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Cover Story - Undaunted In Spite Of Shortcomings

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Despite one of Kelsian Clemetson's legs being shorter than the

other, she has no shortcomings when it comes to living life to the fullest.

Clemetson, 20, was born with a disability known as congenital limb deformity. One of her legs is missing a fibula, thus making one longer than the other. Her plight went unnoticed until she was about three months old. She said her mother; Violet Clemetson, told her that when she noticed it, she immediately took her to the doctor. But the doctor said there was nothing he could do.

"They told her that it would be best she put me in a home because I would never be able to walk. But, to everyone's surprise, I began walking when I was about one and half years old," said Clemetson.

Her mother told her that she used to crawl around with her shorter leg on the ground and the longer one upright.

"I don't know how I did that," she said as she laughed at her herself.

Back to doctor

Clemetson told **Flair** that her mother took her back to the doctor when she was a little older to see if by chance there was something that could be done about her leg. However, to Mrs Clemetson's dismay the doctors told her that the only thing for her to do was amputate her daughter's leg. But she would not have it.

"I am happy that she didn't do it,"

Things for Clemetson took a turn for the worse when she began primary [school](#). She said she was teased by the other children, but the teachers intervened and nipped it in the bud. She said thereafter, she was able to attend school without being teased. On the other hand, her high school years (at Wolmer's High School for Girls) were good. She said the girls were warm and welcoming. She noted that she did pretty well academically, as well, receiving the John Wolmer

Award for [academic](#) excellence during her tenure, among lots of other awards. In fact, she said every year she would receive an award. She also got an award for being the top achiever in English literature in the Cape Unit One examination. Plus, during her senior year, she was a senior prefect, and she was always involved in several clubs.

Clemetson recalled that though her high-school years were good, they could have been even better if she were able to play tennis, volleyball or football, because she loves the sports.

Currently, Clemetson is a second-year student of human resource management at the [University of the West Indies](#). She said that things are not as dandy as when she was in high school. Though people might not openly tease her, she is the object of many stares. She said the truth is there is a thin line between someone looking at you and staring at you.

"Many people don't understand disability and they often don't know how to approach you. I don't know if it's out of fear or they just choose not to and resort to staring."

She added that people with disabilities are stigmatised. "People just don't treat us with respect. But they should be more open-minded. Not because I have a disability does it mean I am less of a person."

Hide from the world

Clemetson noted that there are days she doesn't feel like going to [classes](#), but she knows that she can't hide from the world. So she has no alternative but to try to overcome her fear and move on despite her challenges. As a young girl, she felt more accepted and normal but as she is maturing into a woman, she is faced with the reality of her deformity.

"While these days I may feel bad and cry for a while and then move

on, I find that I think a lot more about my disability because I just want to be accepted as being normal.

"I feel like people just don't understand and are less accepting. So I now wonder if I will be given the same opportunities as everyone else"

Clemetson believes that until people stop discriminating against individuals with disabilities and allow her to feel less abnormal, she will not be at peace in her mind. For the time being, she is trying to be strong.

The good news is she might have a shot of correcting her deformity through limb lengthening and surgery. In 2009, she discovered Dr Dror Paley, the leading surgeon in limb lengthening located in Florida, United States of America. As it was explained to her by Dr Paley, she would be required to do a surgery once per year over a five-year period in order to correct her leg, given that one is 11.5 inches longer than the other. Limb-lengthening surgery (LimbLengthening.us Dr Dror Paley's website), works by gradually growing new [bone](#) and soft tissues (skin, muscle, nerves, blood vessels, etc). This new growth is called tissue regeneration. Bone and soft tissue regenerate when they are distracted (pulled apart) at a very slow rate of approximately one millimetre per day. The website also stated that there are many different lengthening devices used. The most common are external fixators, which are devices that attach to the bone by means of thin wires or thicker pins that have a screw threading at their attachment to the bone. There are also lengthening devices that are fully implanted inside the bone. These devices do not require external pins.

Clemetson told **Flair** that she was quite excited that such surgery could be done.

But she had to delay the procedure because it is very expensive and she is unable to afford it just now. "So, until I can come up with funding, I just have to wait."

Clemetson noted that Dr Paley has advised her that by the time she receives funding, the period for surgery might be shorter because every day new technology is coming out which will shorten the process. For now, she remains optimistic.

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