

ATHLETE

# Liam Malone



1993  
NELSON

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Once upon a time, a young boy named Liam filled his days like a lot of Kiwi kids. He played sports, rode his mountain bike, and snowboarded in the winter time. But when the other kids put on their shoes to go outside, Liam put on his legs.

Liam was born without his fibula bones. As a toddler, he tried to walk, but it was almost impossible to balance. No matter how hard he tried, he kept falling down. So when he was 18 months old, Liam's legs were amputated below his knees.

It can be hard to be different, but Liam's parents taught him that he could do anything. When he was the slowest runner at school, his dad said, 'One day you'll have legs that can go faster than them all.' But sometimes Liam still felt sad. 'Why can't I have real legs?' he asked. After a while, he always wore trousers so no one could see his prosthetics.

One day, Liam's mother got very sick. Cancer. Liam was really scared. The emotions were overwhelming. His mum was someone who made him feel safe and

confident about who he was. How would he cope without her? But instead of asking for help or telling his mum how he felt, he avoided the problem. Thinking about it was simply too hard.

When Liam's mum died, each day felt harder than the one before. He didn't know if he could go on, but with the help of his friends and family, he set himself a goal. It was the only way he could fight through the pain.

Liam's goal was bold. He would become an athlete. It was brave, too. The thought of people seeing his legs made him so nervous he wanted to throw up. But this time he accepted help. People raised money to buy him special running blades. Were these the fast legs Liam's dad had talked about?

As Liam sat on a plane to Rio de Janeiro, he dreamed of a gold medal. Most of all, he wanted to make his friends and family proud. Two weeks later, he'd made the whole country proud. And had two gold medals hanging around his neck.

Liam committed to running as a way to dig himself out of a dark place, never knowing where those blades would take him. His courage helped him prove, to himself and to others, that it's okay to feel sad. It's okay to be scared. Things can get better. And when they do, anything is possible.

ILLUSTRATED BY **Neil Bond**

