

The Fuel for My Fire

By: Ann Harland

My physiotherapist calls my adventures “extreme travel”. I admit that some of the things I manage to do are pretty amazing but none of it would be possible without my AFOs. They enable me to walk farther, stand longer and climb stairs albeit with much difficulty!



Sadly, I imagine for every AFO being worn there is one resting in a closet unused. How discouraging that must be for the orthotist who has invested hours of time and energy to know that it was worn only once on the day of the final fitting. It seems to me that perhaps the most important contributor for success and compliance, with respect to wearing an AFO, is not in the design but the process.

Crafting a functioning AFO is an art and a science all in one. The process is as important as the product. If the client doesn't feel good about the process he or she may never develop the conviction needed to persevere through many

ittings. Support and understanding are easily demonstrated through active listening and enthusiasm. It is often a combination of what is said, and how it is said, that is critical, from the first meeting to the last.

Notably, what the client hopes to accomplish may not be consistent with a well designed, magnificently-crafted, textbook-perfect AFO. The client may not be aiming for a “corrected” gait or posture. His or her goal may have more to do with participation in a particular activity... a lifestyle choice.

Multiple adjustments will likely be necessary. The client may need time to process the functionality of the brace as

he or she reworks their self-identity in coming to terms with loss of ability and change in appearance. Finding the right design and fit is sometimes hinged on not giving up too easily. Success may come only after many trial runs.

When I donned my first pair of AFOs I remember doing laps around the examination table... just because I could! I felt the giddy excitement of a child. I could do things I had not



Sentosa Island, Singapore: “On top of the world” on the most southern tip of Asia.

been able to do for many years.

My husband and I began to travel again, visiting more than forty countries in the span of ten years since that first fitting. But at the same time, those years have wasted away my muscles weakened my body. Two new sets of braces and many, many adjustments have ensued. But I am always bolstered by my orthotist who never tires of my endless questions or balks at my unconventional requests. Her willingness to listen and explore solutions that are “outside the box” inspires me to look beyond my own limitations. Visits to my orthotist are anticipated, not dreaded.

It may sound cliché but it is these practitioners, these special people in my life, who have fueled my spirit. With their help my dreams really have come true.



Mutianyu, China: Climbing the Great Wall, 350+steps, one at a time.