

## Profile

### Graham Parish



*Diabetes is one of the leading causes of lower limb amputation in the world. In Australia over 3000 people will lose a limb due to diabetes complications each year.*

Limbs 4 Life Peer Support Volunteers first met Graham Parish in January when he was an inpatient at the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre in Melbourne. Graham chose to attend the open peer support sessions that are held on Friday afternoons in the amputee gym. These informal sessions give inpatients the opportunity to speak to amputees that have lived with limb loss for a number of years and have regained their independence.

Graham has had Type 1 diabetes for 54 years and until recently he had felt fortunate not to have had too many complications.

18 months ago he awoke during the night to go the bathroom and bumped his toe in the dark. Due to reduced circulation to the foot (a common complication associated with diabetes) an ulcer developed. This in turn developed into an infection which required Graham to undergo four surgical procedures, including the loss of two toes. The infection continued to spread and it was decided that Graham would need to undergo a below knee amputation.

Although shocked at the news, he was confident in the medical staff at the hospital and he knew they had done everything they could to save his foot.

Graham recalls going into the operation theatre, "...this was the point where it really hit me and the reality of losing my leg set in."

Following his recovery from the operation, Graham was then transferred to the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre. This was to become his new home for the next 8 weeks. Once he was up and about in a wheelchair, Graham was to embark on something he never done before - 'Gym' and lots of it. "I had never been to a gym before going to rehabilitation, but with the help of the physiotherapist and the drive to get better, I soon began to enjoy it, in the end I really looked forward to it."

After building up his strength and endurance the next step for Graham was to be fitted with a prosthetic leg. Learning to walk on a prosthetic leg is not an easy process, and for a diabetic there are many considerations. One is the large wound present from the amputation. Even after healing you must be very attentive to the wound, and ensure it is not being aggravated by the use of the prosthetic leg. For this reason under the guidance of his physiotherapist, Graham would only wear the leg for short periods of time, gradually allowing his body to get used to it.

Although Graham's experience of rehabilitation was extremely positive, the benefit of having a supportive partner and nephew gave him the boost he needed when things got tough, as did receiving encouragement from other amputees.

He now attends outpatient rehabilitation and uses his wheelchair as a backup when he feels he needs it. Graham places high importance on his diabetes management plan, and avoiding any injury to his other foot. "I am always concerned and always think about everything I do now."

He is now looking forward to a 2 week cruise in Hong Kong that was planned previously, "I've never looked forward to a trip so much, it must have been fate that we had organised it. I can't wait to put my 'feet' up!"



Published January 2008

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