

I found a new fortitude I didn't know I had

Leslie: I'm Leslie. I served in the US Army, my last rank was captain and I served in Bosnia. When I got sick with a blood clot in my left leg that pretty much put everything to a complete stop. It got so severe and bad that they retired me right there at Walter-Reed on the spot. Though the damage had already been done to my left leg and then on the upper parts of my legs I lost a lot of the tissue. They weren't able to save in time. My parents said the doctors told them at about 10 or 11 at night to say goodbye you know to your daughter, that she will not get through the night.

By a miracle and the grace of God and again I think my stubborn side, it wasn't my time to go so I went into the surgery for the amputation and my mom said the first words that I said when I woke up I said "I used to be a cheerleader." And she said she squeezed my hand and she said yes, but now you can be the coach. A few years after I had lost my leg I lost all of the site in my left eye from another episode with internal bleeding and I got through that and then actually about a year ago I had another same exact episode or setback where it took pretty much all of the vision out of the right eye. So, I am now actually have been declared or noted as legally blind.

You don't get a manual when you have an amputation. Being a female, I think it adds a whole new perspective of a level of I felt very ugly, I felt disfigured, I felt deformed. In fact, it was so bad that I wanted to never come out of the house and it was a battle for me to get over all of that and I finally decided then to say you are gonna have to change this thought process and I actually did reach out to the Vet center through the VA I found a whole new inner strength, a whole new fortitude that I didn't even know that I had.

What I have found is even though unfortunate things have happened and I am not able to serve in the capacity of wearing the uniform that I found a new mission so that I was at least up and walking for when the first wave and for first group of injured soldiers were returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. And I would go down to the therapy room and I would see these guys lying on the mats in that initial stage of this shock and trauma of I have limbs missing and these traumatic injuries and I would walk up and I would be like "Hi I'm Leslie" and I would put my hand out and they would say, "No I don't..I don't need anything" or "I don't ...just go away" or whatever the case was and I would pull up my pant leg and I was like oh "no, no I am a soldier too, I am a soldier too" and I would show them my prosthetic and in that split second, I mean it was this incredible connection because I remembered feeling so alone initially when I lost my leg.

I felt that there were no other amputees in the world, no one could even begin to understand what I was going through at all, couldn't even come close, but that's not the case because we do have each other to lean on and I have found even from talking to other Veterans once I did start coming out and about they helped me. And it's that domino effect of somebody helps you, you want to turn around and help someone else. There are so many different feelings, emotions, you have anger, you know sadness, you cry, you want to scream, you want to throw things, you don't understand. You almost have to ask yourself the question do I want to be the victim and just roll over and give up and say that's it or do I want to try to make the best of the situation and turn it around for the good for the good of helping somebody else. Once you challenge yourself with that and you have that more less that belief and faith in yourself again things do turn around and I still see my counselor and still to this day I thank him all of the time. I'm like if it



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

were not for you I honestly don't think I would be as positive or as readjusted maybe that is a good word to as to where I'm at today.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION