was a really shitty, tough time. And, I went through periods in Darwin where we got 11 dead bodies in three shifts. And you just sit there and you go, what? What did I do in my last life? What the fuck did I do? Because it must have been shocking because everyone tells me in this life that my biggest issue in my life, my biggest fault is that I'm too nice.

I try, like I, 'cause I always wanna help everybody else, but at detriment to myself.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: So I wonder, they say no good deed goes unpunished. Well, fucking hell. I get punished or I, but, shit happens. Yeah.

Rosie Skene: I think, yeah, you should congratulate yourself and see how far you've come. 'cause what a journey .

, I think for anyone that's gonna be listening to this, they're going to be going, what the fuck am I whinging about? When this is what you've gone through over 20 years. 'cause you're in the cops before that and then now you're here able to talk about it. I just find that phenomenal

Carmen Butcher: and it took me a long time.

And I, like I said, I always never go to counselor., I guess you become good at compartmentalizing and doing that sort of stuff.

But it started bad and it stayed bad like the rest, you just got the unlucky shifts, I guess they call it. And I don't know. It was, yeah, I don't know. And it's sort of when I. Certain things will come back to you at certain times. And they tried to send us to a counselor, then I'm like, I'm not fucking going to a counselor.

Fuck that bullshit. And like I said, I used to go in there and sit in that room and stare out the window for an hour and waste everyone's money 'cause I wasn't paying for it. . And finally when I couldn't crawl under my bed, I thought, I need help.

This is when I actually need help. But it took, you've gotta be ready for it. Yeah. You've gotta, you've gotta want to accept that and you've gotta want that change. But I will say now the lady that I talked to now, Mark Thomas actually put me onto work. She's amazing, absolutely amazing. She's in Melbourne and I do it through Skype.

And if you find the right person it does help. It actually does help. But you've gotta want it, you've gotta be ready for it. It does nothing.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Yeah, I couldn't agree with that more actually. Like one, having the right person, especially for first responders because Yep. And even with what you've been through, that's just above and beyond, being a first responder, but just having that, uh, awareness of what first responders go through, that can be so hard just to find someone to be able to do that.

But like you said, you have to be active and you have to want it, otherwise they can tell you what to do till the cows come home. If you're not gonna do what they, suggest or, and you don't want it, it's never gonna change for you.

Carmen Butcher: Yeah. And there's no point going, there's no point wasting their time for your own.

Yeah. Because I was forced into it before the lady I'm with now, and it wasn't working. And then when I, and maybe because we didn't gel, it wasn't working as well, lovely lady, nothing against her, but when I met Jill and started talking with her, and I said to her one day, I was made to do this.

And she actually apologized to me and said, am I making you do anything you don't want? And I said, no, because now I'm ready. I said, unfortunately that box has been opened and now it's opened. Yeah. I can't stop what's coming out of it, so I need to be able to deal with it. I need to be able to, either put it back in the box

and lock it and have a complete another fucking mental breakdown and be completely nuts in a couple of years time.

Or I need to deal with the shit and be there for my kids.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And, they're still too young to, to really, my daughter gets, she sat and listened to me, tell someone a while back about it and she said, mom, I've never heard you talk about Egypt. I've never heard you say it. She goes, that's amazing.

What you did was amazing. She goes, I, she was in awe. She couldn't believe it. Like I sit there and talk about, I went over to the Olympics in Sydney in 2000 and as a hairdresser for just cuts. They had the franchise and cut all the athletes' hair and lived and worked in the Athletes' Village for a month.

I met 'em all and I've got photos of Cathy Freeman and Michelle Tims and all those sorts of people, and they're the sorts of stories I tell my kids.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: Because I share with 'em. And she heard that and 'cause she's old enough now, and she just said, mom I had no idea. She, they knew it had happened.

They knew that I'd had injuries and that it was bad, but she'd never heard the whole thing. Like they, they know Lynn. We get on really well. Lynn's been over here to Alice a few times as well. And I see her every time I go to Melbourne. And the kids love her and, see she came over here and we went to water holes and she'd take her leg off and put it on a sign that said no swimming and take a photo and stuff.

She makes, the laugh of it too. And, she was determined to walk again and she got calipers and I flew over to Melbourne to watch her walk for the first time with calipers. She can't do it long distance. Without support, but she wanted to prove she could do it, and she did.

And she was a teacher and they had no kids, and suddenly she's got no husband, no job, no leg, no ability to walk. And, she said to me, Carmen you lost more out of

this crash than I did. And I said, no, Lynn, I didn't. I said, look at where you're at. She goes, but you look at what your life was before.

And this is obviously before, like after the crash, you said this and what it is now. She said, although I could see you playing Olympic basketball wheelchair because you're a stubborn bitch. But I wouldn't let it get me down.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: I'm actually grateful for that stubborn streak. I'm grateful that I can be a hard ass bitch sometimes.

And on the surface, and, when I'm at work in work mode, I can be a hard ass bitch, but I'm always firm, but fair because. You never know. And this is what I always say to my kids, you never know what someone's going through. So always be careful what you say because you don't know what the words are gonna do.

And my daughter, like they're saying that any kid at school that needs help, she's the first one there to do it. So she, she listens to that personality is there for her. She's got that kind soul. And that makes me feel proud of my kids as well. That I've, with everything that I've done and the, I guess sometimes the shitty view and the cranky aspect I have on life and what it dishes out to you, I can still put like good morals in my kids.

Yeah. So, yeah.

Rosie Skene: Yeah. Thank you so much. Is there anything else that you wanted to share?

Carmen Butcher: No, I don't think so. Just don't give up. 'cause all I say is don't give up. It's not, I'm a PTSD sufferer. Surprise.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: And not just from the crash, from the police related. It was actually connected to police related trauma rather than the crash.

The crash was just a little gift that got put on top with a nice, big red bow that keeps on giving its presence to me. But, you gotta look at, every good day is a positive. Every day you wake up. That's a positive. , You gotta look at the good things in your life and concentrate on them.

, I used to get really angry at myself that I couldn't do what I used to do, and I'd be so angry and then I'd cry from the anger. And I never used to cry. And now I never cried. Never. I always saw it as a sign of weak, of weakness. You pathetic. Stop crying, but cry. Let it out.

You've gotta let it out. If you don't want anyone to see you do it in the shower, God, my shower gets double the water load going down the drain of what comes out the tap. You've gotta, you've gotta, you've gotta try and laugh at it. I, like I do.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: If you don't I look at what I went through and go, my God, a lot of people would dig a hole and bury themselves in it.

And I had that choice, but I made choice not to do it. But just don't give into it.

Rosie Skene: When you talk like that, like I there's a, I don't know, like a little quote or something. It's change your mindset from I have to, to, I get to I have to go and do this, but, you know, you actually get to live your life and you get to wake up every morning and it just, if you can change that one thing, I think in your mindset, it just makes a world of difference.

Carmen Butcher: That's right. My life could have been snuffed out 19 years ago and I wouldn't have these kids. Yeah. I wouldn't have had, as, as horrible. Policing is a career that exposes your brain to things that the brain should never be exposed to. Yeah. Same as being a paramedic and not everyone's cut out for it.

And, I, when I got diagnosed with PTSD I struggled really bad because I was like this, I'm weak. It broke me, it got into my head, and then I look at everything that I went through and went, well, fuck me. Who wouldn't have a little bit of creaky kray in there if, you'd been through that, give yourself a break.

You're still functioning, you're still living, you're still working, you're still raising your kids, you're still paying your mortgages. You can still drive a car, you can still go to the shops. So you, it's a negative on your life, but the positive is you living with it.

You overcoming it. You'll never beat it, but you're overcoming you, you keeping it at a minimum. Except for the days. And you know what? Let yourself have those days. Don't hide 'em. You've gotta have 'em. Because if you let 'em build up by God, when they do finally crack, it takes a lot to come out of it.

Rosie Skene: Yeah.

Carmen Butcher: So, yeah.

Rosie Skene: Thank you so much for sharing your journey. It is. I just, unbelievable is the word that comes to my mind. Like character building. Character building. You have must have the best character. And how are the girls in Darwin? How are they? They're good. They're good.

Carmen Butcher: They both left the police. Yeah, Jeannette went up to assistant commissioner and she left and went and did deputy CEO of Territory, families, like children, youth justice stuff. And Helen's been out now for about five or six years. But yeah, no, they're good. They're both still got their humor.

And I love, like Helen and I, we, our humors are very similar and we,

Rosie Skene: yeah,

Carmen Butcher: We. Like I said they were my family. They were everything for me through that period of time. And I owe them, they put up with me and everything that happened and, being shit on. And I owe them everything and they'll always hold a special place in my life as a result of that.

Rosie Skene: So. Beautiful. Thank you again. It's been amazing to talk to you and I just, I'm so grateful for you sharing a journey for everyone.

Carmen Butcher: No worries. Thank you.

Rosie Skene: I hope you've enjoyed today's episode. If you have, make sure to hit subscribe so you never miss any new ones. We release fresh content every Tuesday, and while you're there, take a moment to leave us a review. I'll genuinely appreciate your thoughts. Don't forget to connect with me on Instagram and Facebook at Tactical Yoga Australia and share this episode with your friends, family, and work means to spread inspiration.

Your support means the world. My name is Rosie Skene Join me again next week for another empowering and positive episode of Triumph Beyond Trauma. Until then, be kind to your mind and trust in the magic of your consistent and positive efforts. Triumph beyond Your trauma is closer than you think. Have the best week.