

At 17 going to the doctors with arthritic type pains in your hip, knee and ankle joints because of knock-knees is humiliating. It then becomes frustrating when the doctors admit it's not good, and your gait is bad, but say you're too young to do anything about it; leaving you feeling like your problems are not real or cared about.

That was how I felt the first four times I visited doctors. I first went in my hometown in Sheffield at 17, but was only referred to physiotherapy to try and learn new exercises and ways of walking to help redistribute my weight in a way that wouldn't put unhealthy pressure on my joints due to my bad gait. Unfortunately I found these sessions useless, and the new ways I was told to stand and walk only made my gait look worse, which left me with no confidence. From being young, to throughout my teenage years, and then even at 17 I was mocked for how I walked. In school I was called a penguin by bullies, in PE class at secondary school other kids would laugh at me when I ran, and in college I even had instances when peers mock my legs and asked me why they were 'so bent'. The physical pains caused by my knocked knees seemed to pale in comparison to the paranoia and depression I had formed over the years because of my legs. I became so ashamed of my legs that I would hate for people to walk behind me, and when I exercised I would try and do it away from other people. Before I left for university I tried once again to get a consultation with an orthopedic surgeon at a hospital after reading about osteotomies, but again I was told I'm far too young and my bad gait wasn't serious enough.

So, I went to university down in London. Once there I tried to ignore the issues with my legs; but after almost two years of the fast paced life of London the pains were worse than ever, so I went to a doctor there hoping I could get a referral. By now the embarrassment of my legs was effecting my adulthood too. Not from vanity, but the balance issues and clumsiness my gait caused me still effected my confidence and sex life, my desires to travel, and ambitions for running marathons. I told the doctor all of this, and she finally referred me to a specialist at the hospital of Middlesex. But quickly my complaints were dismissed as 'I was too young and healthy for any kind of operation', and again physiotherapy was given to me. I didn't bother going to the physiotherapy, so I let another year pass before going to the next doctor. By now I was 22 and so desperate for corrective surgery that I considered going to Ukraine to have the operation done cheaply without any questions being asked. This time the doctor at Whittington Hospital in London got my hopes up, as the referral to the consultant there led to three separate appointments, with each one offering more answers to why my gait was bad, and what problems it was definitely causing me now, and what it could cause me in the future. Yet I was still told to do physio before any kind of operation could even be considered.

Instead of going to physio, I thought about Matt. I knew from lots of reading about osteotomies that Matt was the leading specialist in the UK, and particularly for the one I knew I would need. As he was based so far away, I never considered I'd be able to see him. However, I asked my doctor for a referral to him from London, and the doctor agreed. I traveled on the coach for 7 hours up to Cumbria for my first consultation with Matt and I was elated to finally meet a medical professional who didn't belittle my condition or try and convince me my pains and depression were not valid. I didn't have to fight or prove my years of problems, and Matt agreed that the severity of my gait and symptoms was enough to carry out double osteotomies on both legs. So, I was booked in for my first one on the NHS, and 8 months after my first visit to Matt I had surgery number one. I knew it would be around a year for my next operation as the first leg had to heal, and 13 months later I had my second and final operation to complete the four osteotomies on my femurs and tibias. The

aftercare for both operations was unreal. I experienced no memorable or traumatic pain, and the way I was dealt with by the NHS nurses in Whitehaven was better service than when I had private surgery in London. I was allowed 5 nights in recovery after each op, and I'll cherish the conversations and nurturing nature of the nurses and doctors there forever. There was always a friendly nurse prompt with pain relief, a cup of tea and biscuits, and help to the toilet. After being discharged from the hospital I was given frequent physiotherapy to help with walking with crutches and rebuilding the strength lost in my leg muscles. Follow up appointments with Matt were always reassuring, and it's a nice feeling to see he is proud of his work and caring over his patients.

I owe Matt my new quality of life. My 'new legs' have given me a completely different outlook to what I'm capable of doing. I've never known confidence like it. Two months after both operations I was able to go back to the gym, and back to work as a waiter. Six months after my first operation I was up a mountain in Greece, and 6 Months after the second I climbed a mountain in China twice the height of Ben Nevis. Each time I managed these trips I had to think of Matt and send him a telepathic 'thanks'. Not being able to hike, climb, cycle or run were my biggest fears of having these operations, but actually my improved balance and no more joint pains means that I am much better off during such activities. Just four month after my final operation I started teaching English in China. I now plan to see the world, and Matt helped me on that journey.

Thank you Matt, I hope my words can pay tribute for my gratitude towards you.

Forever grateful,

Kristian Dennett.