

Touching Gift

Doctors give crippled Alex her fingers back for Christmas

Exclusive by David Leslie, News of the World, 30th December 2007

Surgeons have performed an astonishing operation to enable an ailing teenager to open her Christmas presents.

Plucky Alex Hood suffers from agonising epidermolysis bulosa, which blisters her skin and causes her fingers to fuse together.

But in a three-hour operation earlier in December, the Dumfries-born art student had a series of grafts and procedures as medics at London's St Thomas' Hospital battled to restore her grip.

That gave her use of her right hand for the first time in **four years**.

Her dad Robin, from Mossdale, Dumfriesshire, said: "Alex was so looking forward to unwrapping her gifts but without her hands that would have been impossible.

"After the operation, she told me, 'Daddy, this was the best present I ever had.'"

Robin is a key fundraiser for the charity DEBRA.

It aims to find a cure for the rare genetic condition, which affects 400 Scots.

He explained: "Every night since she was a baby Alex has slept with her hands in splints to slow down the fusing.

"Since 2003 she's been unable to use her right hand or even see the fingers. They were joined to her thumb, rather like having her hand in a tight plastic bag.

"On her left hand the digits are fused up to the knuckle."

He added: "People often don't realise the horror of this condition.

"She has no skin on her shoulders, buttocks or legs. Bandaging her every day is a five-hour task."

After a meeting with Alex, 18, in March, generous Harrods boss Mohammed Al Fayed splashed out £21,000 on a specially adapted car so she can learn to drive.

She now hopes to sit her driving test in February.

Robin said: "She's so brave, she never complains."



Alex as a youngster with Robin



Mohammed Al Fayed

DeBRA
Working for a life free of pain

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