



The boy who walked on his hands

The story of Andy Scott, as told to Marita Rademeyer ...



This is the amazing true story of Andy Scott who became a world champion paralympic swimmer ...

One day baby Andy woke up with a terrible fever. He was burning hot and crying with pain. His Mom and Dad were so worried they took him to hospital. The doctor told them: "I'm afraid your baby has polio."

Polio is a cruel disease that makes your whole body weak. Baby Andy got very, very weak. He couldn't move his arms or legs, he couldn't turn his head, he couldn't move any part of his body, he could only blink his eyes. He was too weak to cry and he could hardly breathe. His parents knew there was no cure for polio and they thought their baby was going to die.

The doctors told Andy's parents: "There's only one way to keep your baby alive – we can put him in an iron lung to help him breathe." The iron lung looked really scary – it was a

huge machine, like an oil drum with iron doors at both ends. When baby Andy was put into the iron lung, only his head stuck out. There were little doors in the side so the nurses could get their hands in to wash Andy and change his clothes. Andy's parents couldn't pick him up. They couldn't hold him. They couldn't hug him. They could only touch his head. Baby Andy had to lie in the iron lung all day long and all night long so he didn't stop breathing.

When other children were learning to crawl and walk, Andy stayed in the iron lung. When other children were playing outside, climbing trees, swimming, running and exploring the world, Andy had to keep still in the iron lung. While other children fell asleep in their own warm beds, Andy fell asleep listening to the sound of the iron lung. Whoosh-whoosh-whoosh went the machine and Andy dreamed he was moving freely.

Andy lay in the iron lung for years but at last he was able to breathe on his own. He was taken out of the iron lung but he was too weak to stand. He had terrible cramp in his muscles and he couldn't bear anything or anybody to touch him but he didn't give up. He sat up in a pram and the nurses wheeled him around.

Once Andy was out of the iron lung the doctor called his parents to take him home. His parents loved him very much and they wanted to take care of him but it was difficult. His Dad was often away from home for a long time. His Mom struggled to feed Andy and his two brothers. They often went to bed hungry but his Mom always did her best. Andy remembers one time when there was nothing but stale bread in the house and his Mom cut the dry bread into the shape of a gingerbread man to make him smile.

For years Andy couldn't move around without help. But there was one place where he could move on his own, where he felt free and easy and had no worries. That magic place was the swimming pool.

Andy spent so much time in the pool that he developed strong arm muscles and broad shoulders. His legs were still weak but he could walk on crutches. This meant he was able to do some things on his own. He could fetch second-hand clothes from the welfare ladies. He could leave the house when there were arguments. He could go to school.

School was a big challenge for Andy. He was the only child at the school with crutches or a wheelchair. The other children didn't understand what his life was like. They called him names and made fun of him. Sometimes they even hid his crutches. Without his crutches, Andy had to crawl like a baby and the children laughed at him. Andy felt sad and hurt when the children were cruel to him. Sometimes he cried. Other times he thought of the swimming pool and how wonderful it was to move in the water – without crutches.

One day, Andy was watching some boys kicking a rugby ball on the field. They were laughing and having fun. Next thing someone shouted "Look! There's dandy Andy with his legs all bandy!" Two boys swaggered right up to Andy and ripped the crutches from his hands. Andy's legs collapsed under him and he fell on the grass, out of breath. The two boys swung the crutches in the air and then threw them into a bush, laughing all the time.

Andy pushed himself up by his arms. He saw that everyone was watching him. He took a deep breath and then lay down on his stomach. The boys were quiet, watching him. One boy giggled. Then Andy did something that surprised everyone. He even surprised himself. With a grunt and a push, he stood on his hands and started walking!

The boys watched with open mouths as Andy walked on his hands towards his crutches. One boy shouted: "Go Andy, go!" Andy kept on going. Have you ever walked on your hands? It's hard work. His arms were very strong, his muscles hard from swimming, but he was sweating. Sweat was popping out on his face but he kept going.

A few boys were walking next to him. "Look! He's going to do it! Awesome!" they shouted. When he'd walked half way down the rugby field some boys cheered him: "You're almost there, Andy! Go, man, go!" When Andy reached the bush, he bent his arms and slowly lowered himself to the ground. One of the boys passed him his crutches and slowly Andy stood up. He ran his fingers through his hair and tucked his shirt back into his pants. Then he walked away with his head held high.

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Today, Andy Scott is known across the world as a champion paralympic swimmer. He has travelled to more than 50 countries and he has raised more than R200 million for paralympic sport in South Africa. Andy and his wife have been married for almost thirty years and they have two daughters, both university graduates. Andy keeps on working to help make the dreams of people with disabilities come true.



Andy Scott

Andy is the head of group sponsorships for the Nedbank Group and is a television commentator at Supersport. At the 1968 Paralympics in Tel Aviv he became the youngest world record holder in paralympic history. In a swimming career spanning 22 years he has achieved 13 world records. Andy has received many awards. In 2006 he was inducted into South Africa's Sports Hall of Fame. In 2007 he was honoured as the Nedbank Top Achiever of 2007 and in 2009 he received a lifetime achievement award from Wheelchair Basketball South Africa.