

'I feared I would never walk again'

Amanda Foreman: 'you are quite simply at the mercy of others and of God'

Judith Woods.

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How 'The Duchess' author Amanda Foreman survived a split pelvis. By Judith Woods

When historian Amanda Foreman glided along the red carpet at the London premiere of *The Duchess* last week, a vision in midnight-blue Alberto Ferretti and £138,000 of borrowed Leviev diamonds, it marked a milestone beyond any professional achievement.

Foreman, author of *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, on which the new Keira Knightley costume drama is based, had feared she might never walk again after her pelvis split, leaving her bedridden and in crippling pain for nine months. Foreman, 40, whose husband Jonathan, also 40, works in the City, has five children: Helena, aged six; Theo, five; Halcyon, three; and twin daughters Xanthe and Hero, aged 14 months.

The couple, who are based in New York, although they also have a home in London, had always planned to have four children, but were delighted to be told that she was expecting twins. But one afternoon, three months later, having spent several hours at her desk, she stood up and felt her pelvic bones split suddenly; when she tried to take a step, the bones rubbed together.

"It was excruciating, like someone had thrust a sword through my pelvis," she recalls. "I struggled downstairs and called the doctor. In the US, an ambulance only comes if you're dying, so I had to leave the children with the nanny, crawl into a taxi and go to see him."

Foreman was referred to an orthopaedic specialist, who diagnosed symphysis pubis dysfunction, a condition not uncommon in women carrying more than one baby, and especially among those who have had a number of previous births within a short period.

It is caused when ligaments, which stretch naturally during pregnancy and labour, become so loose that they can no longer hold the pelvis together. "I was given steroid shots, which tighten everything up, strong painkillers and told to go home and not move," says Foreman. "I went to bed and stayed there. My world shrank to one room; I went out half a dozen times over the next six months, in a wheelchair, usually to have a scan."

Often heavily sedated because of the pain, she says she was "lost" to her three young children, who were looked after by their father and the nanny. During the pregnancy, she also suffered three hernias, where the intestine protrudes through the abdomen, and placenta accreta, in which the placenta attaches itself too deeply to the uterine wall; when attempts are made to detach it, severe haemorrhaging can lead to death.

But the twins were safely delivered by planned C-section in May last year. More steroid injections followed and Foreman, still unable to walk, returned home to bed. The ligaments would eventually heal. Two therapists visited her three times a week and gave her exercises, similar to Pilates, to build up her abdominal muscles.

“I was determined to get better and although my progress was very slow, by September last year I was walking again,” she says. “And since then I’ve been a normally functioning mother and human being and was really looking forward to the premiere of *The Duchess*.”

But Foreman’s moment in the spotlight came under threat after she felt familiar twinges of pain, culminating in emergency medical treatment just hours before the event.

“I was filled with panic that I would miss my big day, or be in too much pain,” she says. “I was able to see a radiographer privately at the Portobello Clinic who gave me an ultrasound, a shot of local anaesthetic and a steroid injection, so I was able to enjoy the evening after all.”

The legacy of Foreman’s ordeal is that she feels “very grateful” for her health and conscious that she is lucky to have made such a good recovery, as not all sufferers do.

“When something like this happens you are totally helpless... It’s a humbling experience; you are quite simply at the mercy of others and of God.”