

# ANNAE'S JOURNEY

## Transcription

As @ June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005

### INTRODUCTION

---

Annae:

If someone was to ask me, "What is normal?" I don't think I could tell them because there is no one normal. What's normal for me is maybe abnormal for someone else. But what's normal for them might be different for me. Even you know, I'm sure when I watch this video and see myself doing stuff with my feet, I'll feel like: That's so strange... Because I lived that everyday, and you know, I see everyone doing things with their hands. So you kind of get in that mindset that you have hands, and that you're doing... 'cause you're doing everything that everyone else is doing and it becomes that it's not a barrier anymore. But it's just a part of your life.

How I treat my feet is very much like anyone would treat their hands. Because I use them that way, I decorate them that way too – wearing nail polish or wearing rings on my toes and putting a watch on my ankle.

Well a typical work day for me would be I get up around 5:45 in the morning. Mornings can be a bit of a rush sometimes especially if I sleep in but I've been getting a little bit faster at doing things because I want to sleep more.

---

I remember my mum told me a story, one time when I was younger and I'd eat cereal and if a Cheerio would fall out of the bowl, I would spend all my time trying to pick up a Cheerio while the rest of the Cheerios got soggy. But it was just so important for me to accomplish that. You give up then it says a lot about yourself. I decided that's not the type of person I want to be; that I didn't want to give up; that...I always wanted to put forth my best effort.

And I think my childhood was very much like that. When I had something that I had to overcome and when I did overcome it was just a great feeling inside, that I've accomplished something so big that to my friends was something so small for them, but for me it was just another boost to my confidence and shaping the person who...who I've become.

---

A couple of years ago, I participated in a documentary on feet. So I went and got my feet x-rayed and I was told that my feet have changed, the toes are wider apart so that I can use them for grasping. If you look at someone else's feet, they have a hard time bending their toes like this but because I've

developed them that way, I can. And then also in the x-ray it showed that the bone in my ankle had grown differently so that I could have this side-to-side motion. Most people's feet won't turn up like that and that's kind of a motion that you would get with a wrist. And I don't have as much range of motion with my left foot because I've used my right foot for most things. And then the arch in my foot is also a lot higher because I was grabbing things and bending my foot around

I have many ways to do the same thing just so that if something happens that I will be able to still take care of myself. .

I'm always inventing, it just depends what the circumstance is. It's what I have to do.

## **WORK**

---

-Morning Cheryl  
-Hey Annae! How's it going?  
-Morning Joël.  
-Good and you guys?  
-Good thanks.  
-Good  
-Good to see you  
-Good to see you too.

Annae:

Right now I'm working for an energy generation and marketing company. I'm in the communications department as their communications coordinator. Basically, I am the Jill of all trades.

I really enjoy that it's very busy and high paced. I find I get bored if I don't have enough on my plate. It really tested my ability to adapt to change and to be flexible and definitely that's some skills that I've developed being an amputee.

I took my communications degree at Mt. Royal College in Calgary, Alberta and I specialized in technical writing.

I like the computer aspects of it I use the computer every day, not necessarily programming but I do use it to publish articles and... using the technologies.

I got my first computer from War Amps when I was 13 years old going into grade 7, through the JUMPSTART Program. I was very excited about it that I got my own computer and I was eager to learn how to use it. And I thought it was so neat because it had a CD Rom.

My friends from school would come to me to ask how to do something on the computer because they knew that I had those skills and I was able to help them that way.

The Jumpstart program, I think, is really neat. It helped me get the first job that I got in an office and it helped me with all the jobs I've gotten since because I could showcase those computer skills. Because if you can use a computer there's no one saying that you're not capable enough to do it because it doesn't matter how you use the computer. I use it with my feet, my colleagues use it with their hands but we do the very same things.

Along with the JUMPSTART Program, as I learned more about it, I learned the War Amps philosophy around JUMPSTART and being equipped with a computer was a great equalizer for an amputee. And I definitely see that, especially for multiple amputees because you are limited to the types of jobs that you may be able to work at.

And of course, I couldn't have done it without War Amps help with their-their uh financial help. Completing my education definitely got me to where I was right now.

- Hello, Annae Jones speaking.
- Good and you?
- Your proposal is coming along just fine... I have a first draft....
- You look great. You are bad. (Laughs) Yes. This is all on camera. I'm gonna tell them what you said. (Laughs)

## **ANNAE & GARRETH**

---

Gareth:

I didn't really have to uh change many things to get used to dating Annae. Really I didn't look at her as a different person. You know because she didn't have any arms it didn't bother me um. When it came to holding hands or putting my arm around her um I had to think of a couple of things uh. Like on our third date I think it was, we went up to this park oh near Calgary here. And I just uh asked to put my arm around her because uh I wanted to – I wanted to put my arm around her. And uh of course she said yes and – and uh. Then uh the next date after that we went to a movie and uh we were just watching a movie and uh finally I looked down and I saw Annae's foot uh just up on uh on her leg kind of like how it is now um. And uh it was a clue to me to grab her foot and hold her foot and so it was just like holding hands.

Gareth- Here ducky, ducky!  
Annae and Gareth - (laughter)  
Gareth - There you go.

I thought she was pretty and uh one thing that uh I was interested in the most about Annae was uh her good – her great attitude and she has a great smile uh. Her nose kind of wrinkles up a little bit. ....There it goes, right there. And uh and you know she just uh she just has a great uh spirit about her uh and it just uh made me attracted to her.

Annae:

He made me feel special and different, but not different meaning that I wasn't the same as him, or not good enough. I was good enough just because I am Annae.

## **HAPPINESS IS AN ATTITUDE**

---

The type of attitude that I've developed has really played an important part in how successful I've been, and how happy I've been as an individual. One time when I was younger, my brother and his friend were playing basketball and usually it didn't bother me that I couldn't participate the same way. But I remember this one time, I felt so angry and jealous. Sometimes when you're an amputee, you just want, even just one day to have a normal life, so to speak. You just want that so badly. And I remember sitting there and just being so angry and...Because of that-that anger, I felt really empty inside. And I decided there and then that I didn't want to feel that way; I wanted to be happy. And the only way that I could be happy was to choose to be happy. It doesn't matter what my circumstances were. You can have someone that has everything, so to speak, and they may not be happy because it's a choice. Happiness really is an attitude.

## **WEEKEND CHORES, SUPERMARKET, COOKING**

---

Typically for a weekend, it's a little more relaxed. We can sleep in for a bit, but mostly Saturdays we clean the house and do our laundry and all little errands.

Someone's so used to having their arms and their legs, it's hard for them to see how it could be done differently and so I think that's really important for an amputee to show that it can be done differently and it can be done just as well.

I think that really breaks down a lot of barriers and misconceptions that people have about disabilities and particularly people with an amputation.

There's been many times in my life where I could have been: Excuse me, don't treat me that way... Or: Don't say that...But instead, the best thing I found is to make a joke about it and put people to ease. This guy came up to me one

time. He had a pair of gloves in his hands, and he said: Annae, are these your gloves? And he totally had just forgotten that I didn't have any arms. And I'm like: Sam, I don't wear gloves...And he's like: Oh yeah! You know, and you could turn that situation around. I could have been like: How could you? How insensitive of you! But that's never really crossed my mind to react that way.

Annae: You know, they'll be coming pretty soon so...

Gareth: What kind of pepper you think they will like?

Annae: I think they'll like red.

## **PARENTS -CHILDHOOD**

---

Father: That's a good one

Mother: Yeah

Mother (Sharon):

Look!

Isn't that one cute? Look, her big eyes!

We're just reminiscing; looking at some of your baby pictures.

Annae:

Oh dear, why did you take that one out?

Mother:

It was a pretty normal childhood... She sat up at about 5 months old

We were a little worried about the crawling part but she did what Tom calls the bum scoot.

Father (Tom):

Yeah. She'd sort of sit up and then sort of shift.

Woman:

And then she walked on her first birthday.

We had some parents that were a little concerned that we didn't coddle her as much as they thought we should, you know, and she would fall and cut her lip when she was learning to walk. But we just kind of felt we can't do that because she's got to learn how to fall. And actually we did spend several afternoons pushing her down. We put lots of pillows around and teach her, you know, just keep pushing her down so that she learned to keep her head up when she fell

## **PARENTS-ARTIFICIAL ARMS**

---

Father:

And it wasn't really until after she was six that we thought seriously about the prosthesis. Doctors sat us down and they said the more of a limb that a child's missing, the less we can do for them, you know. We're going to fit her with an artificial arm, and it's going to help her but you have to be realistic in your expectations. And that was a great learning thing for us.

Mother:

The first artificial arm that they fitted her with was a right hook. She wore it for a little while, and then it was just too hot and too slow and just went back to her feet and – but it was worth it because – what'd she say to you in the mall?

Father:

She grabbed my hand and she said this is the first time I got to hold hands with you, Daddy.

Mother:

We kind of adopted the philosophy that we'd try and help Annae adjust to life in the world instead of trying to adjust the world to Annae.

## **PARENTS - COLLEGE**

---

Father:

She went to college; we were all worried about you know where she was going to stay and so forth. And they just happened to have these suites originally designed for wheelchairs right next to the college and it worked out really well, it was just like it was made for her. The counters were a little bit lower and everything.

Mother:

It was hard to leave her though on that first day when we moved her in. You know, we're trying to get her all settled and everything and now are you sure everything's okay and are you going to be okay, and all that kind of stuff. And you know, finally, probably at 10 o'clock at night, she goes: "Go, I'm fine, I'll be okay". You know, and then you go home and like worry all night long. Will she be okay, is she going to get mugged in the parking lot or, is she going to be able to, cope and deal with everything all by herself and cook all her meals. And do all the social things that college students do. After a couple of weeks we stopped worrying. She handled things beautifully.

## **SEMINARS**

---

Annae:

When I was younger, I started to realize that I was an amputee; that all my friends around me had arms, and that I was different. And I remember going to my very first seminar, and thinking: I'm the only one in the world like this. And then, I get there and there's all these other amputees around me. And I was so excited that I wasn't the only one.

It was a break from life, a break from people staring; a break from... people asking me questions how I do everything, or saying: Wow! Or, you know, kind of gawking over you. It was a break from all that.

You were just treated like a normal person.

Mother:

I just can't even imagine life without The War Amps. You have the love and support of your family and your community but they still don't understand what you're going through. And we really did feel all alone until we went to the CHAMP Seminar.

And then it's like wow, there's other people going through the same thing, perfect strangers. I can talk to them about things that I was feeling and struggles we were having.

Father:

I couldn't believe how good it was and how much the people in the CHAMP's organization cared about the children, and about the parents, but they especially cared about the children. And you really felt there was camaraderie; it was being like a part of a family. Cliff Chadderton was just like a grandpa to them.

Annae:

I always enjoyed the TEEN TALK and being a Junior Counsellor. When I was younger I really admired them because they looked like they were these happy people and that they were doing well in their lives and I always wanted to be one of them. I'm like: What! I want to be like that when I get older. And then as I moved into that role myself, it kind of came full circle where I was able to offer the advice and be that example to the younger amputees and show them they could be happy and that they could be successful. To move into that role model was a great experience for me.

Going to the child amputee seminars helped me realize that I am okay just the way I am.

## **BICYCLING**

---

Annae:

When I was learning to ride a bicycle, I wanted so badly to ride a two-wheeler.

Father:

We had some kind of specialized tricycle or you know high-tech type thing. And...

Annae:

I said: no, no because I thought I'd just be too embarrassed to ride that kind of bike. It wasn't actually until about grade five that we found a bicycle that worked and it was a lot of trial and error.

Father:

It was actually Sharon, her mum that came up with an idea on an adaptation to put on the handlebars. That was very simple and wasn't hard to make and ...

Mother:

Cost about two dollars.

Father:

Yeah.

Father:

Try that!

Father:

Far too often, we'd look for these really high-tech adaptations and sometimes it's the simple adaptations that actually work better.

Annae:

My parents would hold onto the back of the bicycle while I tried to peddle and a lot of frustration. And finally they told me...

Father:

Well if you want to learn to ride the bike, then just learn it yourself.

Annae:

And I'm like: What? OK

Father:

She said: Fine!

Annae:

I went outside and we had a bit of a slope on our driveway and so I'd let myself coast on the driveway a little bit just with my feet dragging on the ground a bit. And then, as I got a little more brave, I'd add a couple pedals to it.

Mother:

We'd sit at the kitchen window and just look out and oh, she fell again. She's not crying, so she's not hurt. So she'd just get back up on there and try it again.

Annae:

And then within a couple weeks of that practicing, I was riding it around the block.

Mother:

I was like: Tom, Annae's riding her bike!

Annae:

I just remember how great I felt when I had overcome that obstacle. I remember the wind blowing through my hair, and I used to... like to race my brother and sister around the acreages. For me, that was a big step towards my independence of growing up; coming out of that age where you-you get a lot of help from other people, and moving to a point where I was starting to do more on my own.

## **DRIVING**

---

Father:

There was the bicycling learning driving and then there was the car driving.

You want mum's perspective first?

In a lot of ways it was similar to learning to ride a bicycle.

Annae:

When I was learning to drive... that was something that was very scary for me. And I wasn't sure and of course I had some obstacles of other people saying that I couldn't do it. But again, from the support of my parents and their belief that I could do it - (laughs) and a little bit of yelling at each (laughs) other, when I was making big mistakes on the road - but just that support and that confidence really helped me be that more determined to get my license.

Father:

I expected all these fancy adaptations to the car. And then when I told Annae I had all these ideas, she says, I don't want a car that has all these special things on it. I just want to be able to drive a car.

Annae:

It wasn't necessary but I got a smaller steering wheel and more like a racing car steering wheel on my Buick.... But it has a little more grip on it and it was a little bit easier for me to handle.

The way I drive is I gas and brake with my left foot and I steer with my right foot. The signal light and the windshield wiper are on the left hand side, of the wheel so when I was learning to drive I found I needed some kind of extension there to reach.

Father:

It was a little scary at first. She didn't have really good control of steering and she had to just practice and feel the control of the vehicle. Learn like anybody else does.

Mother:

They had the top examiner in the province give her her drivers test and she passed with flying colors.

Annae:

I remember driving from the Registry, my dad in another car and me in the car by myself was like: Whoa! I'm driving all by myself. There's no one sitting beside me and I was very nervous. I'm like: What if something happens? (Laughs) You know but, on the other side, it was a great relief to know that I didn't need someone there holding my hand any longer; that I'd gotten the help that I needed, and now it was time for me to move on, on my own.

## **CONCLUSION**

---

Annae:

Just that feeling of independence...an amazing feeling. I can't even really describe it. It's just if I ever had that taken away...you know I think I would really feel that I have lost something. And I think that's sometimes how people feel that have an amputation, that they've lost something really valuable to them, even-even those that were born without limbs. You know in a sense, I have felt that before where I've felt that I've lost something, and that I don't-I'm not complete. But as you succeed at various things in your life, you realize that you're as complete as anyone else. And you're as complete as you need to be. Although life might be a little bit different, it's very much ordinary, just like anyone else's.

I feel really blessed to have had this disability, for the things that I've learned from it. And it would be very selfish of me not to share that with other people.