

0. Spencer West and His Leg Amputations - Story  
Preface

1. Spencer West Gets a Bad Diagnosis

**2. Spencer West and His Leg Amputations**

3. Spencer West Redefines Possible

4. Spencer West Climbs Kilimanjaro



Spencer West with his parents, Tonette and Kenny West. Spencer credits his parents for their unwavering support of him throughout his life.

What, exactly, was the problem with Spencer West's legs? For one thing, they weren't properly positioned in his body. One of the doctors explained the situation to Spencer's parents by showing them an X-ray:

*You can see how Spencer's legs are jutting out from his pelvis bone ... My plan is to amputate his legs just above the knee ... I will then want him to wear a special contraption every night for about a year, which will help straighten out the bones in the legs, so that they are more horizontal.*

*Right now, the way Spencer's legs are descending from the pelvis, they go out to the side and gently rise up, almost as if he was sitting in the yoga lotus pose. But once this is corrected, I don't see anything holding him back from walking. (Standing Tall, by Spencer West, at page 13.)*

The surgery would take place before Spencer was three. Meanwhile, he had learned to crawl and, by the time he was two, he was strong enough to lift up his torso and walk around on his hands. It was like the little toddler had instinctively discovered a workaround for his disability.

By the time of Spencer's first surgery, his arms were really strong:

*One upside to not having any legs was that I developed, by age three, the arm strength of an Olympic weightlifter. (Standing Tall, page 14.)*

Spencer had that amputation surgery, to remove both legs at the knee, but it wasn't the last amputation surgery he'd need.



By the time Spencer was five, his doctors realized they had to remove their patient's legs just below his pelvis. That operation left Spencer with no legs at all.

Doctors tried fitting him with prosthetic devices, but they became more of a hindrance than a help. Deciding he

was better off with his hands and his wheelchair, Spencer realized:

*...I can get everywhere with the use of my hands and arms - and I never get tired.* (Standing Tall, page 24.)

When he was in sixth grade, Spencer and his parents decided to forever abandon his prosthetic legs and crutches.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Spencer-West-and-His-Leg-Amputations-Spencer-West-Legless-Man-Summits-Kilimanjaro>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Spencer-West-and-His-Leg-Amputations-Spencer-West-Legless-Man-Summits-Kilimanjaro>

## Media Stream



### Spencer West at Play during His Youth

Image of Spencer West, as a young child, online via the West family and Free the Children.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Spencer-West-at-Play-during-His-Youth>



### Spencer West with His Parents

Image of Kenney and Tonette West with their baby son, Spencer. Online, courtesy the West Family via Save the Children.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Spencer-West-with-His-Parents>