



"I've seen horses that have ruined their leg and they go on. They adapt, they learn how to use what they have."

Clyde Bramble, on the process of adjusting to a prosthetic arm

BRAMBLE | Arm brings new feelings

From Page A1

fixing people, finding ways to give them back what catastrophe has taken away.

It's a process he knows intimately.

When Kenney was 7, he was walking down a gravel road, coming home from a neighbor's house.

"A 15-year-old kid had just gone out joy-riding in his dad's van," Kenney said. "And he just was going a little too fast and lost control ... and I was a pedestrian on the side."

He was struck from behind; the van clipped his right leg. The bumper virtually sheared off his foot.

His parents decided the best thing to do — really the only thing to do — was to cut his leg off below the knee. A prosthetic leg could at least give their son a chance to walk again.

This random tragedy reshaped the course of his life.

His family was then living in Guam, where his missionary father was teaching.

Just like kids outgrow shoes, Kenney outgrew his leg. So every year he'd go to Hawaii for a new prosthesis.

"I really think it was a blessing," Kenney said. "Kids are accommodating, they do real well, they adapt to their situations. And that's what happened to me."

Not only would he walk, he would play football, lift weights and run well enough to compete in paralympic track and field trials.

Few people can tell which leg is "real" and which is mechanical.

"It's not really anything that's missing. If you don't ever have it, you don't ever miss it. Really and truly, I grew up with just one leg."

For that, Kenney feels fortunate. "I honestly think that's why I went into this path. I knew when I was a kid that I always wanted to go into rehabilitation."

That desire has led him to humanitarian missions fitting artificial limbs on people in Mexico, Jamaica, and Ukraine; to veterinarians looking to put artificial legs on horses; and to Clyde Bramble.

Gradually, after his accident, Bramble found his way back to his old life. In the spring, he returned to Mountaineer Park in West Virginia, training horses for his stepbrother.

For several months he'd hung on to a scribbled phone number.

In April, he finally called Mo Kenney.

"I was kind of afraid of it," Bramble said, "afraid of trying to get an arm."

"You don't know if you can do it or not," Bramble said. "You've got your doubts, and you've got feelings about it. Because it's going to be part of you."

"And will it take the place of my arm, and how much will it take the place of my arm?"

In the end, it's up to the amputee to decide to go forward because the amputee will be the one dealing with the pain and the aggravation, with getting out of bed every day and giving it another try.

Kenney was impressed with Bramble's determination.

"For someone to get back in the work force in one year is incredible," Kenney said. "He's gotten back into society. ... Even without intervention, he would have been successful."

But Kenney hoped to give him more.

"He's got a lot of phantom pain. His prosthesis may help diminish the phantom pain. Should help his balance, too," Kenney said.

"Skillwise, he's got a huge amount of potential," Kenney said. "Anatomically? ... He's got some movement back. What is his body going to be able to do?"

A longtime trainer, Bramble had been riding a horse for a friend one chilly March morning at Turfway Park in Northern Kentucky when the left rein on the bridle broke. The filly careened into the outside fence, tossing Bramble off. As he fell, his right arm hooked a pole.

The arm was twisted and torn off his body, nearly severed at the shoulder. Doctors amputated his arm from above the elbow.

But the nerves, muscles and bones in his shoulder were damaged, giving him little control of what doctors sewed back together.

Even after a year, he said, the things he couldn't do included "just about everything."

"It's hard to count money or anything. I lose money sometimes not being able to fold it right. It's hard," Bramble said. "It's just everyday stuff, it's just everything you do that's hard."

Especially with horses. "With horses, everything you do, you use your right hand, he said, so you have to learn how to do it with your left hand."

"I never thought I'd run no more horses again the rest of my life, this time last year," Bramble said in May.

He let himself imagine then what life might be like again with two good arms.

"I had pictures in my mind of how I'd be with it if it worked real good ... just being pretty much normal, doing things that everyday people do."

He hoped the prosthesis would help with one thing in particular.

"You could put it on, and it'd look like you had an arm, and you could use it to an extent," he said. "I don't want nobody feeling sorry for me. I don't like that, and a lot of people do. They want to help you do stuff, and I'd rather they didn't."

Kenney and his staff wanted to try to give him back these dignities.

"We need to take care of our own, if we can," Kenney said. "The story was what hit home with me — the main issue of not having the coverage. To me I thought there's gotta be a way out there to take care of people."

Newer technology — myoelectrics — allows muscle impulses to control the motion of a prosthesis.

But the kind of artificial arm Kenney will be able to give Bramble will be the most basic, using technology not much different from World War II-era prostheses, which may not give him much use back.

The reason: money. An arm like this costs about \$4,000 to \$9,000. A modern, fully myoelectric model could cost 10 times that.

"If he had the medical coverage, he should be getting a semi-myoelectric arm," Kenney said. "That would cost \$20,000-\$30,000."

But the friend Bramble was riding for did not carry workers' compensation coverage. Without insurance, he's been unable to do much more than get by. The Cincinnati hospital that saved his life also sued him because he owed almost a quar-



DAVID STEPHENSON | STAFF

Mo Kenney, center, Chris Luckett, left, and Tom McIntosh worked on the prosthesis.

ter-million in medical bills.

The most basic arm consists of a socket for the residual limb, a hinge-like elbow that can be locked into various positions, a "terminal device" or hook, and straps to support it.

The straps also connect to specific cables — one to open the hook, another to work the elbow.

To operate the prosthetic arm, Bramble will have to lift and move his shoulders in difficult and complex motions.

He'll be able to pick things up with the hook, but to turn it or the arm, he'll have to use his left hand.

It would take most of the summer for Kenney to scrape together used and donated parts from places such as Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital, and to fit the arm.

Kenney set to work in April, first making a cast of what's left of Bramble's arm. On a plaster model, Kenney molded a clear plastic socket that goes inside the artificial arm.

Within perhaps three years this fiberglass and aluminum arm will wear out and will need to be replaced, probably with the help of Medicaid. A body regenerates; a mechanical limb, over time with use, breaks down.

With this level of technology, the results will be up to Bramble's body and his will.

"I don't know what the outcome's going to be," Kenney said in May. "We're going to give him the tools and see what he makes of it."

In June, Bramble returned to see how the socket fit, driving five hours overnight from Mountaineer Park. So far, out of nine races, horses he's trained have won two. The night before, he'd come close, with a second-place finish with a horse named Numatic.

Mentally and physically, over the past month, he felt he was improving, getting more feeling and range of motion back.

"I'm real hopeful," Bramble said. "Really, truly, mechanically he can accomplish this," Kenney said. But not right away. "This is probably the simplest arm, and it's not simple."

To learn to work the arm, Bramble ideally would get physical therapy. But without insurance or someone in West Virginia willing to donate time, that is unlikely.

"I'm concerned about that," Kenney said. "He may not be able to utilize this to get some more function. At least we're giving him the option."

But Kenney knows that the older a patient is, the less likely he is to adjust easily to using a prosthetic limb.

"Some people end up getting so frustrated that they throw the prosthesis in a closet and don't use it."

At his next visit, those worries seemed far away as Kenney slipped the nearly completed prosthesis on Bramble's arm.

"That feels good on there," Bramble said in wonder. "It feels like I got an arm. It makes my brain feel better."

Kenney showed him how to pull the cables that work the arm.

"You've already done more than I anticipated," Kenney said encouragingly. "I'd like to see if you can open that hook. ... Relax your shoulder. ..."

Bramble hunched his shoulders forward, and suddenly the hook opened.

"Oh, yeah!" he said. "That feels good. Now it feels like there's something there. I'll be able to use this!"

Later, Kenney said that gave him goose bumps, that it's the kind of moment prosthetists dream about.

The biggest benefit may be the most ephemeral.

A sort of side effect from artificial limbs is the way they trick the mind and the nerves, easing the pain and phantom sensations am-

putees often feel in the limb that is no longer there.

"This thing feels like a chunk of meat sewed on," Bramble said, grabbing his stump. His right hand is gone but it "feels like a clenched fist."

Before, "my hand always felt like it was way back there," twisted behind his back, he said. The prosthesis relaxed his arm.

"My hand ... it's not there ... but it feels like it is. ... It feels like it gives my hand something to do."

Bramble seemed more hopeful than ever that he would be able to make the arm work.

"I've seen horses that have ruined their leg and they go on. They adapt, they learn how to use what they have," he said.

"Just like humans," Kenney said.

In July, Bramble drove 380 miles overnight from Mountaineer to Ohio to visit his grandson, then came on to Lexington for his last fitting.

Despite the exhaustion and pain evident on his face, he was determined to make the appointment.

"I have to keep doing it. I want to get this arm. It don't seem that hard to use," Bramble said.

The arm was finally finished, completely refurbished, with a new donated hook.

Which is great for now, Kenney said. Future limbs will depend on getting Medicaid coverage.

"My concern is the rest of your life. The prosthesis, it eventually wears out. We've got to get you taken care of."

Bramble tried to put the arm on by himself but couldn't manage it.

To get the arm on, Kenney said, Bramble will eventually learn to either flip the straps over his head, or slip it on like a coat.

"Don't let that frustrate you, Clyde, because it will," Kenney said as he watched Bramble struggle. "I'm going to let you go home with it. Your hardest motion is to move the arm forward, to raise it up and down. But you can move it."

As Kenney helped him ease it on, Bramble sucked in his breath and sighed. "Boy, that feels good."

Kenney: "Feels like you got your arm back, doesn't it?"

Bramble: "It does! It does!"

He worked at trying to maneuver the arm with little success.

But in the months since he's had it, he hasn't given up on the arm.

"I'm just practicing with it. It ain't helping me, though, not yet it ain't. I still got a lot of pain. That's the main reason I wanted it," he said. "And that's why I keep using it — trying to."

As for how he will use the arm, he doesn't think he will use it with horses but probably will when he goes to the races, when another hand would be useful for holding a program or a racing form.

The future will hold a lot of frustration, just like those early days in the hospital.

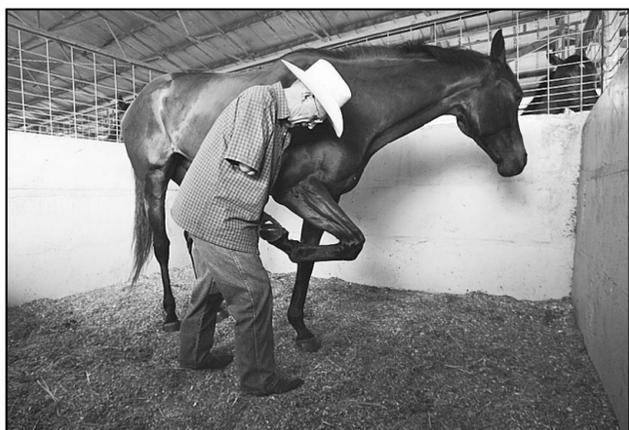
"I thought it would work easier than it did," he said.

"I know it'll work," he said of the arm. "I know it will when I've got time to work with it. ... Because when I go to do something, I do it all the way."

This is just another tool, he said, a new one he will have to learn to use.

"It's like having an arm, is what it is," Bramble said. "That's exactly what it is."

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DAVID STEPHENSON | STAFF FILE PHOTO

Bramble checked the feet and legs of one of his brother's horses at Tampa Bay Downs in Tampa, Fla., in January. "This stuff used to be easy for me," he said.

Calls for new laws, stricter enforcement

Since the Herald-Leader's "Wrong Side of the Track" series in January, racetracks and state officials have acknowledged that workers sometimes "fall through the cracks," and pledged new laws and protections.

Last week in Washington, Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Hopkinsville, held the first of a series of hearings on racing's insurance scandal. Whitfield's investigation, based in part on the Herald-Leader's series, has led to calls for federal oversight of insurance coverage and working conditions for jockeys and other racetrack workers.

Last month, a panel appointed by Gov. Ernie Fletcher recommend-

ed creating a special fund to provide workers' compensation coverage for jockeys and changing state law to require trainers to offer insurance coverage to all exercise riders.

Fletcher said he wants a solution passed in the next session of the Kentucky General Assembly, which begins in January.

In February, all thoroughbred racetracks in Kentucky and some in other states voluntarily increased accident insurance coverage for jockeys — but not exercise riders — from \$100,000 to \$1 million.

The tracks also say they have stepped up enforcement, requiring proof of insurance from trainers before they can stable horses on the

grounds.

There is some evidence the stiffer checks are working.

After the series appeared, there was a rush by trainers to secure insurance coverage for their workers.

The state conducted surprise license inspections this spring at five major tracks. As a result, at least 26 trainers face enforcement actions that could include fines. Bill Emrick, executive director of the Office of Workers' Claims, said many of the policies they saw were "first-time policies," meaning the level of compliance "may be due to the publicity the industry was exposed to this year."

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