

You Can Do It



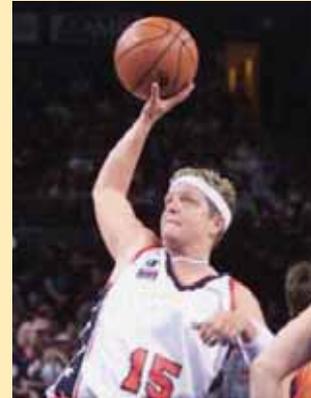
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A short story in which Fiona and her grandfather meet some new challenges



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Sport for All

Welcome to the homepage of the Paralympics

Everyone has heard of the [Olympic Games](#), a sporting competition between different nations every four years.

But have you heard of the Paralympic Games?

These are held in the same city as the main games but they are for athletes with disabilities. They are called the Paralympics because they are 'parallel' to the Olympic Games.



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History

The first international games for disabled athletes were held in 1952.

In the 1960 games in Rome, approximately 400 competitors from 23 countries took part.

Almost 4000 athletes competed at the Sydney games in 2000, representing 122 nations.

The next games are to be held in Athens during 2004. More than 4000 athletes from about 130 countries are expected to take part.



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Range of Sports

Eighteen different sports are played at the Paralympics. Most are adaptations of sports also played at the Olympics, including:

Basketball	a wheelchair version of basketball
Archery	a version of archery with arrows shot at an extra-large target



The other four sports have been specially devised for disabled people. These four 'unique' sports are:

Boccia	a sport based on an ancient Greek ball-tossing game
Goalball	a goal-scoring team game with blindfolded players
Powerlifting	an individual event of strength; athletes lie on a bench and lift a weighted bar
Wheelchair Rugby	a team game combining the rules and skills of basketball and rugby played with a volleyball

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Range of Sports

Goalball Scores!

Fast, furious, skilful and fun! That's the way people describe goalball, a sport that is winning new fans every day.

It's a thrilling indoor game for teams of three. The aim is to score by getting the ball over the opposing team's goal line.

But this is no ordinary ball. So that sighted and blind people can play on equal terms, all players have to be blindfolded, and it is the rattling sound produced by the ball that guides them through the game. The spectators of this sport have to remain totally silent during the match so that the players can concentrate on listening to the sound of the ball. There's no other sport quite like it.

"Goalball's really exciting – you're not allowed to keep the ball for more than eight seconds, and that makes the game move fast. We wear some special protective gear because the ball is quite hard. I've had a few bruises! My team practises every Saturday and I always look forward to it."

Paul Dobson, goalball player



British Wheelchair Basketball Forum

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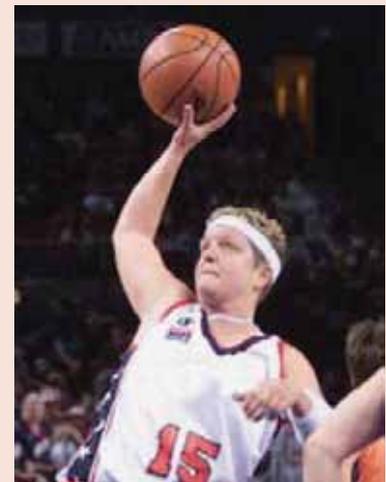
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Silver Arrows

Close Contest

The Woodbridge Arena was buzzing last night as this year's basketball championships reached their climax, writes *John Wilkinson*.



The favourites made their mark early on and set the pace for the game as the Eagles struggled against the superior height of Johnson and Murray. The pair dominated the passing and made sure the Arrows ended their second quarter with an overwhelming 34 point lead.

Rob Lane's long passes brought the Eagles back to life just after the break and upset the opposition for a time.

But the Arrows kept their nerve to secure a narrow victory.

Gomez, the victorious captain, later praised the newly redesigned wheelchairs the team are trying out. "We really noticed the extra flexibility of the wheels. It made turning easier and that helped our confidence."

The future of the game certainly looks bright on the evidence of this final.

You Can Do It

by Theresa Breslin

Fiona, for goodness' sake, hurry up!

Her mother's voice, sharp with annoyance, sounded all the way up the stairs to the attic. Fiona scowled and stuck her chin out. 'Do this, Fiona. Take that, Fiona. Bring this downstairs. Carry that upstairs. Don't slouch about, Fiona. We don't have much time.'

Fiona picked up the last of the boxes she was bringing down from the attic, and as she did so, it burst. Without warning it gave way, spewing bills, old photographs, postcards and letters all over the floor. She gazed down in bewilderment at the mess.

She disliked change, she decided, as she gazed at the chaotic pile of papers at her feet, and this change she especially hated. Moving Grampa out of his big old house into that flat. There was never going to be enough space for all his things, and hardly enough room for her to stay every weekend with him as she had done ever since she was small. As she knelt down and began to gather up some of the bits and pieces, she heard her mother's voice again.



‘Fiona! Come down this minute!’

Fiona dropped the papers she had in her hand and went to the door.

‘Coming,’ she shouted.

She trudged down the narrow attic stairs. She could see her mother’s face peering up at her from the stairwell.

‘Whatever is keeping you up there? We’ll have to leave now. I don’t want to have Grampa waiting too long on his own at the new flat.’

Fiona walked down the next flight of stairs to the bottom hall. She passed her father on his way out to the back garden.

‘Are you going with your mum?’ he asked.

Fiona shrugged. ‘Looks like it,’ she said.

She went out of the front door and helped bundle some boxes and carrier bags into her mother’s car.

'You won't be able to get in here now, Fiona. You'll have to stay with your dad and come on later,' her mum was saying.

Fiona watched her mother drive off and then went slowly back upstairs. Her dad must still be sorting out the contents of the shed. She had time to go back up to the attic and gather up the broken box. It was mainly photographs which had spilled out. Memories of her Grampa's life and family.

There was an old one of him in uniform. She picked it up and squinted at it.

He smiled out at her. A strong face with a dark moustache. Fiona sighed. He wasn't like that any more. Not since a stroke* had left him with shaky legs and quivering muscles.

She decided to get a box to put the photographs in. She twisted round and ran to the stairs.

'Those who hurry fastest are the first to fall' was one of her Grampa's sayings, and it was as if she heard him saying it now, right out loud in her ear as she stumbled on the top step. Seconds later she landed with a crash at the foot of the stairs. Her head hurt, her bottom hurt and her legs throbbed painfully.



** A stroke is a sudden illness affecting parts of the brain, which can cause speech difficulties and loss of feeling in the body.*

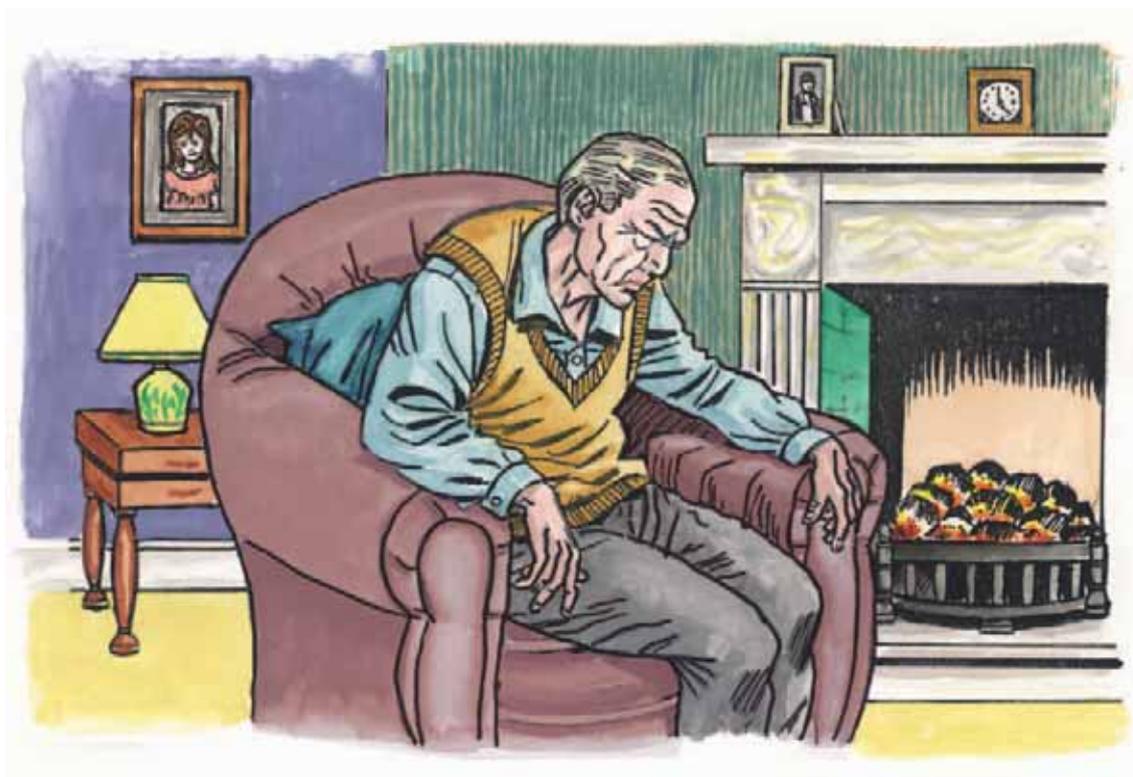
Fiona was quite alone in the big empty house. She started to get up. Her legs were caught underneath her body and she tried to heave herself up and straighten them out.

‘Oww,’ she yelped. A stabbing pain flared in her knees. She moved again, this time more carefully.

The pain was terrible. There were tears crowding in behind her eyelids and her hands were shaking. When she tried to move, both legs hurt badly.

‘Now what am I going to do?’ Fiona asked herself, looking at the steep, uneven stairs below. She couldn’t stand up. She was a prisoner.

Both her parents were so busy at the moment with Grampa being unwell and moving house, that they might not realise anything was wrong, not for a while anyway. But then, Fiona thought, there was someone who usually noticed immediately that she wasn’t around. Grampa. Well, he used to, anyway. Things were different now.



The first day he had come home from hospital she hadn’t recognised the sick old man whose clothes seemed too big for him. She had pictured herself helping him get better, sorting his cushions, picking flowers for his room. She imagined him smiling and saying, ‘Thank you, Fiona’. Then they would play cards and she would win most of the games. But it hadn’t been like that at all. He sat slumped in his chair by the fire most of the day, his eyes were vague and sometimes he dribbled his food. Just like a baby!

She didn’t want to sit on the little stool beside his chair and talk. His eyes were always sad, and he hardly ever answered anyone anyway. ‘He’s not even trying,’ Fiona’s mum complained. ‘He’s supposed to exercise his fingers and practise those words, but he just sits all day.’

As the weeks passed and he didn't get much better, he finally agreed to sell the big house and move closer to the rest of the family.

Fiona looked at her watch and groaned. She might have to wait ages before Mum or Dad came. She moved her position. Something was pressing into her back. Something hard with sharp corners. It was a photograph album. Carefully written on the front in her Grampa's writing was



Fiona made a face. She hated baby photographs of herself. Still... it would pass the time, and take her mind off the pain. She flicked it open. There was one of Grampa with his arm around her as she stood in the swimming pool. It seemed silly now she was older, but she had been scared to stand by herself in the water. Her legs had trembled as she stepped away from the tiled side.



'You can do it, Fiona,' Grampa's voice whispered in her ear. 'You can do it.' And he had steadied her until she was confident enough to stand on her own. 'Thanks, Grampa,' she'd said. And he had pulled her hair and said, 'What are friends for?'

What were friends for? Helping each other, she supposed. She could do with some help now... and so could he, she suddenly thought.

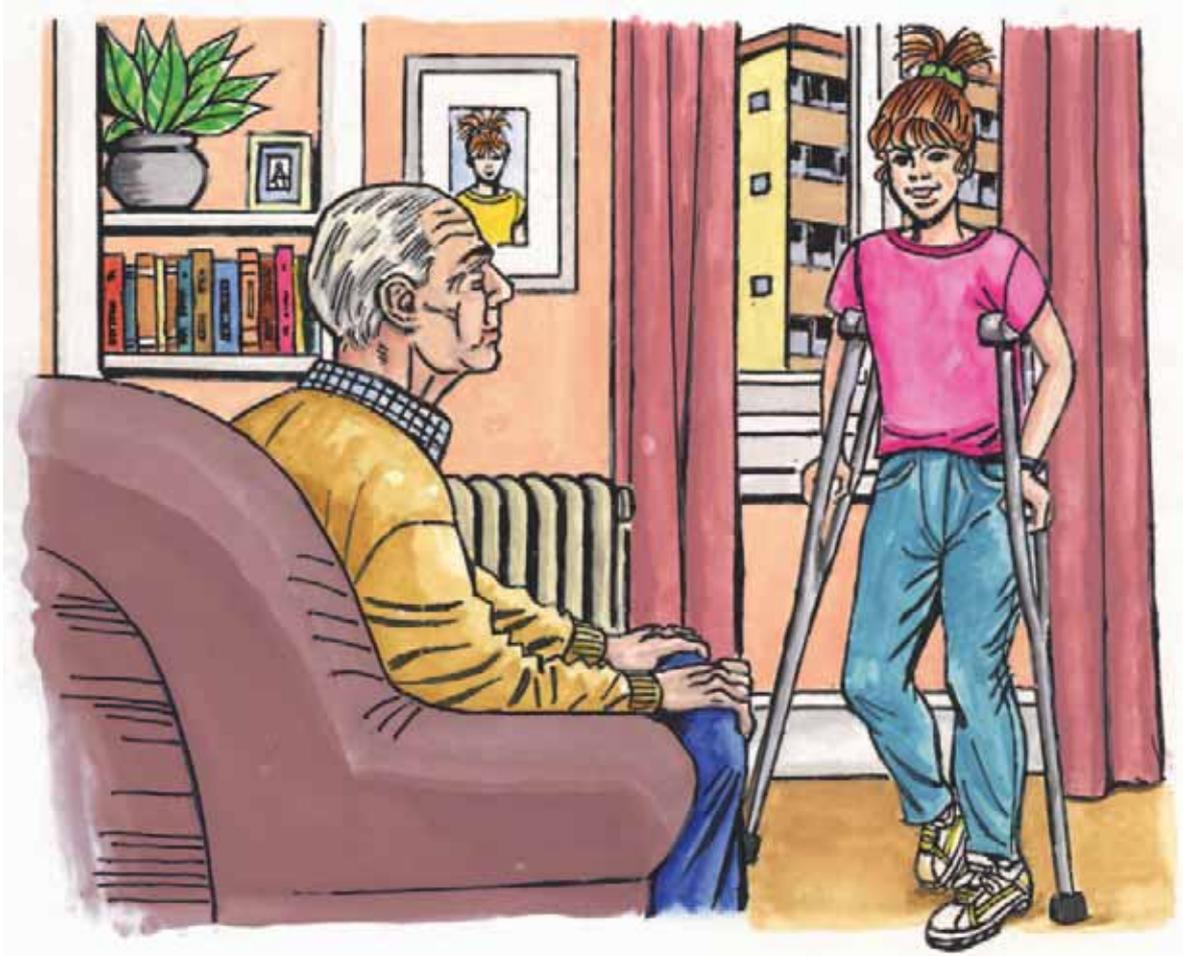
A friend to help him now that he had trembling legs, now that he was unsure, with no confidence, maybe a little scared of trying. Fiona felt more tears coming, and this time she didn't stop them.

And she was still tearful, with a grubby, streaked face, when she heard the back door open an hour or so later.

‘Dad! Dad!’ she yelled frantically as he ran up the stairs.

‘You poor thing!’ he cried when he saw her.

* * * * *



They got back from the hospital at six o'clock.

Grampa was sitting in his chair, hands resting on each knee. He looked up as Fiona came in. His eyes followed her as she limped slowly across the room.

‘I suppose neither of us will be able to manage stairs for a while.’ Fiona sat down beside him. ‘How about a trade?’ she suggested. ‘I borrow your wheelchair, and you get a turn of my crutches?’

The old man looked at her uncertainly. Fiona giggled.

‘We could have races,’ she said. She looked at him, full in the face, the first time she had done so since he had been in hospital.

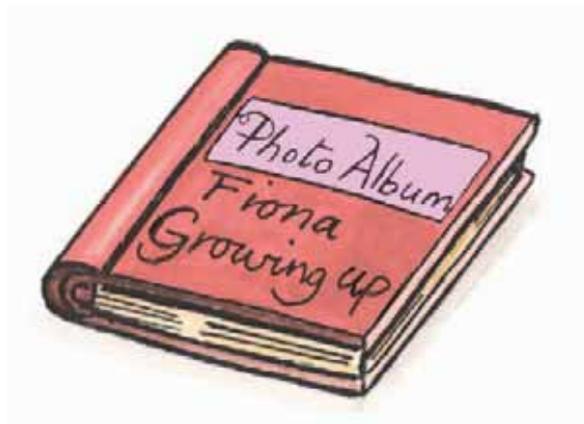
‘Where’s your mirror?’ she asked.

‘Mirror?’ he repeated.

‘You’re meant to have a hand mirror by your chair and do your vowel sounds every day,’ she said. ‘You’ve not been doing them, have you?’ He shook his head slowly.

‘Well, it’s not good enough,’ said Fiona. ‘We’ll have to make a start right away.’ Then she winked at him, and leaning forward close to his head, she whispered.

‘You can do it, Grampa. You can do it.’



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