At the age of 19, Harriet Hulbert of Park Forest, Ill., was at her doctor’s office checking out her right knee, which was increasingly becoming more difficult to bend, when she found out she had a cancerous tumor in it. That same day she also discovered she was two months pregnant. Doctors initially told her the only treatment for her osteosarcoma—the most common type of malignant bone cancer—was the amputation of her leg. But when referred to a specialist, Dr. Henry Finn, she found out about an orthopedic innovation—the Finn Knee System—a prosthesis developed by the doctor that enabled her to replace her entire joint and save her limb.

“I am grateful and blessed,” Hulbert said regarding the surgery she ultimately had when she was eight months pregnant. The tumor was removed and the joint replaced with the Finn Knee. “They could have amputated, but they saved my leg and my life.” And shortly after getting her new knee, she had a new baby girl. Originally, Hulbert thought the prosthesis would last only 10 years, but nearly 20 years later in November 2008, she received a new joint, which had since evolved into the OSS Orthopaedic Salvage System featuring the Finn Knee, a complete salvage revision/oncology limb-reconstructive system. “I felt confident going into the surgery,” Hulbert said. “I knew Dr. Finn would take good care of me.” Today, Hulbert is doing well as she continues with her physical therapy and regains her independence. She expects this prosthesis to last at least another two decades. “This is my new baby,” she smiled. “I intend to have it for a long time.”

“Because of my dissatisfaction with what was available at the time, back in the late ’80s, I developed this prosthesis,” said Henry Finn, MD, chairman of the Division of Surgery and chief of orthopedic surgery at Weiss Memorial Hospital; medical director of the University of Chicago Bone and Joint Replacement Center at Weiss; and professor of surgery at University of Chicago. “Harriet was the perfect patient for it.” The prosthesis treats people with extensive bone and ligament damage as a result of cancer, deformity, trauma, revision or infection that conventional knee replacement would not be able to accomplish.
Hulbert was the first patient on whom Finn used the orthopedic prosthesis with his namesake in 1989. The Finn Knee System officially debuted in 1991 with Food and Drug Administration approval for limb salvage and difficult knee surgeries. In October 2008, it was acknowledged by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons as one of the more notable orthopedic innovations of the 1990s. According to the maker of the implant Biomet Inc., more than 12,000 patients in the United States have benefited from the Finn Knee System and the OSS Orthopaedic Salvage System featuring the Finn Knee.

Patients like Hulbert are living proof that biomechanical advancements with orthopedic devices like the Finn Knee have led to salvaging knees and/or limbs of patients with cancerous tumors, restoring their quality of life for a much longer period of time than originally expected. Hulbert recommends the surgery to anyone in a similar situation as her. “It changed my life twice for the better.”

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