

THE WALK BACK

You're not the first person this ever happen to.
You won't be the last.
Sure it's tough. But now it's happened. It'll take getting used to.

You ask the questions
"WHY ME?"

You ask without really looking for an answer.

But there is one, and it's this:

WHY NOT YOU?

It's a hard world, full of percentages.

If you live in it you can get HURT.

Anybody.

Anytime.

I know because I've been where you are right now.

And I know how it feels.

Full of yourself.

Helpless.

Completely dependent on hospital staff, family and friends.

Confused by pain and drugs.

Alone.

Worried.

Out of this world in one of your own.

How about a little help?

One thing that would have helped me, and I hope can help you are these words about what to expect during the time ahead.

Right off the bat

I'd like to say the biggest thing you have to fight

is not

the Pain and Discomfort and Confusion.

Believe me, they go away.

But one thing won't unless you fight it.

Pitty.

Both kinds . . .

Feeling sorry for yourself and

Letting other people feel sorry for you.

Nobody ever said it was easy

But there are ways of making it easier.

If you think of yourself as a medical case that's what everyone else will think of you. And that's how they'll treat you.

If you think of yourself as a

PERSON

who's had some bad luck but can handle it, that's what they'll think

They'll take their clue from you.

The most important job you have is making them feel comfortable.

If you don't, they'll hold back by being over-helpful.

But it's Rule Number 1 of the walk back.

PAIN is the biggest problem for you now, the thing you live with every minute. The severe pain from surgery should last only three or four days.

After that, your leg will continue to ache for three or four weeks.

This discomfort will disappear gradually.

Strange that there's pain

where there's no longer any leg or foot to hurt.

But not strange if you know why.

The nerves that went to them have been cut, but still have a "memory" of where they used to go.

Where the nerve fibers have been cut is where it really hurts. . .but the "memory" tells the brain, mistakenly, that this pain is coming from the leg and foot below.

In time the "Memory" will fade.

How soon you'll be up and around will depend on whether the skin edges were closed during the operation or left open to drain and prevent infection.

If the skin was closed during surgery, you can expect to sit up in a chair within a week.

Otherwise, it'll be about two to four weeks.

Before you get crutches and a week or so after you've been sitting up and your strength has begun to come back, you'll be introduced to a four-legged appliance called a walker.

You'll use this for several days until you get used to your new body balance.

To be perfectly honest, the first sight of the walker is discouraging to all of us who've been in this 'boat', and you'll feel even worse after you've tried walking. Like so many things you've been experiencing, it's quite an adjustment.

But progress in the walker is fast.

What everyone is most afraid of, but shouldn't be, is falling.

It's practically impossible. REMEMBER THAT!

Once your doctor or physiotherapist feels that you've master the walker, you're ready for graduation to crutches.

You'll be helped carefully, schooled thoroughly and watched closely by your physiotherapist until you're perfectly secure on the crutches.

Within a week, your solo.

Once you do, you've cleared your first real barrier.

When you've gotten used to them, you'll find crutches a fast, safe and easy way to move around.
Even getting up and down stairs is no real problem.

The next plateau is waiting for the leg to heal so you can get your artificial leg.

Patience.

This takes about four to six months.

It seems like a lifetime.

In a way, it is. But time passes and life has a way of going on.

By now you've gotten used to the idea that things have changed. Your body, as well as your mind, has made adjustments.

You've found muscles you never knew you had.

Physical.

Mental too.

You're building up to the Big Day when you get the artificial leg.

The artificial leg at first, but only at first, will be a disappointment.

Before long it will be the best friend you've got.

But not in the very beginning.

In the beginning it's just a ting made of fibers, fiber glass, willow wood and aluminum.

You won leg fits into a cup-like socket and you'll be able to wear any regular shoe on the foot.

When you see the leg, it'll look strange, foreign and really nothing to write home about.

You'll have become used to the crutches by this time, so the new leg will seem like more trouble than it's worth.

Don't be discouraged.

You're much closer to your goal than you know.

Again, you'll be trained thoroughly and carefully as you were when learning to walk on crutches.

You'll still be using them in the beginning.

After the crutches comes a cane.

You'll wear the leg for very short periods of time at first.

You'll bear a little weight on it.

You'll learn balance.

As you bear more and more weight on the leg your balance will improve.

You'll gain confidence.

Before long, you'll be walking.

How well will you be able to walk on your artificial leg?

This, of course, is the biggest question of all.

Without a limp, this is entirely possible.

Many people master it to perfection.

You may not think of walking as a sport, but your new way of walking will be in the sense that persistence, exercise and practice will make you better at it.

The more persistent you are, the more you exercise, the more you practice, the better you'll walk.

Thinking ahead a few years, long after you're done with this and living quite normally again, the artificial leg will wear out.

That will be four or five years from now.

The hinges and straps, like the tires on a car, don't last forever.

Over the years, the contour, shape and firmness of you lower leg will change.

The socket will fit no better than a tired old shoe fits like it did when it was new.

That is a good way to start thinking about it now.

That leg is going to become familiar to you, and as comfortable as an old shoe.

The Walk Back is no Sunday stroll but before long that's just what you'll be taking unless you happen to prefer bowling, or skiing, or golf.

Believe me, I know.

I've been right where you are now.