

## MY JOURNEY

At 18 a normal walking lady I graduated from high school in 2006. Left for University in 2007 but withdrew after 6months of study because I came down with Malaria Meningitis. After 3months in the hospital I got discharged and walked home. After walking around in the house for 1month, one morning I woke up and I could not lift or move my right leg. I got admitted again in the hospital and I was told I will be referred to Port Moresby general hospital for CT scan. I waited 3weeks in the hospital for the hospital to pay for my ticket to Port Moresby, while waiting I lost function and movement to my left leg. At Port Moresby General Hospital the CT scan result showed there was a blockage at level T2 so I was referred to Cairns for MRI at my family's expense, At Cairns MRI suggested operation so I came back to Port Moresby and had the operation but nothing was found / my condition was not improved. So sadly I went home in 2009 October after the operation and have been just at home for the last 6yrs. I did physiotherapy and massage at the expanse of my elder siblings but was not constant because it was really expensive.

## LIFE IN BRISBANE

Thanks to the Australian Development Scholarship now I am here in Brisbane and experiencing life at a whole new different level. Classrooms, stores and the footpaths were not accessible in PNG so for the last 6yrs my world was my room. Even though I was qualified to continue my studies or apply for a simple job I couldn't because the problem was accessibility and most importantly the skills to live independently.

When I first learned that I was accepted for the Scholarship I was over joyed and my hope of walking again grew even bigger. All I could ever think of was graduating and walking into the plane and going home. My first session at My Turn the physiotherapist told me "I am going to teach you how to transfer yourself from the w/chair to the bed and back and also in and out of a car and you won't need anyone to help. At first I didn't believe her because for the last 6yrs I have been always lifted by two/three people into a car and out as well as in and out of a w/chair. After 1month of training and I am now doing the transfers all by myself☺. My trainings at Sporting Wheelies too have done me so well and I feel that I have the muscle power to wheel myself up small hills as well as long distance. I came here and I envied how the way a lady my age with the same disability lives her life here, she is thought skills to live independently, she goes to school and she gets employed and even lives independently-that is something a person with disability in PNG will never do as long as he/she has their relatives around . Unlike me who lives just 2hrs flight away from her it is completely different- my world was my room, living room and backyard. I had lost all hope in life but it was my faith in God that has kept me going and I believe He has given me a second chance to live once more and experience life at a different angle. I am very privileged and grateful to be here and enjoying myself and having access to all the things I never knew existed in the past 6yrs.

Learning all this new skills to improve my daily living and being provided with the assisting devices to help my mobility has given me a new meaning to life and I am excited about it but when I go back to PNG after 18months it will not be the same, here I have all the access and freedom of movement but back home we have not reached that level yet.

## MY MOTHERS EXPERIENCE

In 2007 I resigned from work (Nurse with the Institute of Medical Research PNG) to take care of Ruth. We came to Port Moresby and lived in her elder brother's rented house which was not wheelchair friendly for the last 6yrs. It was a very expensive experience for the whole family (siblings: 3elder brothers and 1elder sister) but we could not help it because most of the services Ruth needed were in Port Moresby so we had to sacrificially stay in Port Moresby. Also culturally according to Melanesian Society there is a belief that "every sickness or death must have a cause or somebody must be blamed for it" So when Ruth lost the use of her limbs, we did not want to go back home because people from our village would not understand the medical explanation of the disability and they would want to find out the cause of the disability. Most often the process of finding out leads to big conflicts and even death so to stop

that from happening we had to stay in Port Moresby.

Ruth was very much dependent on me and that involved a lot of lifting because she did not know how to transfer herself on and off the wheelchair, almost everything we did was in the room except for eating.

An eye opener for me was when I accompanied her to Perth in 2010 to attend the Commonwealth Youth Conference (2wks) as well as to Japan (Tokyo) in 2012 to do a training on how to cater for people with intellectual disability (2months) was, there in those two places I saw how wheelchair friendly they were and I was joyous to see my daughter wheel herself around the place and went shopping for the first time in 5yrs.

Now 2014 we are in Brisbane and life has really changed for me especially the weight bearing and financially. Back in PNG we spent a fortune on private physiotherapy and special medication but she was never thought the skills of living an independent life.

Almost 4months here and I am feeling relieved, relaxed and I am free to go wherever I want knowing my daughter can get herself on and off the wheelchair easily because of the skills she has been thought here, unlike before I couldn't leave the house unless someone is with her.

### *Cultural Perspective.*

The Melanesian culture is very unique and interesting as well as a mind boggling culture. Some of our culture is good like for example the killing of pigs, goats and cows and the singing, dancing, celebration and the paying of bride-price(a hundred thousand kina is the highest) during a marriage ceremony. Usually during that time the bride's family become millionaires over night because the groom has to pay/give money the lady's family for the lady to be his bride. In the past/traditional times this payment was a form of appreciation to the bride's family for bringing her up this far and a way of saying thank you to the bride's family. But it's not the same anymore in this day and age in PNG, most men feel like they own the women because they have paid for them and he can do whatever he wish to do with her-one reason for high level of domestic violence in PNG.

On the contrary, some of our culture is bad and one of the most common and widely practised one is- if a person gets ill and if the doctors cannot help as well as the medicines are not working on him the first thing without any doubt that comes to the minds of his relatives is, that person is not getting well because witchcraft/sorcery has been practised on him. So if that person dies, his relatives will use witchcraft/sorcery to find out who did it and once they find out that is how tribal war comes about.

My case was similar to that, because PNG is a developing country and it doesn't have the right equipment to tell me exactly what was wrong with me/what is the cause of my weak limbs, all my relatives thought witchcraft/sorcery was practised on me. Because their understanding was, it's just Malaria were most often everybody gets healed from it, how could it affect her legs?

Back in New Guinea our house is built on my mother's land in Goroka Town (1hr by plane from Port Moresby), my mother's relatives has been blamed for using sorcery on me when the doctors could not come up with a good explanation of my weak limbs. So now we cannot go back to our home in Goroka because coming from a very strong Christian background we do not want to be the cause of conflict between my father and my mother's relatives. My father's relatives even called him up and said "bring the child back home we will find out, get even and also use sorcery to get her walking again" but my dad said I won't because I believe in God and I do not want my daughter to be part of any satanic activities which could possible lead to more deaths (relatives from either sides killing each other). That has been the reason why we have not gone back home, we have been living a very expansive life in Port Moresby city at the expenses of my elder siblings because of this cultural belief that has been practised for decades.