

MEDI-FILE

No bowel control BUT I'M A MODEL!

Anja was told she could never become a model

Anja Christoffersen, 21, Fortitude Valley, Qld

Putting on make-up and pearls, I posed as my mum, Riborg, followed me around with a camera.

At 14, I'd wanted to be a model since I could walk.

'Don't ever use your disability as an excuse,' Mum always said.

I'd been born with a disorder called VACTERL association, which covers different issues which tend to occur together.

In my case, I didn't have the usual muscles and nerves in my rectum or anus, which meant I had no control over my bowels. I had chronic pain in my

reproductive and urinary systems too.

Surgeries had left me with scars on my stomach and under my right arm.

But Mum never made me feel different to others.

Anything is possible, I thought.

Since I was keen to model, Mum encouraged me to apply to agents. Invited for an interview, I was so excited when I walked in.

'Do you have any scars?' the agent asked.

I lifted up my shirt.

'You can never model with those kind of scars,' he said.

'You can't go to a casting wearing a bikini.'

I was gutted.

My scars aren't ugly, I thought.

They represent surgeries that saved my life.

'Believe in yourself,' Mum encouraged.

So I carried on

contacting agencies. Two years later, I'd almost lost hope when I got an audition in Brisbane.

I'd need to wear a bikini, so I used our hallway as a catwalk until I felt ready.

After the audition, I was thrilled to be selected.

'This is incredible!' Mum smiled

Working on short contracts, I loved every second. But I had some scary moments due to my incontinence as there was no protection in a bikini.

I'd prepare for shoots by emptying my bowel, but once, I felt something run down my leg as I walked the runway. Thankfully, the room was dark!

'I'm sick,' I said running to the bathroom.

Cleaning myself up, I went back without anyone being any the wiser.

'I don't want people to make excuses for me,' I said to Mum.

And my hard work paid off



My tummy scars



Me on a modelling shoot

when I took part in a show in Amsterdam.

However, my health continues to fail me, and I can be in and out of hospital for months at a time.

Whenever I'm better, I'm back to work.

I'm proud my condition has never held me back.

Now, I want to spread the word about 'invisible' illnesses like mine. ●

Anja's book, *Behind the Smile*, is published by Balboa Press

VACTERL ASSOCIATION

A rare disorder affecting multiple organ systems, the name is an acronym of some of the issues it can cause - vertebral abnormalities, anal atresia, cardiac defects, tracheal-esophageal abnormalities, renal and limb issues.



Me and my fab Mum

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