



My story

Phil Sheridan, PCC Member since 2012

I set off to ride on my motorbike to Whitby for fish and chips by the harbour in September 2002. I never arrived. Instead it became my journey to the Patient Carer Community. Not far from my destination on the North Yorkshire moors I survived a near fatal motorbike accident. That doesn't quite describe the full impact of colliding with a 25 tonne lorry and going under the driver's wheel.

Up to the day my life turned, flipped upside down and got shaken out, I had developed my role as a Children's Play Specialist and Therapist for 9 years within a dedicated therapeutic children's home in Leeds. I had become a team leader, manager and innovated evidence based practice for Looked After Children.

It's hard to describe the impact of that crash, the devastation left by the multiple injuries to my legs, hands, shoulders, head and torso, and the eventual amputation of my right leg just below the knee. The ripples of that impact continue to this day. To hear that it's not expected that you will live, then when I did, to hear that you may never walk again let alone engage in the active outdoor sports you once enjoyed, then when I did walk, to lose your career, your home and not a few of your friends along the way. Let's just say without too much melodrama that I spent many days, weeks and months in the depths of despair and depression.

I worked hard over the next 3 years, drawing on twenty years of martial arts practise to overcome the painful injuries and learn to walk again. I could not walk any distance without colossal pain and discomfort yet I still desired to return to the active outdoor lifestyle. No longer able to ride a mountain bike or run I became an accomplished climber instead.

Over the years as I struggled to sustain myself, I engaged in a process of research into prosthetics, recovery and rehabilitation. I joined the Prosthetic and Orthotics User Group at Seacroft Hospital to contribute to the service development via patient involvement and I would support people experiencing limb loss with peer support.

Eight years later in February 2010 I underwent my final major operation to remove the screws and metal work from my right femur. Until this point I could not run or ride a bicycle or walk any distance because the metal work impinged painfully on my remaining muscles, tendons, and soft tissues. With a now long familiar inevitability that I knew so well, I started the laborious process of recovery from a wheelchair once again.

I had the potential if this operation proved successful to perhaps enjoy longer walks with Helen my girlfriend and Sophie the lurcher. Little did I realise at the time as I began the arduous task of learning to walk on a prosthesis again that I may even have the potential to trail run again, an activity I had enjoyed before my accident. With each step I took I found I had more and more mobility in my knee and hip, more importantly, I had no or little pain.

One day with trepidation and with a leap of faith I took my first faltering steps from walking to running. I cannot describe the joy or the commensurate hammer blow of realisation just what a superhuman effort I would need to exert if I determined to run again. But run again I did. Short intervals of chest heaving 5 metre jogs that became 100 metres runs along the canal towpath that became 10km trail runs through the woods, forests and moorland that surround my home.

In nine months I went from not even contemplating running ever again to the joy of hearing my prosthetist say, 'Phil, you've worked so hard I've recommended that you receive a blade.' The elation of running on a blade compared to the limitations of running on a prosthesis designed for walking feels like removing blocks of concrete from your feet and slipping on the lightest of spiked shoes.

I felt so inspired I set myself the challenge to run the Dalesway, over 135km or 80 mile of trail running, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of surviving my horrendous accident. I managed to raise over £2000 for the charities Mind, Combat Stress, Martin House Children's Hospice and Survival International. What I didn't foresee surprised me. The engagement I had with people inspired by the challenge something I had downplayed but simply could not avoid.

Then, in the midsummer 2012 I received an email from Mike Hern, the chair of the user group, with an open invitation from Jools Symons to volunteer with the Patient Carer Community for a day to work in small groups of 1st year student doctors to enable their communication skills with patients and carers.

My first impressions of that day suggested that I had found a group of fun, enthusiastic, like minded people with a wealth of experience to offer, all contained and nurtured with skill and warmth by Jools and the rest of the team. The experience proved yet another turning point in my journey. Only a month before, I had taken a leap of faith with early retirement from my 20 year career with Social Care.

After a fab training session in the morning followed by the delivery in the afternoon I wondered what other forms of patient involvement Jools had going on at the LIME. I didn't have long to wait. Jools suggested I observe the Simulated Patient work with 2nd and 3rd year students as she thought I would like to get involved. Once again the atmosphere of professionalism, warmth and fun reminded me so much of my work with the children's therapeutic home.

The story doesn't end there of course. In just over 12 months I have had the pleasure to witness the superb and diverse work that the team headed by Jools does. From a personal point of view my involvement could not have come at a more opportune moment in my life. A period once again where my confidence and self-esteem needed bolstering. The care and positive feedback I have received has helped me through yet another transition in my life that could all too easily have floundered.

I feel proud to talk about my involvement with the PCC and my work as a Simulated Patient at LIME. The student doctors I have had the pleasure to work with reassures me that in the future the work we undertake to enable their communication skills at such a crucial time in their training will pay dividends later on as they develop their careers.

The journey my life has taken since my accident as I described at the beginning has taken many twists and turns. One creative turn took me back to my creative therapeutic work with the traumatised children I used to support. I had used creative writing as a means to explore and ameliorate the long terms affects of surviving significant trauma. I now used the medium of creative writing with my own explorations of my still raw traumatic experience.

I had always enjoyed creative writing since my childhood. I now had the urge to write, to open windows through which I might return, to look within and understand the places I had travelled. I began to write and collate prose and poetry that at first I had no intention of publishing. However, with the support and encouragement of friends and family I produced a short collection of poetry

that I self-published titled, 'Heart on the Mountain,' firstly as an E book in 2012 and then as a paperback in 2013.

In its production I drew a line between the event that changed my life so irrevocably with its loss and suffering to the life I look forward to now. The role I have with the PCC in no small way contributes to my positive outlook and faith in the potential of the human being to not just survive but thrive also, even when faced with the greatest adversity. To not just survive but give back and pay forward in kind all the fantastic care I received from the dedicated work of the clinicians and health professionals that saved my life.

To finish I have included two of my favourite poems to illustrate my happiness and gratitude at simply still being here. I hope I may share more with you in the future.

Made of Beauty

Made of land
Of sky
Of sun, moon and stars.

Made of wind,
Of cloud
Of mist, rain and snow.

Made of trees,
Of flowers
Of all things green.

Made of flesh,
Of bone
Of blood, skin and nerve.

Made of love,
Of heart
Of thought, word and deed.

Made of beauty,
Of spirit
Of warp, weft and weave.

All things
Made beautiful.

Run

I find my rhythm in the land,
Join with it
And find my ease in the world.

I extend my body,
My hearts tempo
Into my limbs,

And remember myself
Whole again.

You can find out more at my website: www.philip-sheridan.com

My book, 'Heart on the Mountain,' is available online from Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Thank you