

Stepping Out with Kayla Woods



Our daughter Kayla was born with a condition called *Tibial Hemimelia* – an abnormality of the tibia bone. Her femur and tibia were joined at the thigh, appearing as a bone split into two parts. She was also missing a knee joint, her fibula was short and her foot was clubbed. We discovered her condition about 19 weeks into my pregnancy, but the doctors were unsure of the cause.

Kayla's leg was amputated above the knee on 1 February 2007 at the Royal Children's Hospital; she was two years' old. We considered it a blessing that there was no chance of a leg reconstruction – the decision of whether or not to amputate was made for us.

Thankfully, Kayla recovered more quickly than expected and was home three days after her operation.

This was obviously a challenging time for us, but we viewed Kayla's operation as a means to her life-long independence. Without the operation, she would never have had the opportunity to walk unaided. Kayla's surgeon, Mr. Ian Torode, had an excellent rapport with Kayla and ourselves, and we had confidence in his direction and advice.

We joined Limbkids when Kayla was a baby, and that was our first contact with other children with limb differences. It was most helpful and encouraging to realise that we weren't the only ones. We also received a great deal of support from family, friends and the staff at the Royal Children's Hospital.

The development of Kayla's first prosthesis was a difficult time. She didn't like anyone touching her stump, as it was oversensitive and she didn't understand what was taking place. We were given a clear plastic mould of the socket to take home for her to play with, decorate and become familiar with. This is when 'Lizzy Leg' was named, becoming the fifth member of our family.

Kayla's prosthetist, Rod Lawlor, had an excellent bedside manner and earned Kayla's trust quickly. It wasn't difficult to keep her leg on, but getting a correct fit was challenging because of the unusual shape of her stump. Her stump still consists of two bones, with the femur and tibia growing in opposite directions. This will need to be addressed at a later date.

She took her first steps in the family room at home, holding onto the coffee table. It was a jubilant moment for me (tears of joy). Fortunately, I captured it on video! That night, when my husband came home from work, Kayla walked out to greet him. It's a moment he will long remember.

By the next morning, Kayla was walking around the house, pushing a toy pram for support and singing at the top of her voice.

Kayla can do everything other children her age can do – run, jump, climb play equipment. She is also taking swimming lessons. She doesn't get frustrated with Lizzy Leg, but before discovering Prantal Powder we had some problems with heat rash on her stump. She constantly amazes us with her agility, and her outgoing and confident nature carries her well.

As Kayla is growing quickly, she has regular visits to the prosthetics unit (every two to four weeks), and she is now on her second prosthetic leg.

She began three-year-old kinder this year, and after a slightly tentative start is now loving it. When questioned by other children about what happened to her leg she replies, 'This is Lizzy Leg. She helps me to run and walk and I get to choose her colour'. The other children are inquisitive but very accepting.

Kayla's next leg will have a knee joint, and this is planned to be introduced sometime later this year. She will need to re-learn the art of walking with a different type of prosthetic and will need some additional physio.

I am so proud of my little girl and her 'can do', independent attitude towards life. She is my greatest teacher. 'No Mummy, I can do it myself', is a common phrase heard in our home. It can be hard at times to step back and let her learn for herself, but this approach has furthered her independence. We have deliberately tried not to wrap her in cotton wool, and we are now seeing the benefits of this type of approach as she matures.

Judy Woods

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