

Leg from Nottingham changes Amputees life in West Africa

Tuesday 5 May, 2015

Freelance Journalist Louise Hunt follows the journey of a leg from Nottingham to Banjul

Gerry Shooter always wanted his leg to go to a good home, says his widow Jean.

"He knew that if his prosthetic leg went back to the NHS it would be chucked on a pile. But he wanted something good to come out of his disability if it could give someone else the chance to walk," she says.

Having visited Africa during his time in the Royal Air Force, Gerry was keen to find a charity that sends donated prosthetic legs to the continent. After he passed away this February, Jean searched for such an organisation and discovered Legs4Africa – exactly what she was looking for!

Gerry had used a prosthetic leg since having an amputation related to diabetes in 2004. His limb was collected by one of the charity's volunteers and so began its journey this April from Cotgrave, a mining village in Nottinghamshire, to the Gambia in West Africa.

In the ramshackle prosthetics workshop, donated limbs protruding at odd angles from every available surface of the National Rehabilitation Centre in the capital Banjul, Salifu Bayo is fitted with Mr Shooter's old leg, which has been especially couriered by Legs4Africa volunteer Jenni Sanderson.

Salifu, 42, lost his leg as a young man when a cow crushed him and the injury became infected. He has been using the same patched up prosthetic limb fashioned out of heavy resin for 15 years. The country's only prosthetist Gabu Jarjue, and his assistant Morrow Forfarna, have to modify the limb to fit Salifu's 6ft something stature using makeshift materials, including piping and the rubber more commonly used for the soles of flip-flops. The team are nothing if not resourceful and enormously dedicated to helping the thousands of amputees in the country who receive very little state support for their disability.

With his new limb successfully fitted Salifu grins. His new leg is much lighter and for the first time since his accident he is able to bend a mechanical knee joint. Before his knee was locked, which meant hoisting his leg round at the hip for every step, limiting his movement and causing back pain.

Salifu, who works on his small plot of farmland, says: "Now it will be easier to work, and it gives me the courage to walk longer distances."

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Legs4Africa

T. +44 (0)780353630

E. tom@legs4africa.org

W. <https://www.legs4africa.org/>

Additional Contact(s):

Tom Williams, Legs4Africa Founder, 0780353630 - tom@legs4africa.org

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