My name is Guro Fjellanger and I am 38 years of age. I was born on the western coast of Norway in the city of Bergen, but was brought up in Stokmarknes in the northern part of the country. I am the oldest of three sisters, and the only one afflicted by spina bifida.

I went to an ordinary kindergarten and school and received no special teaching, although I spent at least one month in Oslo every year through primary school, in order to undergo various forms of surgery. My medical journal from this time says ; "Guro is an intelligent child with a great imagination and an ugly walk..!". During my childhood I participated in different forms of activities such as gymnastics and playing the clarinet in the school orchestra. Of course I was not able to do all the same jumping and running as other children. But I was among the best at throwing two or three balls against a wall for a very long time...

My parents chose not to have a car, which was possible because I grew up in what was then a village. This forced me to walk, use my tricycle during summer, or chair sledge during winter. My parents raised me as similarly as possible to "a normal" child together with my two sisters. This gave me a strong belief in being just as valuable as any other human despite my disability.

I have always been interested in politics, especially issues related to the environment, racial equality, gender and questions of disability. I moved to the southern part of Norway, to the capital Oslo, when I was 19, to become a silversmith. At the same time I started my engagement in politics by joining the board of the youth party of Venstre (The Social Liberal Party of Norway). Since then I have been into politics on different levels, and became Norway's Minister of Environmental Protection in 1997, a post I held until March 2000.

Travelling to different conferences and negotiations as a Norwegian minister on crutches, I was very often met with the question: "Did you have a ski-accident?". They were always smiling, but when I replied "No, I was born like this" the smile usually would disappear and they would say: "I’m sorry".

I think this story underlines the biggest challenge we as people afflicted with disabilities face today. Even though I was the same person, and the crutches were the same, their view of me would suddenly change, when they got to know that I was born with SB and had not just broken my foot.

Today I run my own company giving lectures on environmental issues, and I also run courses teaching people from organisations and interest groups how to get through to decision makers. Not least, however; I give lectures on how the care system and society around us should be more adapted to our individual needs and made more accessible for us. I live with my spouse and my cat in my own flat in Oslo. I spend my spare time to see friends, read, listen to music, go to movies, theater and concerts. Also, I have traveled a lot, not least in south eastern parts of Africa. Today I have learned to ask for help, and I have even got my own wheelchair to cover distances longer than I am able to walk. I live a good life, with its ups and downs as other people.