



PHOTOGRAPH BY DELLY CARR

A DAY
IN THE
LIFE OF

Turia Pitt

Turia Pitt is more than a survivor.
The Ironwoman tells **HARRIET EDMUND** why she sets such enormous goals for herself, and shares how life is now that she's achieving them.

When Turia Pitt wakes on Monday July 25, 2016, two things are different from any other day.

She's slept in – it's 6am instead of her usual 5am wake up, and it's her 29th birthday.

Some things are all too familiar, though. There's a dull ache across her shoulders, which she attributes to poor swimming technique, and her legs are heavy after the weekend training camp in north Sydney.

Turia is preparing for a tilt at arguably the pinnacle of athletic endurance events – Ironman World Champs in Kona, Hawaii. A feat she describes as terrifying, but that's what she loves about it.

Her fiancé **Michael Hoskin** is still asleep. He drove three hours from the couple's Ulladulla, NSW, home the day before as a birthday surprise. "It was cool that he surprised me during training, but I was like: 'so, where's my present!'" laughs Turia, in her typical tell-it-how-she-sees-it approach.

Birthdays are definitely a time to reflect, says Michael. It's hard to believe just five years ago, Turia couldn't walk after suffering burns to 65 per cent of her body when competing in a Western Australia ultramarathon. Now, she's about to line up for her second Ironman event in five months – plus, she hiked Kokoda in between.

"No human is meant to be capable of surviving what she experienced," says Michael. "So, what she's doing now is phenomenal, it's way beyond what we would have predicted life to be like."

And, it's largely due to Turia's determination and downright stubbornness to set – and get – unthinkable goals.



"No human is meant to be capable of surviving what she experienced," says Turia's fiancé Michael Hoskin.



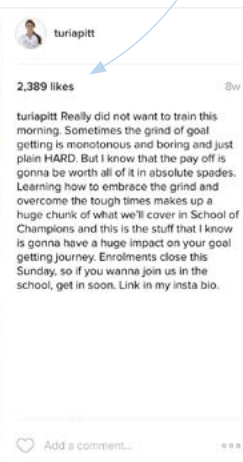
Not even her birthday warrants a day off training. After a quick breakfast together, Turia says goodbye to Michael and drives to the coast for a two-hour run.

Her Kona training program will peak at 25 hours a week. But, today, neither the picturesque trail or her favourite gangsta rap blasting in her ears are enough to pump her up.

A mid-run post to her 100,000+ Instagram followers is refreshingly honest. "Really did not want to train this morning. Sometimes the grind of goal-getting is monotonous and boring and just plain HARD."

Turia says it's not realistic to think achieving a major goal is going to be easy. But imagine swimming 3.8km with your fist closed or riding 180km when you can't grip the handlebars, such is Turia's effort given four left fingers and her right thumb are amputated. And then there's the challenge of regulating her body temperature while she runs. As a result of Turia's burns her skin does not sweat. So, running 42.2km during the hottest part of the day in Hawaii will mean regular pit stops to pour water over herself. If she doesn't keep her core temperature under control, she will risk passing out.

Her coach Bruce Thomas, of Energy Link Coaching, says Turia's mental toughness is her



greatest asset. "It's ridiculous the things she is overcoming, but she just toughs it out," he says. "Once she decides to do something she just goes about executing it, and that's a real testament to her commitment."

At the end of her run there's no time to shower. Turia calls a cab and heads straight to the airport. She's part-way through a national motivational speaking tour and tonight's event is in Melbourne. The driver recognises her and wants to chat.

For a self-confessed recluse Turia's okay with her new life in the public eye. "I'm a bit of an introvert, but I can turn it on when I need to," she says.

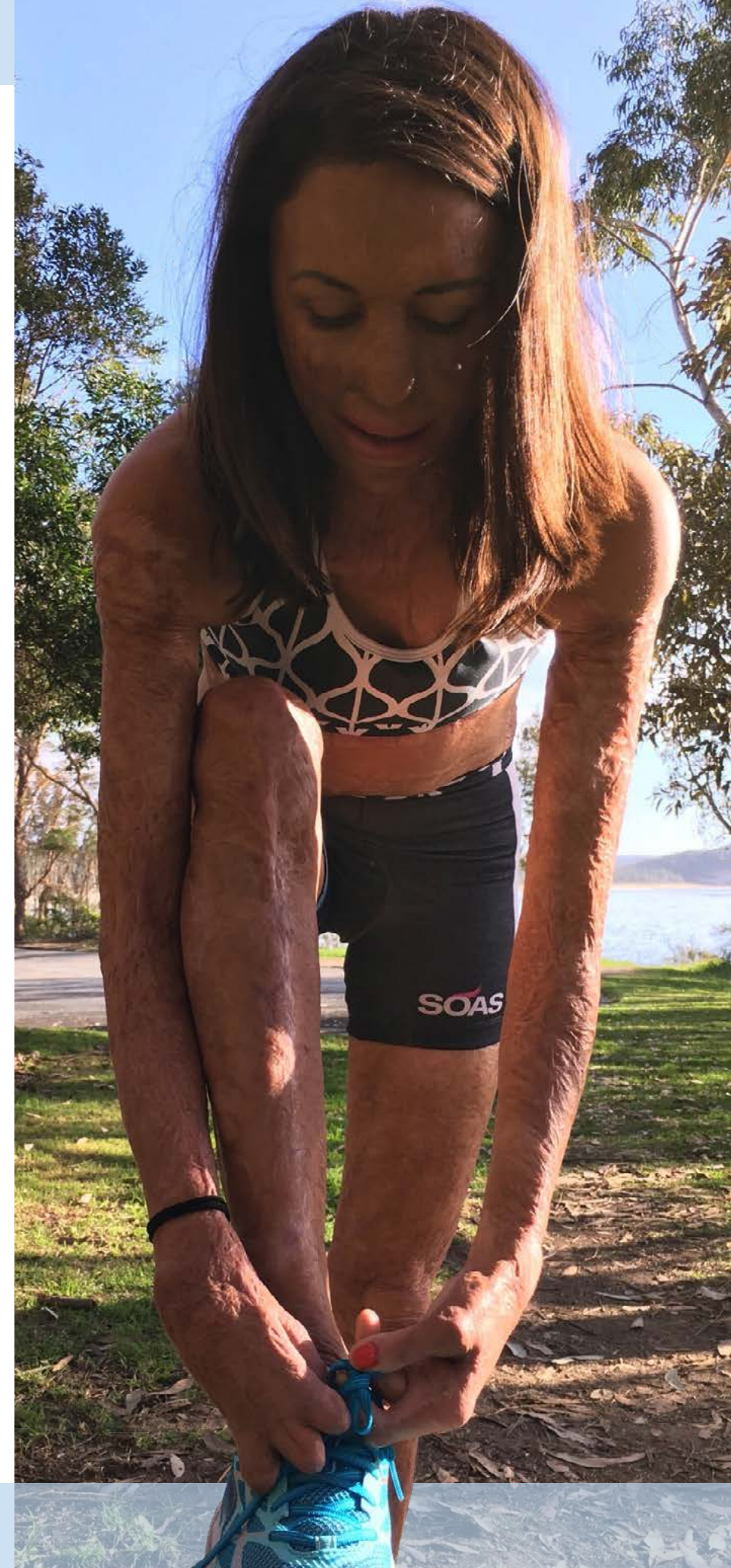
So popular is Turia now that her name is typed into Google more than 240,000 times a month. "I think I'm in a good spot now," she admits. "I can influence peoples' lives in a really positive way and it's incredible."

In fact, more than 7000 people have taken part in her online goal getting programs this year – a free 7-Day Challenge and her paid eight-week School of Champions program. As a result, participants have reported leaving violent relationships, changing careers, quitting smoking, entering marathons and finding the strength to recover from physical and mental setbacks of their own.

"I don't really care if someone says: 'you're inspirational'. I care about what I've inspired you to do," she says.

After the fire it wasn't long until Turia started taking her own affirmative action. She recalls the day when her Rio Tinto boss made her redundant from the mining engineer job she loved. "I'd just got out of hospital, I was 24, living with my in-laws and we were on Centrelink. I thought: 'who am I now, I don't have a job, I can't run'. I had to find something to do. I wanted to make something meaningful out of it all, and validate what happened."

Turia now donates 10 per cent of her earnings to Interplast, helping provide ▶



“Learning to be vulnerable – to ask for and accept help – is one of the best things that ever happened to me.”



Above: Turia crossing the line at the Port Macquarie Ironman earlier this year.



reconstructive surgery to people in developing countries. She's also hiked Kokoda and sections of the Great Wall of China and the Inca Trail to raise additional funds.

Arriving in Melbourne Turia and her managers meet in her hotel room. A birthday cake arrives and Turia learns they will all be joining her in Hawaii. It will be a team effort and she's grateful.

"I am terrified of Kona," she concedes.

So why do it? "For the end result," she says. "No amount of money can buy that feeling of achieving something really big, something you're terrified of, something you don't actually know if you'll be able to do."

After finishing Port Macquarie Ironman in 13 hours and 24 minutes in May this year, Turia says she's proven her point to the collective 'them', those who suggested she set goals such as getting her licence back and "maybe even" getting married.

But Kona is different. This race is about self-improvement and making the most of opportunities that come her way.

It's the recent death of Martin Van der Merwe, a South African runner who was with Turia on the day of the fire, that made her take stock.

Martin was training for an adventure race with his son Shaun when hit by a truck.

"I'd always thought: 'okay I've been burned, nothing else can happen to me now'. I felt invincible, but Martin's death reinforced that our time on this planet is so fleeting and fragile, we have to embrace whatever time we have here."

"You can either live a half life and never take a risk, or you can say: 'f*** it. I'm here, I'm going to live as best I can. I'll take a few risks, and if things don't work out that's okay'."

There's no doubt Turia pushes her limits as a burns survivor and an athlete, says Amanda Osborne, her physiotherapist from Body Align Physio. But she always takes a methodical and mindful approach to her rehabilitation and training.

"We use clinical Pilates and a home exercise

program to focus on areas that are stiff and tight from the scars, as well as stiffness in her joints that have seized over time," says Amanda. "As a result of the accident, Turia's right calf and ankle aren't as flexible as her left. It was causing instability and pain in her pelvis, right knee and plantar fascia when she ran. But she doesn't report any of that pain anymore."

Turia is big on mitigating her risks as she approaches World Champs. She spent two weeks heat-training in Thailand to help acclimatise before the event. She also added electronic gears and brakes to her bike to better fit her hands. Plus, she asked Michael to ride with her on race day for moral support.

Asking for help was once difficult for the high achiever. "I had to come to terms with the fact that I'd lost the ability to do so many things independently. I felt like asking for help was somehow cheating," she says. "The thing is, learning to be vulnerable – to ask for and accept help – is one of the best things that ever happened to me."

Turia gives another example of recently asking her mum, Celestine Vaite, to cook some post-training meals for her to keep in the freezer. "I find it hard to eat really good meals when I'm always busy," she admits. "And, whenever I go back to hospital they are always telling me I have to put on weight."

As Turia's body fought to heal itself from the burns her metabolism rapidly increased, making it hard to gain weight. By the time she left hospital six months after the incident she weighed just 47 kilos. She couldn't feed herself, and what she did eat was junk food. "It was meant to help me gain weight, but I didn't have any energy – I was always tired, in pain, on antidepressants and just really down." Turia started eating healthy and nutritious food again and noticed an immediate improvement in how well she slept and felt. "Now, it's a matter of getting enough in to fuel my training," she

says. "Because you can over train but you can also under eat."

As Turia takes to the stage in Melbourne her cropped red top shows off her scarred stomach. "You have to wear it like a boss," she says of her body, which required skin graft tissue from America.

She informs the audience: "Since my accident I've had over 200 operations... My latest is a series of laser surgery, which is like sanding back an old piece of wood."

Giant images are projected onto the screen behind her. There's one of Turia and the runners being rescued from the Kimberley desert on September 2, 2011. Another of Turia in hospital where she flat-lined three times. And then a video of Michael and Celestine cheering as Turia, wearing her black compression mask and moon boots, climbs her first flight of stairs.

It's no wonder her final message of the night resonates. "Do we curl up or do we step up?" she asks. "Whatever your goal, challenge yourself and see what it is that you're really made of. Because I believe that all of us are capable of greatness, you just have to go after it."

After a rousing response, Turia boldly announces, "it's actually my birthday today!" And she leads off the singing of 'Happy Birthday' as another cake arrives.

When the audience is given a chance to ask questions the inevitable "what's next?" is raised. Turia admits she never gave herself time to reflect on her achievements before the fire. And so, after Kona there will be plenty of downtime – surfing, fishing and freediving with Michael.

But Michael hints at perhaps starting a family, and then there's a new book and finishing her Masters of Business.

Turia heads to the back of the room for book signings and to pose for selfies.

When she finally gets back to the hotel she orders room service – a pork roll – does her stretches and climbs into bed. It's 12.30am. **EW**

TURIA'S TOP 5 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU FIND GREATNESS

The more you know about yourself, the more you can understand your potential for greatness, says Turia. To help, she suggests answering these questions (Turia's responses are in red).

1. What is one thing you love about yourself? *I really like my sense of humour. I think it's awesome that I've been able to maintain that.*

2. What is a moment of success you've made happen? *Ironman.*

3. Who makes you feel good about yourself? *Michael Hoskin.*

4. Describe a moment when you felt truly excited or happy about what was happening in your life? *When I found out the team of people around me were coming to Hawaii. I am really grateful that they are working to achieve the things that I'm doing.*

5. Think about a challenge you've had to overcome – how did it feel to triumph over that adversity? *Do I really have to answer that one (laughs)?!*