

I was born with the condition spina bifida, for which I was operated on the day of my birth. Three weeks later, I was diagnosed as having hydrocephalus. I was not expected to live. A further unusual operation was performed, but medical opinion was still doubtful if I would have more than a vegetable-like existence. My parents did everything possible to find out all the options.

At four years old, I was still unable to sit up. From that age until my mid-twenties, I had Alexander lessons regularly – at first with F.M. Alexander himself, but he died when I had had only about three weeks of lessons, and his assistants were left to continue what he had begun. I was lucky to have lessons from Walter Carrington, and these continued for many years.

At Lansdowne Road, as well as my private lessons with Walter, I had lessons in term time in the large training room, where several other teachers, supervised by Walter, worked simultaneously on me, while I sat on a toy donkey. (Among the teachers were Peggy Williams and Joan Murray.) It was only after Walter's death that I learnt that he had later devised what came to be known as *saddle work*: a way of working on people's legs that originated in my lessons on that historic donkey. (Walter tells the story in his book *Personally Speaking*.)

By the time I was about thirteen, thanks to the Technique, my upper body had become quite strong, and I was introduced to callipers and crutches. I learnt

to use the crutches with Walter's help. The way was now open to an independent life as an adult – going to university, driving a car, having my own flat, and earning a living.

Walter and Dilys were always very kind to me. I remember particularly that they visited me regularly to give me lessons when I was at boarding school. I had difficulty in writing, and Walter helped me with that. I looked on Walter and Dilys as an uncle and aunt, and those weekend visits were the highlight of my life. To say I am still grateful would be an absurd understatement.

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Jane says I probably remember more than she does – after all, she was a child, and her Alexander lessons were just part of her daily life at the time. She couldn't know how interested we all were – teachers and students – in her progress. She was about twelve when I first knew her and it was impressive to see her in her wheelchair: by then, her upper body didn't suggest any handicap.

I was privileged to witness the first time Jane felt anything in her leg: Edward Gellatly touched her foot lightly when she couldn't see what he was doing. She looked like someone listening carefully for a distant sound. "It's my left foot, isn't it?" she said. "You're doing something like this with your fingers." Soon she was complaining about bumps and bruises that she would not have noticed before.

A particular memory is of Jane – at about sixteen – inviting me to dinner when her parents were out. A good hostess, she sent me into the sitting room while she made the coffee. Responding to a shout from the kitchen, I was amazed to see her perched on the worktop, after finding the coffee grains on a high shelf. "How on earth did you get up there?" I asked. Jane – who couldn't use leg power to *jump* up – explained carefully, "It is quite easy if you free your neck and send your head forward and up." (!) I tried but the worktop was too high for me – and Jane is quite a lot shorter than me. I remember thinking she had understood more about the application of the Alexander Technique than most people ever do.

Now in her fifties, Jane said the other day, "I still try to live the Technique as much as possible." (E. Langford)