

FEATURE

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STORY

Turning Casualty Into A Cause

By Rouzalin Hakim

Hello friends and fellow *thrive* readers. It's been a while. My last contribution to this magazine was over a year ago, but I found a story so amazing that I thought it's time to get back to writing.

I spent several years sharing my journey as a new amputee with *thrive* readers as I learned how to navigate my new life. My hope was that my story could help others on their journey. From returning home from rehab to returning to work, to the gym, to relationships, and all of the ups and downs along the way, eventually I ran out of 'returns' and quietly put my pen down.

But as we all know, life can have a bigger and better plan and a funny way of lining things up for us. I met a fellow female lower-limb amputee with a story so heartwarming that I just had to tell it. She reminded me of why I started writing in the first place. So, here I am again – pen in hand, heart open – "returning" to my passion for writing to share a story that I hope touches your heart like it did mine.

It starts like this. This summer I received a request from ParaSport® Ontario to speak at a wonderful event in Oakville, Ontario, as a ParaSport Brand Ambassador. It was a 5K Run organized to raise funds for prosthetic devices for those in need by Wings for Limbs, a new charity. I felt very aligned with the cause because I'm a grateful recipient of an Ossur running leg through ParaSport Ontario's Play to Podium Fund. So of course, I immediately accepted.

I hadn't heard of Wings for Limbs, and I didn't have much information about it or its founder, but I knew that this is exactly what our community needs... people

gathering together for hope, love and support. I headed to the event without any expectations, just an open mind and an open heart.

I arrived early and to my surprise, a huge number of people were already gathered and ready to run for their family, friends and community. They were all there at the request of a wonderful woman named Sonia Montanez, the visionary for Wings for Limbs.

Sonia gave the opening speech. Her energy was overwhelmingly moving and full of emotion. Tears of compassion were abundant on the faces of her supportive audience. We all stood poker still, listening intently.

Her words were powerful yet calming, carrying a sense of hope that seemed to wrap the crowd like a warm blanket and bring us all together in unison. I immediately knew that I needed to know more about Sonia.

As Sonia spoke, I couldn't help but think of how life can so suddenly divide itself into before and after. What was her journey like? What brought her here to this stage? What were her hopes and hurdles? What I found out was beyond inspiring.

Before the motorcycle crash that claimed her left leg below her knee, she was an accomplished accountant in Venezuela – driven, family-oriented, and deeply rooted in her community. She'd spent years

challenges

building a beautiful life. She married young, raising two children, and advancing in her career. But when her country went into political turmoil, and the economy began to spiral, safety and stability were swiftly slipping away.

With such courage, Sonia and her family made the life-changing decision to leave and start over in Canada. Leaving behind everything familiar – language, culture, friends

– she arrived in Canada ready to rebuild from the ground up.

It wasn't easy. She faced the loneliness of a new country, the challenge of learning a new culture, and the heartache of distance from loved ones. Still, she pressed forward, finding work, finding community, and a new rhythm of life. But with it came an irreconcilable casualty. The move across continents exposed cracks in her

marriage and the couple made the painful but peaceful decision to separate, both wanting what was best for their children.

In time, Sonia opened her heart again, entering a relationship that would endure on and off for seven years. Then, on the first day of July in 2021, everything changed again. A horrific motorcycle accident left her fighting for her life, a battle she won at the expense of her leg... another casualty.

The recovery that followed was lengthy and painful, both physically and emotionally. It took four months before her body was ready for a prosthesis. "Those four months were the hardest months of my life," she says. Her wheelchair, she shares, was a constant reminder of everything she had lost. She didn't feel accepted, not even in her own home. "The communication and dynamics were completely broken, each one of us sheltering in our own rooms," she said referring to her and her partner and her two teenaged boys aged 16 and 19 at the time of her injury. Her independence vanished, and her confidence went with it. Gratitude for survival slowly gave way to grief. She grieved her freedom, her mobility, her motherhood.

Self-doubt crept in, whispering questions she couldn't yet answer. "How will I drive? How will I work? How will I care for my children? How will I move through my home? I felt like I was no longer the provider, the professional, the one my family could lean on. Who am I now?"

The emotional toll deepened when, just months after the accident, her partner decided to separate and move out. The heartbreak was layered. She was not only learning to live with one leg, but now learning to live through another break-up. Her energy was low, her focus scattered. Even when her body began to heal, her mental health struggled to keep up.

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But somewhere in that darkness Sonia found a small spark of purpose and it flickered in the form of rehabilitation. Her sessions became her outlet, a place where pain met progress. Seeing others with similar circumstances pushing forward with determination was a source of strength for her. Slowly, her grief began to bend back toward appreciation.

Then came the day that she had waited for – the day her prosthetic leg was ready. Standing for the first time since her accident was more than a physical act; it was a reassurance. The moment that she felt the floor beneath her again, a rush of hope returned. Step by step, she began reclaiming her indepen-

dence, her confidence, her identity. Her therapy and peer support groups became lifelines, reminding her that she wasn't walking this path alone.

Her biggest lessons came quite quietly. Accepting help. Letting go of stubborn pride. She began to understand that resilience isn't a finish line. Rather, it's a rhythm to be found over and again when life asks you to start over.

Out of this rebirth came Wings for Limbs. What started as gratitude for the emotional, financial, and physical support that she had received grew into a mission to

help others who didn't have that same safety net. Sonia wants people with disabilities to feel seen and accepted within their communities, and to know that hope can be rebuilt through collective compassion.

As founder and event organizer, she strives to raise funds for prosthe-

purpose

ses and to connect people who might otherwise feel alone or forgotten. Wings for Limbs is more than a non-profit entity – it is a bridge between pain and purpose.

Today, Sonia carries herself with a quiet conviction and the grounded might of someone who has found peace in her own mirror. She describes herself as faithful, passionate, responsible, loyal and devout – a pillar of family and community.

rebirth





hope & courage

When I asked her what she hopes people would take away from her story, she paused for a moment and smiled. "To cherish who you are," she said. "Mind, body and soul, they have to move together. And when they don't, that's when you have to fight for your balance."

Her words stayed with me, because Sonia's story isn't about what she lost. It's about what she found through loss. She found courage. She found faith. She found her purpose in helping others stand tall again. And maybe that's the truest meaning of Wings for Limbs – not just walking again, but rising high above.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rouzalin ("Roz") Hakim is an above-knee amputee of four years and a respected voice in the disability community. She blends lived experience with advocacy, public speaking and partnering with brands that reflect her values. Roz volunteers with the Amputee Coalition of Canada, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Sunnybrook Hospital, and St. John's Rehab, supporting and empowering children with disabilities and fellow amputees.

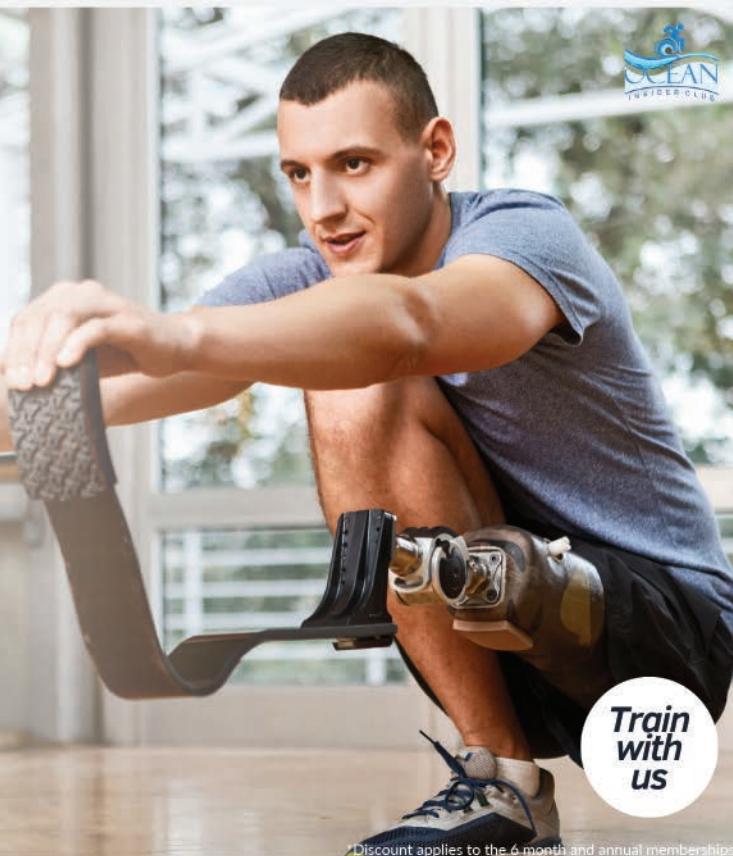


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