



TWO

OF US

STORY BY Nicole Partridge | PHOTOGRAPH BY Edwina Pickles

Anders Halvorsen, 66, part of the Halvorsen boat dynasty, and his wife, Julie, 64, married in 1974. Anders, who suffered a spinal injury one year earlier, was told he would not live past 40 but has defied the odds and fathered three children.

**A**NDERS: When I first saw Julie I thought she looked really hot. She was a singer in a gospel group and I was the shy guy at some of her concerts. Weeks later, a friend introduced us. “Julie, meet Anders Halvorsen.” Julie eyed me critically and said, “You can’t be Anders Halvorsen.” When I asked, “Why not?” she said, “Because my girlfriend told me you were tall, blond and good-looking.”

“Wow! This girl’s got some spunk.” I thought.

Julie and I dated for a while and then shortly after my 21st birthday she dumped me. She told me I didn’t talk enough. A year later, my life took an unexpected turn.

It was April 20, 1973 – a Good Friday – and I was on my way with seven other blokes riding motorbikes to the Bathurst races. I was in the lead on my Honda 750 when a random biker we didn’t know overtook me on a hairpin bend, lost control and tumbled onto the road ahead. To avoid him, I continued straight, ploughing headlong into a metal guardrail, then flipping over the top and landing on my head.

I was taken to Sydney’s Royal North Shore Hospital and recovered in intensive care, where

doctors told me I had a fractured dislocation of the spinal cord and would never walk again.

Months later, I got a surprise visit from Julie. I was really crook. The night before, my catheter had jammed and I had blood in my lungs. Despite my pain, I thought Julie looked lovely. I knew all the blokes in the ward would be envious.

A year later, Julie and I started dating again. When it got serious, I asked her to see my specialist, to find out what life with a paraplegic would look like. I waited nervously in the car. After 45 minutes, Julie came back smiling: “All good,” she said. Shortly afterwards, I proposed.

The early days of marriage were tough. Julie went from a glamorous job in Sydney to working in a mouse-infested, corrugated-iron shed in Dubbo [in central-west NSW], where I ran my own business. To top it off, I was in a wheelchair. We’d been told we couldn’t have children but I had faith and believed otherwise, and in December 1976 our first son was born.

Julie is an incredible mother, so selfless and capable, but sometimes the pressure of having to do it all got to her. One morning, I was in the bathroom when Julie stormed in. “I’ve had

enough,” she announced. “I’m going home, back to Sydney.” I recall moaning, “Can’t it wait until I’ve finished on the loo?” It is something we laugh about now.

I have a feeling I’m going to walk again, even though I’ve been told this is impossible. Then again, so was having children. I can do anything with Julie by my side.

**J**ULIE: In the 1970s, my girlfriend and I went to youth group and often compared notes about the hot guys. One afternoon my friend said, “Julie, you’ve got to meet Anders Halvorsen: he’s so good-looking!” Growing up in Turramurra [in Sydney’s north], I knew of the Halvorsen family boat-building business and had a mental picture of this hunky bloke, but when we met after a church event I was disappointed and told him so.

Weeks later, Anders invited me on a date, but he was too quiet for me and we broke up. It was Easter Sunday a year later when a friend phoned and told me Anders has been in a terrible accident. I was speechless. I knew Anders to be such a go-getter. He was the guy who liked fast skiing and fast bikes and now his life was hanging in the balance.

I went to visit him and he looked grey, thin and so sick. Later that night I had a bubble bath and cried. The reality of what paraplegia meant to a young man like Anders was such a shock. A few months later Anders was discharged, recovering well, and he invited me to join him at a friend’s wedding. He picked me up in a red, two-door Monaro with GT stripes. I was so impressed with his independence. We talked a lot that night ... of his hopes and dreams. Straight away something shifted and the relationship deepened.

Anders suggested we see his specialist, Dr John Yeo, who told me Anders had a life expectancy of 15 to 20 years and that he would never have children. At the end of the meeting Dr Yeo said, “Julie, I have a feeling if anyone can make it, you and Anders can.”

We got married 15 weeks later and almost immediately started trying for a family. A year later, I was pregnant. A few days after Lars was born, we visited Dr Yeo. He was delighted – and curious – and we did our best to describe our own home version of a few acrobatics ... coupled with prayer.

Motherhood wasn’t easy. I did everything from taking the bins out to driving on family holidays. I’d sometimes say, “I can’t do this, Anders.” He’d look at me calmly and say, “Julie, you can.”

Not only has Anders lived to 66 and fathered three children, but he has run successful businesses and completed a master’s of business administration. In 1996, he also fulfilled his crazy idea of climbing Mount Kosciuszko. At one point, on our way to the summit with our kids and friends in tow, we reached a narrow, icy track. Anders thought it was all over until a friend said, “Nah, we’re not giving up.”

So we rallied some other hikers, who supported the wheels that were suspended over the side of the track. Everyone was yelling and encouraging one another. It was a remarkable display of unity. Anders made it to the top. He is such a courageous man and life with him has been quite the adventure. ■

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