

Fresh Powder, Fresh Perspective

April 10, 2014

Image not found or type unknown



Begin with the teenage girl working her way down a white mountain on a snowboard in, say, 1997. Back then, Amy Purdy's goals were pretty simple: Graduate high school, travel around the world snowboarding. Make money as a massage therapist. Snowboard more.

Cut to the disease: A form of bacterial meningitis she acquired at 19. Doctors gave her a 2 percent chance of living. Still, the ordeal ended with life, not death. But her new life began without legs, both amputated below the knee.

“I had to let go of the old Amy and start the journey as the new Amy,” Purdy says now. “I knew I would snowboard again after losing my legs, but I didn’t know how I would do it. Sometimes all you have to do is believe and the ‘how’ will figure itself out.”

She jolted life forward. After trying to find the perfect prosthetic legs for snowboarding, she ended up designing them herself.

Get Up, Move On

Now that the back story is set, let’s talk about Purdy’s life in the present. If you watch “Dancing with the Stars,” you’ve probably seen her. She’s the one making judges cry this season with her unlikely story. If you watch “The Amazing Race,” you saw her there in 2012.

If you’re into the Olympics, you may have followed her journey to the Sochi Paralympic games, where she won a bronze medal in snowboarding. And if you go to the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach Pro/Celebrity race on April 12, you’ll see her waving the checkered flag as the race’s grand marshal.

Purdy has been a part of Team Toyota – the impressive group of professional athletes who have a history as loyal brand advocates – since 2013. You could say she’s making her team proud.

In a world full of vapid fame, Purdy is gaining attention for all the right reasons. After her illness, Purdy saw a fork in the road. She chose the route that inspires people and allows her to maximize life. She and her boyfriend, Daniel Gale, created Adaptive Action Sports, a nonprofit that helps disabled youth participate in sports like skateboarding and snowboarding.

“I wanted to give back and help others since I got so much help along the way,” Purdy says. “It’s so rewarding to see the faces of people trying things they never thought they would do again or trying something they didn’t think they could do at all.”

Shining Her Light

After staring down her obstacles, inspiring people became part of her job. Purdy is a powerful motivational speaker and [her must-see TED Talk about her struggles](#) has more than 625,000 views.

In that talk, she describes the struggle to accept her first set of prosthetic legs. Once she accepted her new life, she tells the crowd, “that is when it dawned on me that I didn’t have to be 5-foot-5 anymore. I could be as tall as I wanted. Or as short as I wanted, depending on who I was dating.”

Though she recently joined Team Toyota, the company has been part of Purdy’s journey from the beginning. “The folks at Toyota have been there for me since my illness,” she says. “They supplied a vehicle for me and to Adaptive Action Sports. I would not be able to get anywhere without them.”

So her role with Toyota comes naturally. Purdy is among the most decorated members of Team Toyota, winning three consecutive World Cup gold medals. She also played a pivotal role in getting snowboarding added to the Paralympics for the first time in Sochi.

She marked that success by flying to Los Angeles from Russia the day after receiving her bronze medal. She had to begin her new challenge on “Dancing with the Stars.” To hear her talk about it, the show seems to be something of a microcosm of her life.

“I only had four days to learn the cha-cha and I was training for the Paralympics at the same time,” she said. “So I just kept thinking ‘just make it through the first dance.’ (dance partner) Derek Hough and I were both unsure of what I would be able to do because of my legs. Then quickly we realized how much I *can* do on them. I just needed to make it through that first dance, and now I can say that I am in it to win it.”