

MIND OVER MATTER

By Triona Daly

When I was asked if I would consider writing an article for a Grange Parish Book, I have to say I was reluctant, initially. While it is good to be thought about by your neighbours, I suppose as I have grown older and more guarded of my independence and privacy, I didn't want to become the subject of patronising behaviour, no matter how well intended. However, the more I thought about it, the more I came to believe that it would be good to share my story with people who don't know me and to allow those who think they know me to know me properly.

August 11th, 1971 was the day when life for a young, carefree Grange couple and family changed forever. I was born with a congenital abnormality; I was without arms. These were pre-ultrasound times, so my parents had no idea of my condition before my birth. Now that I am a parent myself, I often wonder how my parents coped in those early days. I am fully aware that I was a very lucky child to have been born to these parents. My dad has always been a strong influence in my life and was always the one urging me to be my own person, and he always looked out for my wellbeing with great loyalty. My mother has long been a legend in Grange. She took the decision very early on in my life that nothing would ever hold me back. Inspired by Christy Brown's mother and the book *My Left Foot*, she began to place toys at my feet, as a baby. This progressed to pencils at my feet and so by the time I started school at four years old, I was already writing with my feet. My sister and brother, who came after me, have always been a source of support to me too – thanks guys, I don't say that enough!

I have such happy memories of my time in primary school in Bruff, and of course, like all Grange children, I received my 'real' education on the school bus. I was regularly on stage: if I wasn't Irish dancing, I was set dancing or singing in Scór na nÓg. This was a forward-thinking approach by my parents that gave me great confidence, and I never saw myself as different. That is how it should be. Too many people treat 'disability' as a difference, a non-conformance with the expected. I always like to think that I have changed that misperception of disability. After my time in Bruff Secondary School, I spent three fantastic years in UCC and one

at UL. I took all of my examinations by writing with my feet, it was never an issue, and I always joked about my strong left foot!

I married my school sweetheart, Ken Daly, in 1995, and we proceeded to have the two most amazing children, Cormac who is now sixteen years old and Caoimhe who is twelve. I never contemplated a life without kids; so what if I had no arms, I was still determined to have children. When Cormac was born, I have to say the bravado left me, and I was scared, it was now a reality, I had loads of fears. How would I lift him, feed him, wind him, bathe him, dress him? I was scared! Ken was amazing but never overprotected me. He encouraged me to find my way around things, and I did. I would rest Cormac on my chest after feeding and just sway with him over and back gently to wind him. I would lift him with my mouth and put him in the pram and then wheel the pram around the house, instead of carrying him. I changed nappies with my feet. I remember, as he became older, getting a narrow amount of time to change him before he would take off crawling. When we had our lovely daughter, I was so relaxed because I had been through it all three years earlier, so I knew I could do it. All that said, the support I received from Ken, my parents, sister and brother as well as Ken's parents in those early days was amazing, and I could not have done it without them.

When I consider myself, I don't see a 'disability'; in my mind's eye, I have two hands. 'Dis' - 'ability', technically means 'unable' - with certainty that isn't me. I believe that getting on in life is all about attitude. From the outset, I had a very confident attitude instilled in me, and this has grown over the years; thanks are due in no small part to my parents and family and my wonderful husband and children. My limb absence is a very obvious visual thing. Many people carry internal 'disabilities', like depression and anxiety. I encourage those people to appreciate the good things and not to dwell overly on negative aspects; adopt a positive attitude. I am a firm believer in karma, if you think positively, then positive things will happen. If I had let my absence of arms dictate my life, I would probably never have lived the great life I had so far. My motto is: *Live life to the full and never let anything hold you back.*

Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

Triona.



Triona Daly, New Line, Grange.