

Some of you know me as Cheryl McLay; some of you know me as Dr. Coldwater, a pediatrician. I am both.

I love working with children. They are so fun and honest. I walk into the exam room and a 6 year old says “Dr. Coldwater, where is your other leg?” Or some of the quieter ones turn to their mom and in a stage whisper say, “Mom, the doctor only has one leg”. Or the truly enterprising kids, while I’m talking to their parent or another child, get down on the floor and start trying to look underneath my dress to see where that leg is. I just tell them that they can’t look under someone’s dress because it’s not polite and they might see my underwear! Of course, their parents are about to die at that point.

So, I explain to them that I only have one real leg and I have a special leg that helps me walk, but sometimes it has to get fixed. I also have crutches to help me walk sometimes. I tell them that I only got one leg when I was born so it’s okay. It doesn’t hurt me. It’s just the way I am. Sometimes I tell them that God made me that way, so it’s fine. I tell them that everyone is different. And they get it. Well, they may ask all the same questions the next time they see me, but that’s okay.

I was born with a birth defect which caused my left leg to be much smaller than my right leg. I had a brace when I first learned to walk and had my first surgery when I was 6 years old. I had other surgeries when I was 10 and 14 years old.

I later asked my orthopedic surgeon why the surgeries were all done at such critical times in a child’s development. He said that those were the times when they figured out what surgery to do, so they did it. (They didn’t spend much time on child development in those days- now they would have Child Life workers, a pre-hospital visit with Skippy, the purple kangaroo, and there would be playrooms and games to make the hospital stay more fun).

When I was in the hospital when I was a teenager, they actually put me in the men's unit because the doctor thought the nurses were better.

Having only one "normal" leg, having a "disability", probably made me a different person. It allowed me to look at the world in a different way. It led me to become a pediatrician and directly influenced how I work with kids. I've learned that there were very positive aspects of my "disability" that may not be obvious to others. I've learned that attitude is more important than how many legs you have.

As I got older, I realized what a blessing all of this was.

When I had my first surgery, I was in a body cast for 6 months. Since I couldn't go to school, a teacher came to my house. On the first day, she told my mother that I had already read all of the first grade books, so she was going to have to get more creative. Because of that, I got a jump start which gave me an enthusiasm and love for learning and reading.

Since I had surgery right before I entered High School, I started school with a cast with a metal lower leg and crutches. I wasn't popular, good in sports, or any of the other things girls were supposed to be at that time, so I had the opportunity to use my brain. I could be a "nerd" (though that word wasn't common then) and spend time learning whatever I was interested in and doing well in school.

Because my parents never told me I couldn't do something I wanted to try, I was able to learn to ride a bike on my own, ice skate with a brace, snow ski and I still try new things. Now I row single sculls on Town Lake, work out with my friend and personal trainer, swim, and ski. Sometimes, my husband can't remember

which leg I have and which one I don't have. I DO know, but when I dream, I have two legs.

Because I spent so much time in hospitals, I learned about all the wonderful people who work in medicine. I learned that the doctors can only do their work with the help of all the other staff. When I became a doctor, I had complete respect for the nurses, therapists and everyone else who worked with me. I could never understand the doctors who treated them badly, because they would never be able to do anything without them. It's the whole team which gets things done, not just one person.

I realized that not all people handle adversity in the same way. Two people could have the exact same thing happen to them- a car accident, a death of a loved one, a loss of a job. For one person, that bad thing becomes her life; it is a PROBLEM (with capital letters). For another person, it is an annoyance, something you deal with and move forward. What's the difference?

I think it must be faith. It must be the understanding that God is helping you through whatever it is. It must be the knowing that things will be fine. Some people really believe this and some people don't. That's the difference. I don't believe that God is trying to make us happy and beautiful and perfect all the time. I do believe that God is always there with us when we are unhappy or feeling ugly or imperfect. We just might not always understand it at the time. But the "faith thing" helps us understand that it isn't all bad, there are things we don't know and it is still okay. Then, we choose our attitude. We don't get to fix everything or have everything be perfect, we just get to choose our attitude about it.

I was talking to a friend once. I said that neither of us had ever really had BAD things happen. Our families are whole, no one ever had a horrible disease or horrible accident, no divorces, no houses burned down, no loss of everything. We had had good lives

so far. How would we ever know whether our faith was strong enough to handle bad things? We had never been tested the way some people have. There is a little insecurity there. How will you know until something bad happens? She said, "Cheryl, you only have one leg!" I said, "Yes. Well, that's an inconvenience. I've always had one leg. I didn't have to make a choice. It just is what it is".

Now this doesn't mean that I never complain. Just ask my husband. I complain about not being able to do some things. I complain about getting my prosthesis fitted and I get a little annoyed when it doesn't fit correctly sometimes. I've even been grouchy from time to time. But that's probably just being human. I will keep trying to do my best at whatever I do, I will keep answering the questions of children, I will keep looking at the world from my one-legged point of view. I will persevere, because that is why God has blessed me with everything I have.

When Jesus performed miracles and healed people, He did not choose to help them because of their wealth or standing, seriousness of their disease, or because He was told to. He chose to help them because of their faith.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And let us rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but let us also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance." Romans 5:1-3