

I AM NOT A WEIRDO!

A brief outline to me – by Emma Chivers

It's actually quite amazing to be me, because of what I've learnt and how I have grown with what I have gone through. I am such a chilled and relaxed sort of person - well so I believe! It's true what some people say to you: you do learn as you get older.

I have been stuck in an anxious body for far too long. When I was about 33 years old, that's when I began to find out about me - it's been a very slow process. I think that I kept it under wraps until I was completely sure. However, I was scared to take the plunge for a few more years. I now know why it had taken so long to find out the answers: it was finding the right time and moment. I believe that everything finds its time to show itself to us - it's just a case of waiting.

As I already had a basic knowledge of how to use computers, the next thing I did was quite easy to do. Technology has moved on and I had more time on my hands to investigate, using my head to figure out the basics. It did not take too long to figure out who I needed to ask for help, once it became obvious to me. I am quite proud of the fact that I waited for so long with this dreaded problem being in my head. I am a lot older and things are easier to understand. I certainly have had some great lifetime experiences, having held together a family of three children and having the support of a husband.

I managed without hospital assistance for quite some time after the initial help, learning to walk, talk, read and write - basically the whole caboodle. I believe that the help is out there for anybody that needs it. It's just a case of finding the source: 'putting your finger on the problem'. Today, information is at our fingertips if we need to find out something. The support is much more advanced in these specialist areas which helps a great deal to suss out what problems we have. It was quite easy to figure out my problem, by ruling out what it couldn't be. I know I am one lucky lady even though my problem took over 30 years to find out. I guess I am quite strong to withstand what I have endured. Reading the right information helps.

Even though a head injury never goes away we learn to manage it and to ignore pains we can't deal with.

My story

Now, it all began when I was eight. I was quite a normal kid, a bit of a tomboy playing football with the lads at school. But one day in September 1983, the week after I had started back at junior school, that's when it happened. Yeah, I did something really stupid, I got hit by a car. (You stupid girl!)

That meant recovering in hospital which took roughly two months. First going to Grimsby hospital and later being transferred to Hull Royal Infirmary as the injuries I had sustained were a little more severe for the care they could give at Grimsby Hospital as they didn't have all the correct equipment.

That was the easy bit complete. Now begins the hard work. I have to start all over again. So, yep, it was quite difficult. I had a really positive family to support me and my mum and dad had a great bunch of family friends too who gave help and supported my mum and dad very well. I suffered a broken leg, a broken jaw, a fractured pelvis and brain damage (head injuries). But never mind, I'll get over it. Just you watch!

Here's my mother's account of that day:

My first recollection of that Saturday was that we had had a lovely morning out cycling as a family, life was good and happy. After lunch at home Emma asked to go to her friend's house across the road. She was meant to be walking but took her bicycle instead she wasn't careful enough going out the drive by herself and bang there was a collision with a car! The day had gone from good to bad in the blink of an eye! We ended up in the back of an ambulance going to our local hospital.

On arrival, she was assessed immediately and it was decided she should be transferred across the Humber Bridge to Hull Royal Infirmary for more specialist treatment. Emma had broken her jaw, had head injuries and needed an operation to relieve the pressure on her brain. She had also broken her left femur and fractured her pelvis. Emma was lucky to have a top neurosurgeon to treat her, Mr G Brocklehurst, and I am sure he saved her life! After a long stay of six weeks in hospital we took Emma home. She couldn't walk, talk or eat proper food. She couldn't even sit up properly, so it was like taking an oversized baby home.

Fortunately, with encouragement, Emma progressed back towards her old self. We were very lucky her super personality and positive outlook didn't change. The most lasting damage for Emma is her speech which is a little slower than normal. Her immediate memory has been affected and her walking gait is a little ungainly.

Emma has always been a joy to be around with her sunny friendly personality. I'm sure this has helped her through a very difficult time in her life! She has gone on to become a normal teenager, meet a young man, get married and have three wonderful children, a credit to her resilience. I am very proud of her achievements.

I reckon I was home just before Bonfire Night as I think I can remember sitting in my wheelchair watching fireworks from the dining room window. And I know that the first noise I made was laughing at the cat and dog playfighting. I have to give a huge thank you to our family dog, Sally Woofer, because without her I wouldn't have taken to walking so easily as she was great company. And I remember taking my cat to bed to help me sleep. What uses pets have!

At Christmas, my headmaster from school visited a couple of times fetching chocolate

buttons. That coaxed a smile out of me! A good few visits for physiotherapy to the Grimsby Handicapped centre as it was then known (later to become the Child Development Centre). Physio was quite important to have - though at the time I remember not liking it! However now, thinking back, I am quite glad of it as it kept me going.

I had a few more problems to overcome. I had to go to speech therapy where I first came to know of a metronome. It helped me keep in time with speaking correctly as I had to be right as near as damn it! I learnt two poems off by heart with help from another lady. There was Mick:

*'Mick my mungralow lives in a bungalow, painted green with a round doorway with eyes for cats and a nose for rats.
He lies on the threshold half the day dusty and brownish, wicked and clownish.
He'll win no prize at the county show but, throw him a stick, and up jumps Mick right through the flower beds see him go!'*

The other being 'Wheelbarrow':

*'He dumped her in a wheelbarrow and trundled her away! How he chaffed and how she laughed on their wedding day!
He trundles her through the garden gate, he bounced her down the lane! Then he reeled and how she squealed, and off they bounced again.
He jiggled her across the ditch, he jiggled her through the holt! He stubbed his toe and she cried oh! whenever she got a jolt.
He wiggles her up the bridle path, he woggled her through the street, down he stumbled, down she tumbled, right at the parson's feet!'*

It all helped me with how to correctly pronounce my words and also a couple of tongue twisters:

'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, then where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?'

*'She sells shells on the sea shore.
The shells she sells are seashells, I'm sure.
So if she sells seashells on the seashore,
Then I'm sure she sells seashore shells.'*

There are a few more well-known ones as well. They all seemed to help me to improve the quickness of my speech - which seems to annoy me more than other people nowadays!

Once I could speak again I had an imaginary friend, as you do as a kid. Mine was called Fredrick. This was a disguise because really people who do this are talking to themselves. But we're not potty! It's just giving oneself encouragement to do things or to stop yourself: the voice in the back of your head willing you on or preventing you from making a huge mistake.

Back to school

I had a year off school: yay! It would have been yay but starting again from scratch was not so easy. Life has its ups and downs - yes, it was somewhat difficult to begin again. I had to catch up on everything. It should have been easy as I had done it before but it certainly wasn't. I had to carry on with the occasional visit to the hospital so I began back at school on a part-time basis. On one occasion, I remember falling out of the school door. No wonder my mum and dad used to call me 'Miss Independent' - laugh out loud! I do however remember having a weird feeling when doing maths at school, realising that I had done the booklet before but thinking 'how curious, hey!'.

The following Christmas, I was presented a Casio Keyboard from the school as a welcome back present. I can remember learning 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' on it as well as other things. I recorded something to play to the assembly at school, which I played back to them as I think I was far too nervous to play it for real and too slow. What a little cheat I was! I think they were all just so happy to see me.

I still had to visit the hospital occasionally for the odd appointment which was ok as it made my school day shorter. However, no one can understand quite how difficult it actually was. I was occasionally picked on by those who I thought were my friends before my accident (not all, though). I did understand why as they were only kids. I remember crying once a week but always trying to find a corner to hide it away if I felt myself welling up. And I know that I consoled myself a lot with those in-a-monologue words!

I was 8 but had to restart and catch up to 8. What happens in between? You age and your mind is a sponge when you are so young. I grew up so much having just been through what I had. I just did not have the capability to show or prove it. I knew I could suppress the little tittle tattle as it wasn't as though they were throwing things at me. I had been pretty lucky after all as I did survive. Even though, we humans should never be mean to one another - but like that's ever gonna happen! At the time, it did feel pretty bad. I felt as though I had to stay strong. My mum and dad had been put through enough.

I can remember walking around the playground during playtime and maybe lunchtime. One year I remember queuing in a line for our T.B. jab (tuberculosis vaccination). The other children were saying they thought I would not be afraid because they said they bet I'd had lots of needles in hospital. They probably did not think about me being unconscious at the time. But anyway I was fine. One girl was a little hysterical and had to have a family member come in and sit with her.

I also remember the odd nice time of feeling included, for instance playing marbles on the drains, and I do remember girls putting my legs up against the wall as they could do a handstand but I couldn't! It wasn't all doom and gloom for me, they just needed time to get to know the new me.

Child of Achievement

In year 6 I won the Child of Achievement Award 1987. Now that was great as I received a letter through the post from the Queen inviting me to London with a guest, who of course was my mum. Apparently, my headmaster (Mr Tyson) had written a letter to the Child of Achievement organisers. Wow, how lucky was I to be picked! The main thought of that week was that other children wanted to hang with me. But really what it was all about was that they wanted to get on cameras as I was to have a newspaper piece about me winning the Child of Achievement Award.



I then went to London on the train to collect my award from the Guildhall where I met plenty of other Child of Achievement Award winners. Mum and I were pretty close to the front where the TV stars were situated. There were a few stars of that era there who were to do the presenting of the awards. Tony Arthur presented mine to me. A few of the other stars I can remember were Bob Holness, Matthew Kelly and Pat Sharp.

After the award ceremony, we had something to eat then we were all given goody bags. I think that topped it off! After leaving the Guildhall, Mum and I had to catch the train home. Opening the goody bag on the train was quite exciting as well as surprising. It didn't consist of that much but still... I remember getting a Barbie doll and thinking 'why?' - because you see I was more of a Sindy Fan. I thought Barbie was a tart!

Next, the TV cameras came to school. I had to pick a few friends to walk back into school with me. They didn't show that though. Instead they showed me playing in the playground and a recording of my then deputy headteacher revealing that I was seen the week before my car accident punching the living daylights out of another lad at school. Whoops! See that's the real me before, tomboyish. Tut!

We had one computer at that school for the children to use. (Computers were not so widely spread about in schools back in the eighties). I managed to write at least one page about my trip to London and learnt how to type properly at my next school the following term.

Back in the eighties there were a couple of comedians that were particular favourites of mine (Cannon and Ball) and they had sent me a tape which they had recorded themselves singing different songs. Bobby Ball had also recorded himself on another tape inviting me to

meet him after a show once I had got better. You see I had lots of encouragement. All the support I had in the beginning was so much and certainly gave me the willpower to succeed and carry on.

Moving school

I had been asked whether or not I wanted to stay back a year so that I could catch up but I declined. Thinking back on it now, perhaps it would have made a difference but I just wanted to get on the best I could, and not have to backtrack any longer. "I will catch up": that was my mentality at the time, as if there was no problem. I had done the hard part.

Mind you, I think we carry on saying that throughout our entire life. Maybe so or maybe not. But I still do think there are hurdles to jump. Life can never be plain sailing for anyone. So, the mere fact of just having had an accident shouldn't be that hard to overcome. It just needs a little grit and determination which I would say I have. But looking back on it, it did have its ups and downs - pretty much like a rollercoaster ride.

During the school holidays, I remember nearly getting hit again on my way back home from my old school. My mum had heard before I got home. Everybody knew me. (Argh!) I guess it was nice but at the same time not, because I didn't really understand what my presence meant to everyone. The fact of being able to make people smile wherever I went made me feel quite good about myself. Yes, of course I still had the odd person that would make fun of me but laugh with them and it soon stops. I devised my own method of coping.

I did not really understand the school change: it was still a little confusing for me. Things seem to tire me out a lot more and I didn't understand why. However there seemed to be an annoying problem which appeared around that time: a pain in the right leg, which I just ignored. I knew that there would be pains from the aftermath of the accident. I just knew that things would be hard at times.

I did experience a little more tittle tattle at the next school but it seemed to go over my head as I had heard it all before. Basically, you have to grow a thick skin be able to handle it. I had the thought that it will end eventually. I guess that if you could see it from my perspective, some would have just quit and given up. I thought about it at times but I just couldn't do that. My parents had been through enough. And they were very caring and understanding with me. If you show any weakness to bullies they have won. I nearly gave in to it at school once as I got taunted by some lads but I dobbed them in. That sorted it!

At the first secondary school I went to, I just tried to keep moving at break times and not talk to anybody. I made the odd friend but I didn't feel as though I fitted in much there. When I moved school, I noticed a boy that went to the first secondary school that I went to - he used to play truant so I guess that is where he had gone. I saw him a little while longer then he seemed to disappear. I'd guessed he was up to the same tricks again!

To begin with, I was doing all the subjects but then I think that the teachers were getting concerned about my workload. I was advised to drop a few subjects so I did, as they knew what was best. I had a catch-up class to replace those, which was fine as it did help. At this new school, I got the chance to have a teacher's aide who would help me by taking notes that I could not keep up with and I even got a laptop computer to aid me to take notes. I was supplied this from the Frederick Holmes School in Hull (a special needs school). There was another boy at this school who was in a wheelchair and had a teacher's aide too, so I didn't think much about how it looked.

I began to begin to feel quite good about myself now because of that. I knew that I would still try my hardest to achieve all my goals even with being that little bit slower than others. It wasn't a problem to me. I just went with it. I listened and took in things. I spoke to the other children but still felt quite lonely at times. I guess I didn't want to put on anyone. I would be there and wait for someone else to talk to me first. I was used to me. I didn't much like it but, as the old saying goes, you have to like it or lump it.

I remember quite enjoying school however difficult it became at times. I was still able to do the odd activity out of school after I had my accident. It didn't stop me from doing anything - I was just a little slower. I went horse riding at weekends, I went to Brownies during the week. After Brownies, there were Guides and Rangers.

I remember going to ballet and tap. Tap wasn't for me though - two right feet! I did go to a keep fit class to keep in the dance thing which I so enjoyed. My love of music, any type will do. It helps with movement and gets in your soul. I remember dancing to Wham in the class - see, I'm showing my age now! I just basically loved dancing and knew what I could and couldn't do. I think that I very much enjoyed listening to music too. Without music, life would be boring. I believe it helped with my speech too, as I tried to sing along. (Too slow though, however in my head I could keep up).

At sixth form college, it was all different but at least I still had some help with writing as I had brought my laptop from school. I suppose that was one of my biggest bugbears to get over - the fact I could not handwrite quickly! I had decided to resit a couple of my GCSEs again. I was also advised to take a few extra GCSEs which I did, only to enhance my existing ones as to me they did not seem very much, however pleasing they were to other teachers. It still had to look better. This was so unfair - I was so high-flying before my accident!

During the Services to People Course, we had to do a study during class around disability. I had to tell the class what I had been through to give an example which at the time upset me a little. I tried not to show my upset face as I wanted to appear strong! I think that must have been the last time during my education time that I had thought so deeply about the ramifications of my accident. I just carried on during my life trying not to ponder about my accident.

While I was at sixth form college, I worked at a friend of the family's café which gave me a little pocket money. I was soon to turn 18 and that is when I met my husband. We were to be married the year I turned 21.

Setting up home

I had a year of life alone with John my husband. He was a drummer in a band so a lot of the evenings were taken up with that. I didn't mind - I could tag along if I wished. As my husband worked during the day, I had the joys of housework during the day. I can't remember too much about what happened there other than we had our first cat there, getting bitten by a stray ferret, band meet-ups, and my brother-in-law living with us for a short time. I went shopping for household things. It wasn't a very big house so it was not too tiring but after a while it got more difficult - because I got pregnant!

Yep, the first was to be born the next February just before my 23rd birthday. Murrone was born soon after we had moved which began another chapter for me. It was a miracle I did not feel much pain when I delivered my first baby girl. I was really quite worried about it. Murrone was her name. I really enjoyed motherhood - I couldn't actually believe how I took to it. I guess the classes beforehand helped but I took to it like a duck to water! I felt totally relaxed. However, I must have got on my husband's nerves at the time. I think I am forgiven though - I had just had a baby.

I remember that when my firstborn was born, I wanted her all to myself. It was nice going through her first years, just me and her. Of course my husband was there but, apart from that, it was just us. I liked that! Yes, it was tough at times but we got through it. My husband had his things to do besides work while I just had to stay home and look after Murrone which I think I handled considerably well. My mind seemed to be busy.

Some can manage to get through it without a mishap, but some struggle with depression. I remember getting put on some tablets from the doctor but my husband didn't really like it as he said I may get hooked. So I stopped taking them. I believed in myself enough to get through this period. I knew I could as I had those certain strengths that some people have a problem doing. Admittedly I talk to myself a lot but nobody would presume me mad because I do most of it at home - at home only the four walls see and when I'm out, I talk in my head so nobody else notices! I took Murrone everywhere I was going as it was important for her to be with me. Our bond was so strong. Things seemed to be going fairly well.

I think however I may have done things wrong though because I stayed home an awful lot. And this makes one quite nervous about the outside, makes you get anxious. Especially doing it alone as at first you are given lots of support from family and friends of the family. After the initial help is given, you are in it on your own. My husband and I took a lot of trips back up to Grimsby to see my parents. At least my dad saw Murrone as later on that year my dad got ill. He took a turn for the worst and died the week before Murrone's 1st birthday.

Once Murrone started eating, I guess I seemed to be quite bossy as I would get in a bit of a tizzy if she made a mess. She understood I reckon because she began to eat without making a mess! In particular, at a children's Christmas party at a mums and tots group that we went to, I remember someone commenting on how clean Murrone was because all the other

children were covered in chocolate and other things. Murrion was as clean as a whistle. Murrion has always had a sense of cleanliness about her as she always looks nice. There seemed to be just sugary cakes and biscuits with the odd good item. The majority though were hyperactive foods which I did not want Murrion to have. I chose maybe one or two fun things but then put an egg sandwich and fruit on her plate. I was very proud of her when she had finished because a lot of the other children had noticeably dirty faces and my Murrion was spotless.

Murrion was so helpful with me - she seemed so easy going and just wonderful to be around. But I couldn't believe how much she began to change once she went to nursery. I had realised that Murrion was a very clever little girl because of who we were. John was and is such a clever man as he had gone to university. My mum had told me that when I was younger I was a clever girl - if I hadn't have had my accident, I would have gone to university like my brother did.

After Murrion had started school, we knew we were going to move soon. I hoped we would not do it again as moving wasn't an easy task. I had to take several bus rides to find Murrion's new school for her to change to within walking distance. That was the most important thing to me as I knew it would be me that had to do it as John would be working. Not thinking about me so much was nice - I had to look after another person, my daughter.

About a week after the move, I gave birth to our second daughter! I was a little more relaxed this time as I had done it before. I had some help which was so nice to have for those little moments when you need a little help. I had Murrion to share the moments with as their daddy worked. So, in a way, Philippa had two mums as Murrion absolutely adored Philippa!

We went on a few holidays abroad and around Britain north and south during their childhood besides all the school walks and shopping. So I would say that all three of our children were given a good start to life. When my girls were quite young I managed to take them both to Cadbury World. It was an adventure I particularly wanted to do for them. I had never been and I had my star helper Murrion with me to help me with Philippa. (Not that she did a lot other than calm me down at points!) I had to take charge of the situation and I felt really proud of my girls' behaviour throughout. I knew that I was blessed with my girls as they both helped me in different ways.

Seven years after Philippa had been born, I had another baby. A boy this time - phewee! Tristan was different still, a good baby however. I didn't find early motherhood a problem - I know some people struggle. As the girls were both that bit older than Tristan and still at the same school, we did manage to get a school photo with the three of them.

Doing the school run helped shape their lifestyle and I can say I am proud of them all for keeping up with me. I knew I would have to stop walking Murrion and Philippa at some point as well as Tristan but I was so nervous about them walking alone especially to their first school. As I had to do it with them, it certainly kept me fit - or exhausted! Once they had gone to school, I can remember not being comfortable to leave them until they had passed 8 years of age. In actual fact, I kept my eyes pretty much on them all the time apart

from them being at school. It felt important to me because I wanted to keep them safe. I think I began to get on their nerves at times!

During school hours, I found things to do and courses to go on which fitted in quite nicely. I ended up working in a charity shop which gave me lots of courage amongst other positives. I felt as though working there brought me out of my shell a little.

I feel that having had the children when I did taught me how to be patient and understanding. Yes, I know I got very impatient at times but, through all the mishaps, I would hurt myself rather than hurt the children. I would rather have them smiling or laughing rather than crying. It has made me stronger and more determined.

There have been times that I have thought about giving in but, as I had a family, I just knew that I could never give in. Yes, I know that I am nothing special but I have to stay positive for my children. That's not just me anymore. However I can help my children develop into nice human beings, that's so important, no matter what I have to go through. Their little lives are important and I will be there for them. Children are always picking up skills from different people and learning new skills without realising - boys how to behave like a man learn so much from their dad. So I hope I have at least helped to pass on something to my girls. But I know that they have definitely got their further education from their dad as I didn't go on to better myself. I hope that my kids all have a great life and are happy with what they achieve.

Both of my girls have helped me a great deal in my life and I am so proud of them for their achievements. Murrion is at university following in her father's footsteps using languages and Philippa will also be doing a university degree this year. Then, hopefully, Tristan will follow on into higher education as well. I think he aims to do something like engineering which is another trade but we shall all just have to wait a little longer to find that one out. I have no doubt in my mind that he will succeed in his life as he has had such a great family support network and he is after all his father's son.



John my husband just seemed to let me do things with the girls, to take full rein when they were small which seemed fine for me at the time, to travel alone and stuff, to go into the city centre alone. John has been so there for me as he has not tried to muddle my life. He has supported me too by having me constantly being able to moan at him about all my aches and pains!

I do remember after moving house, when my husband started working from home, I woke up one morning and my legs would not move. I was upset because it would mean my husband would have to take the kids to school but, as I had already made friends with one other lady around the corner from me, I believed that I would be able to walk to the corner so as to meet her on her walk to the same school my girls went to. I knew I had to look after the children as John worked. I knew my time would arrive so that I could help with the mortgage - it was just a matter of time and patience.

John has been with me all these twentyfour years of which we are both proud! To have been married for that long these days is impressive particularly as he chose me out of all the girls to be with.

Righting my right leg

After the school run was completed, I decided to grab the bull by the horns and take myself off to the hospital to find out what the hell was wrong with my leg.

From the beginning, I have suffered with a pain in my right leg, in exactly the same place where I broke the other leg. I always thought "oh, it's just taking the pressure off my left leg", so I carried on and dismissed it though a little voice in my head said "deal with this later". When I had finished the last school walk with Tristan I knew then it was time to find out about that.

The pain in my leg was figured out through endless journeys to the George Eliot hospital where they helped me by doing scans on my brain and various other procedures to find out the problems. I was sent to physiotherapy for my aching leg and I think my physio had decided that I needed to have more treatment from there on until another physiotherapist figured out that I needed a leg brace to correct my walking. In actual fact I wore an ankle brace to begin with which brought my walk back to normal. It was amazing!!! I was told I needed to wear this for six months then that would be it but, no, I wore that for a year except in the house. The leg brace was next and I did roughly the same I think.

After giving my leg a break from wearing my leg brace, I felt so tired after a short walk. I guess I will have to wear it again. I am so impatient about the next stage happening - I guess I should realise that nothing ever happens that quickly and learn to take things one step at a time, meaning to increase the length of walk gradually. After all it has been a heck of a long time since I have done anything about it - righting my right leg I mean.

I am so glad that I persevered to the end of wearing of my leg brace as I can notice a difference. Yes, it's still tiring to walk but I am getting there! It's really transformed me so much. I walk normally for one and I noticed that my balance is a little better too. I'm just so impressed with the improvements. I knew I needed to do it and I am just so pleased that I did. The journey I took into finding out everything that it could and couldn't be was long.

My walking has been quite painful since my teens but there is now a considerable reduction in pain due to the ankle brace and also the leg brace. I don't believe that I will ever be without pain but I am able to understand why now - and that is amazing. However, I can disguise it because I always have done. The trouble with doing it now is that I am feeling all the pains that go with it whereas the pains I might have had before were taken over by growing. So, I am feeling them a lot more now, not that I seem to complain a lot. (John however may tell you differently!) I don't think I should complain because my injuries seem so small in comparison to many others. I must say I am taken back by other people's bravery. Mine seems insignificant.

I must be so resilient being able to stand so much pain (high pain threshold) which I believe is a good thing in a way - except for not noticing burns or scolds! When my husband used to go out to work and I used to look after the children, I managed. I would always go to the doctors if necessary but I generally knew what I had done and, if it was bad enough, to see the doctor or nurse.

Figuring out my head

Figuring out my head has taken some time. I think that the fact I had already found some information out by myself spurred me on. It helped solve the first initial problem which was some writing I had read by the late Mr Stephen Hawking about living with a disability and about having depression. I had read this information on Facebook: yes, I confess I got sucked in but I believe I used it rather than it using me.

I mean, if I had come across this earlier on in my lifetime, I would have not taken any notice because I did not have the time or the right frame of mind for the information to sink in and I guess I would have just thought it useless. As it came to my attention when it did, I had a little more time to investigate.

I'd read the information several times just to make sure I had got it right. I think I had even sought out more descriptions about having depression to back up his theory too, as people tell you never to take the first information as gospel. I took myself off to the doctors and said "I think I have depression". It hit me quite hard but I would not give in. I think that the hardest part was actually getting over the anxiety.

I worked out for myself that I needed to go back to where it had all started and then pinpoint where I may have slipped up - metaphorically speaking! I discovered that my shoulder had also been hit during the accident too which had been masked by the pain coming from my leg. I have exercises to get the movement back but they cannot do anything about it now as the time has been too long to change it, but I am fine with that. It was the not knowing that was the greatest problem. I can definitely notice the difference

in me knowing about all of me compared to the before knowing some of me. Now I can understand it all, I am more relaxed.

The trouble with being so nervous is a problem, I don't know why. I think that is one reason why I walk so quickly. Now I have got to grips with the ankle brace, it does not seem to hold me back too much - however my legs seem to want to collapse sometimes! Not that that will stop me. Rushing about is not such a wise idea as having low blood pressure makes me dizzy and that seems to be getting more frequent. I am sure it will pass.

I am not mad or crazy even though I talk to myself a lot. Oh no, I've really set the cats amongst the pigeons now! You or anyone who reads this may actually assume the worst. But let me tell you that I have always thought it to be a useful thing to do! Maybe not so much in front of people but still out loud as I want to hear myself. It helps me to give myself moral support. Yes, anyone can do the speaking to themselves in their head so as not to give it away. So, ha ha maybe we are all mad. It's just getting caught talking to yourself is the kind of laugh out loud moment as people seem to point and say what an utter nutter!

I'm quite lucky to be me having had such a not so different life - it could have been worse. I maybe could have been left on my own to survive, meaning not to have met John and got married then had three amazing kids who have been there for me. Having had all the adventures and trips away seeing the world.

I do feel awfully privileged to have led the type of life and lifestyle I have had but-I now know that the traveling days are over as it seems harder to sit through. I had found out about fibromyalgia which, according to the NHS¹, is a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body. In many cases, the condition appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event such as an accident. There is still a lot they don't know about the condition but there are estimates that it could affect as many as 1 in 20. Women are affected much more commonly than men and the condition tends to develop between the ages of 30 and 50.

I'm just so lucky to be able to walk. It's a blow to the system not being able to do as much now but at least I was there in my kids' lives when they were young and able to ignore some of the pains. I did moan at times - I know I did, not all the time though!

Now to mention pain, I don't much like mentioning it, to be honest. I would say I am more open today than when I was younger and that is because I have had more time to think about it. I am not wanting to complain but I have endured my fair share of small problems throughout my life, but got over them to the best of my ability. First biggy was of course my accident. Later on, to have three babies. All in all, I would say my life has run quite smoothly.

However there have been a few additional incidents that have to have taken their toll not only on my health but my mum's and dad's health too. My dad had an accident just before

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fibromyalgia/>

my mum's brother got married. Then later on my big brother decided to do a disappearing act and cause an even worse upset to the family as I have a close-knit family. I think this really hurt my mum who had been through so much trauma so what I have had to go through seems insignificant when I think of what my mum has had to go through emotionally.

After doing a full week of six hour shifts, I am quite impressed with myself and I do believe it is helping me forget about the pains. I just need to keep my mind occupied! I was waiting for this time in my life to arrive. I believe that the children have kept me going. All those with 'disability' besides their name may feel it to be a barrier but I believe it has helped me. Then again, I have a few give away signs anyway, even though I can do just about anything I set my mind to!

My husband has been following a man on his twitter feed called Elon Musk who wants to take away disabilities within people, and he told me of this which I thought to be a very good idea! <https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=RcYjXbSjBN8>

Finally, help is out there for people who are struggling with a head injury. My husband asked me whether I would consider it and, thinking about it, I don't know that I would. I guess whilst I was struggling then, maybe I would have chosen to opt for some help but I believe I have got through the worst part as I got my answers myself. It was really just getting the opportunity to find out myself! I knew I could do it. I have the grit and determination to see things through until the end.

So, I will just carry on with the medication for depression and pain until I can be certain of an outcome before I take full control. I have to get put right as near as damn it! I want to find out the problem. I know my speech will always give it away. But, to be honest, you live with it as long as I have and you just learn to live with it. Nothing will stop me from doing what I want to do. There are always answers to questions - I just did not have the questions to ask before! Now I know something, I can't help but push myself to the limits (pain barriers edge). I don't give in: it's always been the same (strong character) and, if I can help doctors' understandings, then I will.

Coronavirus

Now this is one heck of a serious space in time! We all, I mean ALL, have to be responsible and do the right thing. I know that most people have a relaxed attitude to lots of things but hopefully we will get through this with the right frame of mind, as this is nothing like we have been through before so we have to listen and take things on board! It's happening now. If we can help in any way we ought to lend a hand. Hopefully people have the right knowledge to do the right thing.

It all seems to have come about so rapidly. I know this generation of people will not forget about it if we or they survive it but it is really quite scary! We have to not go outside without good reason and outside you have to stay approximately two metres distance from people. It is quite a good job that it's already within me to do this. What I mean by this is that until quite recently I have always kept my distance from people as I did have quite a nervous disposition. I always used to feel as if people were after something or would make fun of me so I decided to change. Grow a thick skin and build up my courage. Yep it took a while but it's not that difficult once you set your mind to it.

Back to the virus thing, nobody has ever experienced anything like this before so it's all new. But we already know many thousands of people have died from this virus and it will probably rise even further, and we also know that it does not only go for elderly people. The main thing we are told is to wash our hands. Everyone must keep safe and look after themselves. All those that care for others, which must include just about everyone, you are doing a great job so just y'all stay safe!

I guess we have to think about the light at the end of the tunnel. This cannot go on forever though! British people are sociable beings not stuck up, hey whatty what, as that is what we are basically all regarded as. Especially today we like to all show our care and compassion through appreciating all the hard work those caregivers give and all the support that each and every one endures throughout their lives.

Keeping one's self busy is not so easy as all there is to do is housework and washing. This staying home mullarkey is not as easy as one would presume when one has been so able to go out at any time during the day before this time was bestowed upon us.

Just on the way back from the shop, an old gentleman passed by and said to me "I would come closer to you but, with the warnings about, I shouldn't". It was a cute thing to say and it made me smile and I replied with "oh thank you, you are so kind". I did think, "hey that's cheeky" but aah well. So I do believe this moment in time is affecting everyone, not just me!

I think this stay at home time is altering people's way of life and I wonder what we all shall be like after the lockdown has lifted. People are social creatures and this two metres' distance is really taking a toll of people's health. It makes me wonder about how many people will come out of this unscathed. With my understanding about mental health from having had to deal with my problem, and the fact I now work where I do and have had to do some work surrounding dementia, I have quite a good knowledge behind mentality.

Social distancing is becoming the norm, people are listening to the guidelines a little more so there will be an end to this. We can't say when but we know there will be an end to all the upset caused by this virus which has set everybody's nerves on edge. I certainly don't feel as relaxed as I should. I can definitely feel the unease in the air so I guess it isn't just me.

However, we have all got to stay safe these days in the different pursuits we do today and for much longer. Talking to the elderly whilst working is very nice - one lady mentioned about the goings on outside and said she believed the time has come to have another clear out of people. Those were her words and I kinda get what she means!

I think what this lady was trying to say in not so many words was she would be prepared to go, as she had mentioned her earlier life had been a good one. It's awfully sad to think that the older people know when they have had enough of life or know they don't have that much more time to share their wisdom. I guess if you can say you have had a good life at the end, that is all that counts!

Working in a care home

I now have a job to go to! And that has been a long thing to get.

Thinking back on jobs I have done, I first started to earn money by doing a paper round with the help of my dad, then working with children on work experience, and work experience at a solicitors' office. Then the Inland Revenue in Grimsby, washing up in a café, working at a child development centre, and doing some work supporting young adults in cooking. Various placements through a YTS then more volunteer work either working in a shop, working with children or young adults. I knew I wanted to care and Arbury Lodge is the right place for me as it was within walking distance from my house.

First, I started going in on a volunteer basis. When I had finally filled out my form to volunteer, I was able to take cups of tea into people and chat with them too if they wanted company. I met one particular patient there and I believe that she helped me settle in as she left after my third week of going in. I did go in to thank her especially because I knew that she had made me feel as though I could do this even more than I had realised. I believe that this was exactly what I needed to give me a little more courage and to believe in myself. I guess you will never know what you can accomplish until you try!

A couple or three weeks later after the lady who had helped me settle in had left, I heard about a cleaning position being vacant and so I took no delay in asking whether I could apply. The lovely nursing staff and receptionist proved to be very helpful and helped me fill in the application. So I was to become an employee. And I love the job! It's definitely what I wanted to do. I feel I can give hope and maybe inspire people to get better or at least give words of comfort as I have achieved a lot so why can't they at least help themselves to be positive. I am so supportive towards those in a non-reversible complication or illness - all I feel I can do is listen to them and to give words of hope and empathise with them.

A couple or three weeks ago, we had this end of life patient come down from the hospital and she has kinda taken to me as everyone usually does. (I don't want to blow my own trumpet but I will! You can make your own judgement.) I know I sure am lucky to be able to make people feel so relaxed as they talk to me. Of course, it may take a bit of time for that new person to get used to me as often when I meet new folk I speak slower until the situation relaxes. Or perhaps we gel immediately, who knows.

There have been a few ladies of recent that have come to the home and have taken to me by talking to me quite a bit, due to the lack of visitors because of the Covid 19. I also guess I am easy to talk to as I believe that I have an empathic nature about me. This job suits me down to the ground - it's so enjoyable to make those days towards the end of life so nice for those that have to come for that reason. If talking to, or just listening to, another individual brightens their day in any way, I can certainly do that.

Being able to give in such a way is very important to me. The chance to be able to do this as well as to get paid is so ideal and I know I do want to give more time to this but I also realise I have to break in to this kind of work quite slowly. I knew in a way all along I would end up working in the care field. I did not get any qualifications but it came to me once I knew I had the time. I am told I have a lovely sense about me. It seems to just come naturally to me to be a trusting caring and companionate woman with an endearing aura about my person! I do realise that I am nothing special when you get to see all the other disabilities that there are in the world. I know I have done well but I always think of other people to have achieved more because all my hard work was done so long ago. I have just grown with my disability so it's not caused that much of a problem.

My little friend at the care home has had it hard as she has cancer and she is a trooper as in she does everything she can to keep herself going which I believe I have done too. My friend knows she is fading but she has to keep going (carrying on), because she knows she has no other option but to sit this one out. Which in some ways is quite horrible as, knowing her over this short period, I can see how she has declined and I feel that it is punishment for those that have such a debilitating disease to be put through such an ordeal.

I have had certain conversations about what she would like to happen but she knows that she would not have the money or the energy to do it, in going to Switzerland to end it. I am sure she hasn't had been the only one to think like this. It's so unfair because we would get punished if we were seen to be keeping our pets alive if they had the same, not that we could watch our pets suffer.

Life is so unfair if you have something like this to deal with at the end. The British law is more compassionate to animals than humans! I guess the general public do not have to think about it unless they come against it within their own lives which in a way does not seem so caring or compassionate. If there may be one thing I could change before I say goodbye to this place, it would be to have that one change within our law. I know that it could not be done lightly! Bless her: she even falls asleep on her feet. I think it could have something to do with the drugs she is on but still she will not give in.

She is stubborn and likes her own independence. However, the care she receives in the care home is very good. It's an awful shame that she has to deal with the fact of no visitors as well because of the virus, and she and the other residents miss seeing their family. It's quite understandable but we have to think about everybody's safety in the home.

A comforting thought for me was hearing from one resident that he also came from Grimsby, so I just smiled and said "how lovely, me too". I asked which part he came from but he could not remember! Another resident said, after seeing my name badge, that her daughter was also called Emma, Emma Jane and I was surprised when she said Emma Jane as 'snap' - that made us both laugh and smile! So every time I saw her afterwards she would say "hello Emma"!

Through working at the care home, I have been able to find out things that perhaps I would not have even bothered to find out but I do believe that I have arthritis really badly as I have an inner monologue that is saying so. It makes sense as I guess my body has been shaken up, put through its paces, run ragged but I have survived. I have fought to get this far in life and believe that I had a purpose to be here. I want to be able to prove that anything can be achieved if you really have the strength to carry on and believe in yourself.

Headway

The start to my Headway meet-ups began back in Grimsby. I didn't know that it was a national thing back then so was happy to have been able to join the Coventry and Warwickshire group once I had grown up a bit more and had to move house to start a new family life. There I felt ok - there was just me to look after when I went to a meeting!

Anyway, as time moved on, I was asked by the man in charge about going to a meeting with him. Now I was quite flabbergasted about being asked to go on this opportunity as I was pregnant! And it would mean going to London with this man from Headway. However I did go through with it. My husband kept on ribbing me about Tom from Headway because I mentioned him a few times and my husband thought I liked him. Errr no!

I got bored of those meetings so that seemed to fizzle out. I still kept in contact with Headway even though I moved around a couple more times with the family. I went to the Nuneaton group once I had plucked up enough courage to do so. I have also been over to the Leamington Spa group which is quite a challenge - it pushed me further on doing things by myself which I believe I coped with quite well. I met a lady called Sally there and discussed writing a book. I know I can be a dizzy doughnut head sometimes but all in all I don't do too badly!

It's a really nice feeling that being able to open up about the past to people helps me so much. But I really don't understand why it's such a great deal to those that listen because I am just one of the people that have made a positive way through life! I just think: "so what. I had an injury to overcome (big deal). There are far worse things that could have happened." I was lucky to not have lost all of me, as my personality didn't change and I believed that I could do it. I had a good family to support me and I didn't have to rush

myself. At times, I worried that I needed to have enough time to find things out before I die but, once things fell into place, I knew I could do it.

To figure out the mindset of someone who has sustained a head injury is awfully problematic. I know it's a very real thing which one should not joke about but, coming from someone who has sustained a head injury many years ago, gives me that opportunity. I do believe it has its awful bits and its joyous bits but, all in all, it is me and I think I have handled myself quite well. I have had lots of help and support on the journey which I am most grateful for.

It's maybe a case of waiting for the right moment but, if things are meant to happen, they will so just go with the flow. It really is quite easy to achieve anything if you believe you will. I don't think I have even told you readers everything but I just wanted to give out the message that you can do it! If I can, you can too. There is always hope. If I can only inspire you to try and not give up or give in, then I can safely say my job is done.

Trust is a biggy, having good friends is very important. Trusting certain people is a tough thing one has to decide on for oneself. But I choose with whom I converse. I guess it's similar to choosing who we speak to, they are always of similar mind to oneself. Clever people talk to other clever people and, pardon me saying, but thickos seem to stick together, sporty people stick with other sporty people, the list is endless but you get the gist! It's just like me - I have a mad walk and slurred speech so can you now understand why I gravitate towards the waifs and strays in society.

It's kinda funny when you think about it, on how our minds always skip to a word or phrase that we would use if speaking directly. With me I perhaps have let the moment go where I should have said the word or phrase, but it still makes me giggle to myself as I find having a slightly delayed reaction to things quite funny at times. And I don't have to share!

The mind is a wonderful thing, once you really start to listen to it. Just don't leave it too long!

Conclusion

I had to write this book because I feel that people just need a little belief and inspiration that it can be done. I hope this is a starting point for many head injured people. Mine was a severe one but I have got to a point of understanding and I hope that this story helps another soul feel that they can do it too.

I just thought that now was the right time to share my experience, to provide a sense of hope to another parent or carer facing a trauma similar to mine. I wanted to give something back to provide a sense of direction, and belief. Possibilities can arise from anywhere if you can push yourself forward, and never give up.

A head injury never goes away: it just becomes easier to understand, tolerate and deal with.

So, folks, please never give up. It will get easier I promise! Always think positively and never give up hope, as things can only get better. Possibilities are always there. Go for it! No matter what you face, believe in yourself and anything is possible to achieve. Don't dwell on things that you can't change as wallowing does no good. Look forward, never look back. Things can change but we have only one path to follow and that is the one in front of us! Just know that things can only get better.

I made it to yet another birthday and I can remember back when I was 12 or 13 thinking will I even make it to 40? Well I did - and I have gone beyond that as I am now 45 and, I would say, still going strong!

I would like to thank everybody that has helped me through my journey of recovery. No, matter how small a part you played in it, it has helped me no end: THANK YOU! In particular I believe that I couldn't have gotten this far without my parents' support, as they have been there from the off and throughout.

I hope there are many more survivors that are able to live to tell their experience. Writing this story has not only opened my eyes to realities options and possibilities. It has also been a great release and taught me about the possibilities I couldn't have imagined to be possible!

Readers - yes **you** – please, please, never give up hope, believe that you can achieve and the moments of negativity will just simply become a distant memory. If I can do it, anyone can! Just give it your all and be a survivor.
