



Tarek Kalam

My name is Tarek Kalam. I had a spinal deformity from childhood. In 1973, when I was 13 years old I had an operation in then Shaheed Shaurwardy Hospital in Dhaka to correct the deformity by an American bone specialist namely Dr. Ronald Garst. The operation was successful, however, I used to get severe back pain whilst playing any outdoor sports e.g. basketball, cricket etc. I passed my SSC (1977) from St. Placid's High School and HSC (1979) from Chittagong Government College.

In May 1979, I saw an article in the Bangladesh Times about an innovative treatment to correct the curvature of spinal cord by a British spine specialist. After reading this article I thought to write him giving brief details of myself i.e. the pain and problem that I was suffering and my past spinal operation. I was surprised to receive a beautiful reply from Mr. Gardner the specialist from Basildon Hospital, Essex, who developed this new technique to correct spinal curvature. I came to England with great hopes and expectations in July 1979. In 1980, I became paralysed after a series of spinal operations that unfortunately went wrong that carries only 5% risk factor. The treatment and follow-up rehabilitation was carried out in different hospitals in UK spreading nearly over four years. Finally, in 1984 I came out of the hospital as a wheelchair user.

The outcome of this operation had changed my life totally. Initially, I was very much bitter and depress, used to think that "this is my end" and that I shall never be able to do anything and that I would be a burden for the whole family. I was sent to the Southport Spinal Unit for rehabilitation in 1984. Here, I saw and realised the hardship of other patients with spinal injuries. In fact, in this spinal unit, out of 40 in-patients whom have spinal cord injuries (SCI), I was the best among others in terms of dependency and mobility. Seeing the struggle and dependency of other SCI patients I found that I am much better than others and I must thank to the Almighty Allah that at least I can look after myself without nursing staffs. In this hospital I was taught how to lead an independent life in a wheelchair. The spinal consultant Mr Krishnan showed me how to lead a positive and independent life and his words motivated me to accept this new challenge as a wheelchair user. Alhamdoillah at the end I accepted this new way of life as a wheelchair user.

After coming out of the hospital, I started thinking to continue my education and career that I left in 1979. Southport Spinal Unit has opened my eyes and mind. Here I saw how people in a wheelchair taking active role in every day life just like a non disabled person. I believe if disabled people have all the facilities and there are no social barriers, they can do anything they want and can also contribute vastly to this society. In the beginning I went to a local college doing a part-time course 12 hours a week studying Computer Studies. Eventually I went to do full-time courses and finally graduated with an honours degree in Computation from University of Manchester Science and Technology (UMIST) in 1990. After my graduation I also successfully completed a business training course from Manchester Business School and then set up my own home-based business trading as KalamTek offering computer consultancy, translation and typesetting in Bangla. I have also worked in several organisations whilst running my business. Like any other businesses there are ups and downs BUT I am happy the way I am. I became a qualified Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) in Network Essentials.

I have worked in several organisations in Manchester and Salford besides being self employed since 1992. At present, I am working for Manchester City Council with Data Governance Team analysing data information etc.