

Seeing Past the Clouds

by Shannon Taylor

I was thrilled about my first amputation. It was a dreary day in April 1993, and I anxiously anticipated my appointment with the vascular surgeon. Freedom from my prison of agony, despair and immobility was only four days away once the doctor confirmed the magic word: amputation. Not.

At least, not yet. Although my foot and a small part of my calf were gone, and I didn't have to deal with nonhealing ulcers, the war still raged on. Years of poorly designed prosthetics, overuse of those prosthetics and a stressful lifestyle led to a difficult battle with infected sores and blisters on my residual limb below the knee. In 2005, I was hospitalized with another severe wound infection on my residual limb that compromised my immune system, affecting my overall health. Unlike the first time, I was not looking forward to another amputation on the same limb. This meant that I would be more immobile than ever. And it meant that I would struggle with my self-image as a woman without having my knee.

I was hit with a barrage of decisions to make, but I knew my health was on the line and no amount of plastic surgery was going



to prevent more sores and infection. Finally, for the sake of my health, I reluctantly agreed to the amputation of my knee.

My recovery following the surgery was agonizing. The discomfort was unbearable, and I seriously wondered whether I had made the right decision. If I had known then that I would be just as mobile as a below-knee (BK) amputee and healthier and happier as an above-knee (AK) amputee, I would have been very excited about this option, and perhaps the pain wouldn't have seemed quite so intense.

I was sent home with a prescription for narcotic pain medication and outpatient physical therapy. Although essential, the physical therapy sessions weren't enough to fuel my inner drive to walk again. The prosthesis was cumbersome and awkward. When I tried to bend the mechanical knee, it seemed to be more in control of my body than I was. The close-fitting socket around my thigh and crotch made it difficult for me to balance and bear my weight on the leg. I was weary and exhausted from the sessions, and my frustration and disappointment combined to form dark clouds of doubt and anger. I couldn't see past these clouds toward the horizon up ahead, aglow with the certainty of walking normally again and following my dreams. I knew it was up to God, and then me, to change this glum scenario.

On Christmas Eve, 2006, I decided to park my wheelchair and conquer the complicated limb leaning against my living room wall. Today, I am standing upon the hill of that horizon and walking toward my dreams. Although it's not a microprocessor leg, my prosthesis is outstanding. I am also extremely healthy and active. I never knew I would be this happy and at peace as an AK – and no more sores! ■