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Title :

My Journey

Abstract :

*A version of my life from birth until the present time, at the age of sixteen years.
This story has been written by my Mum.*

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My Journey by Claire written by Mum

It was on a beautiful day in May that I was born. There were great celebrations in the Dolan household, my Dad after a great many years, and three sons, had got his first daughter. Mum tells me often, how many of the St. Peter's Parishioners celebrated my birth, and it was on a warm July evening that I was baptised, Claire Marie at the 6.30p.m. Mass. My three brothers were my Godfather's, Mum didn't think it necessary for me to have a Godmother, all the people who were at the Mass promised to look after my spiritual welfare.

For the first twelve months of my life, my milestones were like any other baby and were greeted with excitement by the Parishioners. Is she walking yet? Is she saying Daddy? Mum says I was the centre of attention and everyone was keen to see the new baby in the Dolan household.

It was not until I was about fourteen months old, that Mum started to worry, at first they thought I was just very placid but the alarm bells started to ring when Mum and Dad realised that there was very little I was interested in. I was very happy and content just to sit and smile and was making no moves to talk or walk.

I won't bore you with the details of the rounds of the consultants it was a very painful time for Mum and Dad, I know because Mum cried a great deal and Dad never knew what to say to her or me and that was not like my Dad.

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I found it hard to understand what was happening, the people who had been so keen to stop and talk to me, started to ignore me and Mum. Dad and I knew they were very frightened and unhappy for us. Mum started to get Mass Cards, she explained to me that people didn't only send Mass Cards to people who had died, but it was a special prayer for me. I couldn't understand this as I was still the same person as I was before, I hadn't died nor was I ill. Why did no one want to talk to me now?

Then my big brother took over, he could see how distressed we all were and he painted me a special Tee-shirt with "MY NAME IS CLAIRE" on the front and "PLEASE TALK TO ME" on the back, and I started to wear this for Church on Sundays. This did the trick because some people came up to me after Mass and started to talk to me again which made me and the whole of the Dolan household a much happier place.

My Mum and Dad were told that I should go to a Special Nursery, but when they went to see it, they were not very impressed, and so I was fortunate to be able to attend Charnwood Nursery where they take the non-disabled child with the disabled, and although I had to go away from my local community, and so never really got to know children in my neighbourhood as I was not able to play out like other children I thoroughly enjoyed playing alongside the other children at the Nursery.



It was a very happy time for me and for my Mum who used to take me, but at five that all changed, all the other children were excited and a little nervous about going to their local school, but they were all going together. I was to tread a different path, and so we polished up my Wheelchair and went to visit the different Special Schools available for children like me. It was so very different from the Nursery. There was no happy chatter, no children playing together, and no matter how you look at it, disabled children altogether in one place is an awesome sight, and it made Mum and I a little afraid but Mum told me not to worry. The experts had said I would get used to it, and would eventually like being with people like myself.

And so it was in September 1986 that I entered my first Special School. An old bus came to pick me up on my first day. My day started at 7.45a.m. We had to pick up other children like me and so on that long journey I had no one to talk to me, not even someone who would reach out and touch me and it took over two hours to get there. I didn't like being there, the people there were always so busy, I was left on my own a lot of the time with a toy or a mirror in front of me. I didn't want to look at myself, but other children and I couldn't play with the toy on my own. I didn't like lunch times, because the staff said I couldn't cope with the noise, I had lunch on my own. It's funny really I had been so used to such a lot of noise in the Nursery.

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I became isolated from the friends I had made at Nursery, I suppose because they were not growing with me, they forgot about me and when they did see me, they had forgotten how to play with me, and I was getting more and more afraid of going any where, I was so used to being on my own and away from the happy chatter and bustle of children.

Mum and Dad became more disturbed and worried about me, they knew I was not happy and this made them unhappy and so a family conference was called and it was decided that I should be sent to another Special School.

I was very fortunate to meet a man called Mr Ken Jupp who was the headmaster of the Special School, who believed that all children should be able to attend their local school if they wished and he persuaded Mum and Dad to try and get me into the local Catholic School. I know they were little nervous, but I reckon they thought they had nothing to lose, they could see I was very unhappy and was regressing.

The long hard battle started for my Mum and Dad with the Authority to allow me to belong in my own local community Catholic School. They did everything, even paying at first for my support worker to be with me.

And so started the happiest time of my life, I met Carol who is my friend and my support worker. I will not tell you it was all plain sailing, it certainly wasn't for Carol and me, we had to get used to each other, and as Mum is often telling me, I take some getting used to. We had to learn how to communicate with each other, but Carol, I knew loved me, and she worked very hard, both with me and getting used to the routine of a Mainstream School. It was important for her to make relationships with the teachers and the children in the school, but before long, I started to make relationships myself and some of these have become very close and remain my best friends.

I was invited out to parties and out to tea. Mum and Dad invited my friends for days out in the holidays. I've even had friends stay the night. My house became a happy place again, and my family became excited as I was with my new life. As the years went by I became more involved with my friends, they even learnt how to feed me, they even changed their games so I could be involved. They understand when I have a fit, they will sit with me and hold my hand, even though they tell me I have great strength in my hands and nearly crush their fingers. They ring me when they're on holiday even from France. I know it must appear odd to most people because I can't

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Speak back to them, but they understand and they know I love to hear them. I gained certificates for swimming and for athletics, all with the help of my friends. They are keen that I should be involved in anything they are involved in. They love me and this gives me courage and a great deal of dignity.

They were so determined that I should go to Secondary School with them that they all wrote letters saying why I should go with them.

And so here I am at High School with my friends and I'm enjoying every minute of it.

I have dreams like other people, I don't dream of exotic holidays or expensive toys, I dream of being in my community and with my friends. I don't want charity I just want to belong.