

Legs and Wings – by Victoria Panton Bacon

Walking is something most of us take for granted. When we get out of bed in the morning, the first thing we do is put our feet on the floor and take our first few steps before we start our day. Into the bathroom, into the kitchen, wherever we need to go. Almost all of us, on foot.

Take just one of those feet, or legs, away, and life is harder. Much harder. That is why in this country we have prosthetic clinics; places where people who have lost one, or in some cases two, lower limbs can go, to get a ‘new’ leg (or legs.) It doesn’t take all their difficulties away, but at least for most amputees – here, and in other developed countries – mobility can be restored.

However, in many of the poorest countries in the world, the situation is not like this. There is no automatic entitlement or even opportunity for most people who live with limb loss to get a prosthetic leg. In many such places prosthetic provision is rare – available to only the few who can afford it (and access it). Some amputees will have crutches and may be able to walk/hop a short distance to school or work, but most aren’t even in that position; and children are denied an education – therefore denied the life chances of their peers. Some of these vulnerable children are forced by their families to beg on the streets; where they are often mocked and bullied. Most are shunned by the society around them; myths perpetuate in areas such as these that amputation is a ‘punishment’ for something done wrong in a previous life – and amputees are often treated accordingly.

The issue of childhood amputation (which I accept is just one of an endless list of immense challenges faced by millions living in the poorest countries in the world) is particularly pertinent to me because I have a niece, Pollyanna Hope, who is missing her lower right leg; and, whilst her personal journey from amputation to mobility has not been easy, inevitably, at least the provision of a prosthetic has never been questioned. In light of her amputation in 2007, my family and I started to become aware of amputee children in the world for whom this support was not ‘simply a given’ and in 2011 we set up a charity to help as many of these child amputees as we could. With the support of friends, donors, and the public relations firm PLMR, *Elizabeth’s Legacy of Hope* was established (in memory of my mother Elizabeth who died in the same accident in which Pollyanna, aged just two at the time, became an amputee.)

Over the years *ELoH* has changed the lives of some 500 children, in Africa (Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Liberia), and in the Andhra Pradesh region of India. Working in partnership with organisations based in our chosen countries, we provide all the medical care our amputees need – first and foremost around their amputations, but also additional medical and psychological care to ensure they have the quality of life we want for them – and they deserve. In Africa, we also fund their education (we do not do this in India because the children are cared for at a large and well-equipped village for orphans, where education is provided by other donors.) We have funded limb clinics in all of these countries; and through our partner’s regular reporting (and have seen with our own eyes during project visits) are assured of the difference a prosthetic leg makes to an amputee child. We are hugely proud of every child who has blossomed under our care; the difference it makes for not only their parents but their entire families too, is immeasurable. A prosthetic leg for a child who cannot walk is, without doubt, a life-changing gift. It gives them not only mobility but so much more. It enables them to access an education; but equally important it changes the way they are perceived in society – with it also comes inclusion, friendship – normality.

However, these 500 children are only a tiny fraction of the thousands across the world who need such support. *Elizabeth’s Legacy of Hope* has drawn attention to the extent of the problem of childhood amputation – both in terms of the numbers of the children who suffer, as well as the difficulties individuals who live with amputation face. However, we have also discovered that the provision of a prosthetic leg for lower limb amputees is not actually hugely expensive, or complicated. Of course, to provide this support to thousands of amputees, rather than hundreds, will

cost far more; but every prosthetic given should be seen as an investment, rather than a cost. An education for a child who will eventually be able to work will be a giver, not a (reluctant) taker.

I know how immensely grateful the children we have given mobility to, are. They know that without the support of charitable caregivers the prospect of a normal life is a dim and distant dream. However, whilst the need for us undoubtedly remains, the world has changed – immeasurably – since *ELoH* was set up in 2011; other global challenges have attracted more and far wider attention (huge natural disasters, most notably but not only the very recent devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria), increasing conflict not only in Ukraine but also in Afghanistan, Myanmar and African nations including Libya, Somalia and Yemen. As a result, we have seen our income fall. The legacy we began in 2011 is now in place – and the vital care we established for child amputees will continue, but with our partners; not with *ELoH*. The vital work that now needs to be done is to advocate for proper provision for these children, that needs to be provided by the developed world, as well as by the governments of the children's own countries, so that their needs are addressed in such a way that they can give to their country, not take from it.

As much as I am saddened, personally, that the trustees and I have had to make the decision to close *ELoH*, I am comforted by the fact my mother's legacy is in place. The children currently under our care, and many more, will continue to be supported (directly) by our partnership organisations; *World Hope International* in Africa and *HEAL (Health and Education for All)* in India.

To support the children in Africa, please go to: www.stewardship.org.uk/partners/20330999 (please put in the 'any details or reference box' that you would like your money to help child amputees in Sierra Leone and / or Liberia. Thank you, and for our Indian children, please pay into *HEAL'S* UK account: Account name is: 'Heal', sort code: 05-06-67, account number: 46295170, putting '*ELoH's* child amputees' in the reference. *HEAL* have also suggested a sponsorship scheme – they ask for a commitment of around £400 per year for each child amputee. We hope that some schools, societies, and companies will choose to join to do this; if you would like more information, please contact uktreasurer@healcharity.co.uk. *World Hope International's* website is: worldhope.org.

Finally, please read these few words of Guthala Mohini, a child amputee from India who has received *ELoH's* support (and who, I believe, speaks for all our children):

*“Though I have eyes, I have no legs. I thought I would never fly this world, but ELoH has given me wings. I am able to go to college with the legs given by ELoH without any difficulty, and I am shown me the light of the world. This organisation has shown me the way.” **

*Words taken from a letter by Guthala Mohini, aged 14, published in *Elizabeth's Poetry of Hope*, available on Amazon (money raised will continue to support the amputees): Elizabeth's Poetry of Hope: Amazon.co.uk: Bacon: 9781399910682: Books

HEAL:

www.healcharity.org/

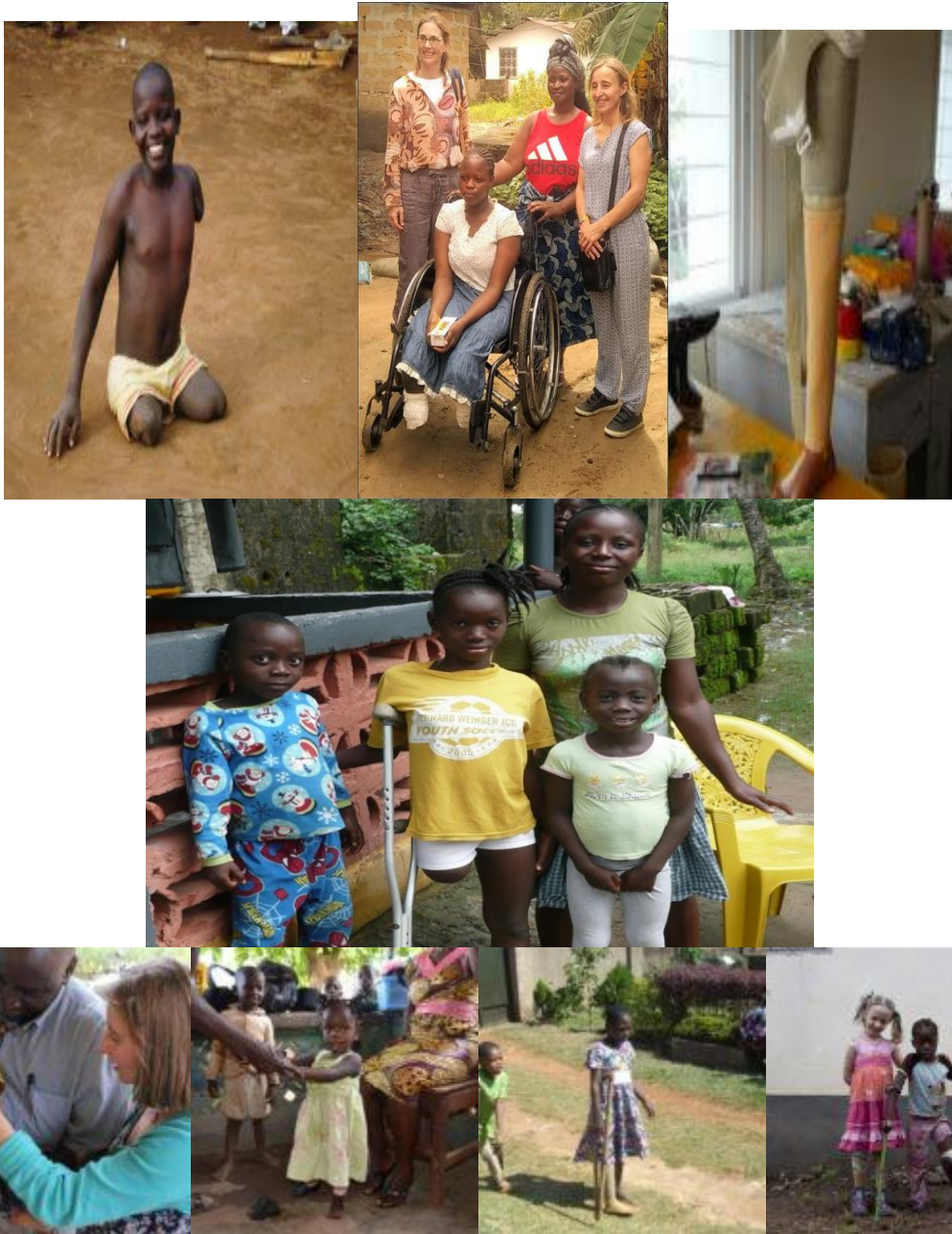
<https://healcharity.org/heal-takes-first-steps/>

<https://youtu.be/qGTWqHxV22o>



WORLD HOPE INTERNATIONAL, Operating in Sierra Leone and Liberia

<https://worldhope.org/project/enable-the-children/>.



PLEASE WATCH OUR FILM:

[Our story - Elizabeth's Legacy of Hope \(elizabethslegacyofhope.org\)](https://www.elizabethslegacyofhope.org)

THANK YOU

Elizabeth's Legacy of Hope is a charity registered in England and Wales, number 1141287,
www.elizabethslegacyofhope.org

