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Foreword

If Leonardo Da Vinci had designed the foot, it would have been a wheel. As a means of locomotion the foot is wasteful of energy, when compared to the wheel, but as a means of shock absorption and leverage from the ground the foot cannot be outdone by modern engineering. In fact, the foot is a high speed, minimum friction, reciprocating propulsive system, powered by the muscles intrinsic in the foot and leg but controlled by the brain.

As a podiatric surgeon of nearly 30 years experience, one of the greatest sea changes in my entire career came with the screening of *Sex and the City*. Suddenly feet really mattered as much as handbags, sunglasses and lingerie. Shoes became seriously important to every woman of style – but that’s when my problems started. Off the shelf, high fashion shoes just will not fit every woman’s foot so rather than change their shoes, some women sought to change their feet.

A misshapen foot can cause acute embarrassment and lifestyle restrictions, which can be just as important to the sufferer as a painful foot. And although it is a controversial area, cosmetic surgery for the foot is a growing industry.

The foot is not just something to be looked at, being primarily for function and the foundation of our bodily movement. Throughout this funny, quirky, fascinating book, testament is paid to how serious an issue it is when feet become so problematic that they restrict a person’s mobility. Many examples are provided, from concentration camp survivors to Beirut hostages and even Bruce Lee.

The first book ever written about the foot *A Treatise on Corns and Bunions* was the result of a challenge taken up by an eighteenth-century French physician when he harangued his students, saying that it would be

possible to write a book about anything, even something as lowly as the human foot. Isobel Guckian has once more met that challenge and proved that there is nothing lowly, irrelevant or even boring about the human foot.

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Introduction

*Perhaps as long as I had my shoes I had some dignity.*¹

Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*

I remember reading *An Evil Cradling* by Brian Keenan and thinking, 'Wow!' I savoured every turn of phrase, understanding the emotions of fear and hope, and I agreed with his observation of obsessive belief. I tasted every word, marvelling at his insights into the human condition, transporting myself into that small room. I was with him at every moment, but I couldn't, for the life of me, understand the above statement.

As I went on to study podiatry, that phrase began to make more sense. Then one night I watched a television programme called *Survivors* about the survivors of the 2004 tsunami disaster in Asia. Something a man said as he was trying to climb onto the roof of a deserted house before the second wave hit struck me and reminded me of Brian Keenan's phrase. 'Whatever you do, leave your shoes on,' said this man. As he went on to explain how he was trying to climb over all the broken glass, debris and destruction of the first wave, it suddenly dawned on me.

If the man had no shoes, he had no protection from glass piercing his feet and therefore immobilising him. His loss of foot function would have jeopardised his family's life, his own life and the life of the person he was carrying. He would have lost the very foundation of his movement. By keeping his shoes he felt he had some control over what was happening and thus would not give up fighting for his life. His feet were his stability, both psychologically and physically. His shoes protected his very foundation.

Primo Levi was a survivor of Auschwitz during World War II. He describes the importance of mobility to survival: