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Dancing with my Stoma

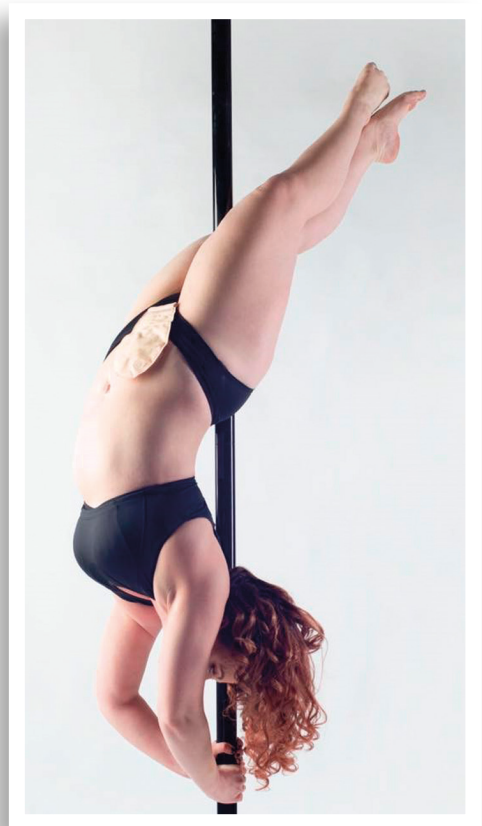
In the year 2003, I was just 18 years old and a first-year University student when I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. I had been suffering with the effects of the disease for years already, but after a misdiagnosis, my health only deteriorated further. Eventually I became so ill that I had no choice but to defer my first year at university, put all my plans on hold, and move back home. It wasn't long before a new doctor visited me at home and found me in such severe pain that I couldn't move.

He immediately phoned the hospital, and I was admitted as an inpatient.

The consultant gave my parents some terrifying news about how close I'd come to death. His exact words were, 'Where have you been until now? If you hadn't brought her in today, she wouldn't be here tomorrow.'

I had septicaemia (*Ed: a life-threatening level of blood poisoning*) and many other complications related to the Crohn's disease.

Eventually I was able to go back to University, but I found it incredibly tough.



Exercise gave Ceri her confidence back.

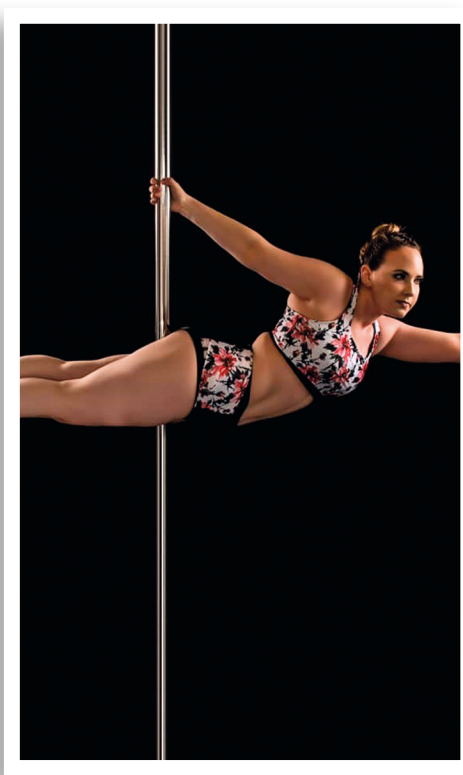
I struggled to get up in time for classes because the disease left me permanently exhausted. My emotions were up and

down, and I even fell out with my friends because they couldn't cope with my condition. Once I was prescribed the right medication for me and my Crohn's settled down, I decided to move back home and finish my degree at a local university.

Fast-forward to 2010. The illness started affecting me again; the Crohn's was incredibly active and it was clear that my medication was no longer working. The consultant ran a series of tests and confirmed that my large bowel had become damaged and ulcerated, leaving me with surgery as my best option for recovery. I'd been warned years before that surgery could be an option, but back then I wasn't ready for it; I was too young and scared. But by 2010, I was mentally prepared for the challenge.

This time, I was in my first serious relationship, and I had my friends and family around me for support. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I could have accepted it the way I did. The operation for my ileostomy took place on 19 December 2010, and although I experienced a lot of pain, I immediately felt an improvement. It felt strange to say it, but it was only after they'd removed my bowel that I could see just how much I'd held myself back by avoiding surgery.

I'd always been one to prefer a good book to sports, but as the years went by, I found myself putting on weight. I decided it was time to change my ways. I took up jogging and attended a pole-dancing class; after just one session, I was hooked. Now I pole-dance 3 - 4



Now Ceri is fitter than ever before.

times a week, and my stoma definitely doesn't hold me back!

In 2017, I had a full panproctocolectomy (*Ed: the removal of the entirety of the colon, rectum, and anal canal*), making my stoma permanent. My ileostomy is here to stay, and I can't imagine my life without it. Whilst I still have my rough days, the good ones far outweigh the bad. I refuse to let my stoma affect my life in a negative way anymore.