



BORN TO RUN

JERICHO RODRIGUEZ is Making Big Strides as a CHAMP Ambassador

By Kimberly Tiessen

Eight years ago, in a hospital delivery room giving birth to her third child, Joy Rodriguez wasn't expecting to hear the words her husband calmly and lovingly whispered in her ear after their second son entered the world. From his first gaze at his newborn boy he said: "He's beautiful, but I don't think he'll ever be able to walk."

The nurses whisked baby Jericho away, into another room. But there was no panic or despair for Joy. She remembers how she trusted that everything was going to be okay. She had faith in the fact that this was no accident. Jericho was meant to be a part of her family. Jericho was born with two club feet and cleft hands.

Jericho was a fighter from the very start. Joy remembers what a happy

baby he was, which made the road ahead of them look a little less steep. "Being born this way, Jericho didn't know life any differently," she tells, inadvertently comparing his circumstance to an acquired disability. "I believe that allowed our family to adjust naturally and at our own pace."

When Jericho was just a month old a specialist at Sick Kids Hospital asked Joy if the family had heard of The War Amps organization. Joy had not, and with that the practitioner made the introduction, helping the family fill out the necessary forms and forwarding them to The War Amps headquarters in Ottawa. Joy regards The War Amps as a guardian angel, and the obliging helper at Sick Kids as its messenger.

"I had no idea that The War Amps offered so much support to young amputees and their families," Joy

“... by helping my parents
pay for all of my legs
I can live like a
regular kid.”

admits. “From financial expenses related to Jericho’s care and devices to advice for our family, anything we needed The War Amps were right there to lend a helping hand,” she adds with a nod to the monumental difference it has made in their lives. That kind of unconditional support allowed her and her husband to focus on their family and cement how they wanted to move forward as a unit, Joy recalls. “It strengthened our family’s foundation.” It also offered both parents more time with all of their kids, evading the need to be laser-focused on Jericho and his unique needs.

Joy questions what the state of her family unit would be today without that support which changed the



direction of their lives. “We would likely be struggling financially,” she acknowledges. “We would likely be drained emotionally too.” The War Amps’ guidance, support groups and seminars create extended families... “families that intuitively understand what others are going through,” she emphasizes.

The successes accrued by the Rodriguez family from The War Amps support is presently being paid forward in the form of Jericho’s media work as an ambassador for the organization’s Child Amputee (CHAMP) Program which offers a range of services to child amputees

and their families across Canada. A unique program for young amputees worldwide, the CHAMP Program was built on The War Amps' Winner's Circle philosophy which encourages child amputees to accept their amputations and develop a positive approach to challenges.

Jericho takes his public relations role very seriously. "It feels awesome to be a War Amps Champ," Jericho enthuses. "The best part is being able to spread inspiring messages at seminars that I get invited to. I love to tell people that 'anything is possible'." The eight-year-old already has aspirations of being a motivational speaker one day... but first things first. Above anything else he dreams of being a professional athlete – a runner. He loves to run.

The precocious youngster has a roster of positive messages that he likes to share with his CHAMP community. "Always try your best and never give up," his motto and a rule he likes to live by. That credo is abundantly evident in a new, made-for-TV Public Service Announcement from The War Amps in which Jericho is the featured CHAMP. The spot features Jericho's active life and his appreciation for The War Amps and how the organization has contributed to making that possible for him.

Being a CHAMP has given Jericho a new wave of confidence that has translated into breaking down barriers in his school life too. A girl from his school saw a War Amps brochure that had come in the mail. The next day she came to school boasting that she saw Jericho on the cover. "I felt really proud and special that day," Jericho reveals. "Lots of people recognize me. Even my teacher said 'I saw your commercial on TV and I shared it with my family.' And other kids who see me always say how cool it is."

Jericho understands that The War Amps have changed his life in more ways than affording him respect and popularity. "They've changed my family's life by making it easier by helping my parents pay for all of my legs so I can live like a regular kid," he salutes. Jericho's definition of a "regular" life



Photo courtesy of The War Amps

“To me, he’s just my normal, active little brother.”





includes dreaming big. “I want to be a great athlete one day, a Paralympian. Maybe being a runner won’t be my full-time job, but a scientist or a prosthetist might be,” he says without reservation, and in step with his “anything is possible” message.

At age five Jericho was fitted with his first pair of running legs, a very different experience for him than when wearing his everyday legs. Joy explains that typically, when kids receive running legs for the first time, it takes a period of acclimation, practice and specialized re-training to learn how to walk or run with the new prostheses.



“Not Jericho,” she beams. “We, including the team at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehab Hospital, were all shocked at how he just took off running... no training, no practice. He just put them on like they were always meant for him.” Jericho interrupts to add: “I finally felt free.”

While his running legs have opened up a brave new world of independence and activity for him, without his “springy” legs childhood wasn’t always easy for the genial youngster. Jericho remembers how isolated he felt in school. He dreaded hearing the recess bell. In grade one he felt lonely on the school playground’s sidelines as he watched his classmates run about playing tag or soccer or whatever. He just couldn’t keep up in his everyday legs. He couldn’t participate in the fun. With his running legs he said goodbye to the sidelines. As he excitedly ran onto the playground for the first time

he shouted to his friends, “Look! Look! I have these, I can play now!” The recess bell sounds so much different to him now.

Jericho’s friends have always embraced his differences. They have never treated him any differently than any other schoolmate. Jericho is quick to talk about a memorable experience at his new school when he had the opportunity to stand in front of a class of new faces with a War Amps friend. Together they explained his differences and answered questions from his new classmates that day. Joy initiated the “in-service.” She asked The War Amps for a seasoned ambassador to accompany Jericho in a presentation to ease his transition. It worked, staying off any reservations or fears that the students might have had in Jericho. A natural embrace and acceptance ensued.

As for his siblings, Jericho’s older brother Josh says he doesn’t feel that he overprotects his brother... no more than any older brother would. “It doesn’t change because he has spe-

“Be kind-hearted, smile, and show kindness to receive kindness.”



Photo courtesy of The War Amps

cial needs," the 13-year-old professes. "If he gets knocked over in a crowd, I run over as fast as I can to see if he needs help, but most times he doesn't." Josh knows that his brother is more than capable of handling himself, something he's proved many times over. Sister Janelle, 12, says, "To me, he's just my normal, active little brother. A lot of my friends come over and ask questions and I don't mind that at all." Janelle says that she feels good when she can educate someone about her brother's disability, and even better when she gets to brag about all that he's accomplished.

When it comes to staring, the family adopted a united front from the very beginning. Joy has instilled kindness and grace in her children and that's how they deal with those who stare as Jericho passes by. "We engage with people who stare at him by smiling and if we think they might want to ask a question we usually initiate conversation and encourage them." Josh pipes in with a humorous tone, "If people are

just staring and not watching where they're going, sometimes they end up bumping into something." The family gets a good laugh and most times that opens up some dialogue with that person.

"Be kind-hearted, smile, and show kindness to receive kindness," Joy postulates. "But there are days that Jericho feels overwhelmed and just wants to go about his business and live a regular life," she qualifies. "On those days he doesn't feel badly for looking the other way and leaving those to just stare." The approach is most times guided by Jericho as he has taught his family when to jump in and when to leave him to get through things on his own.

Jericho is a genuinely happy kid. It's not rehearsed. Cordial and gracious, he's always happy to hear others share their life experiences. "I like to hear how other people live, not just people with special needs; it inspires me and I think I inspire them." But when he closes his eyes and thinks about what makes him

the most happy, his answer comes quickly and unscripted. "Running is happiness. Just running." Full speed ahead for this little CHAMP.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Tiessen is a writer/photographer and founder of Hope for Mexico, a charity that helps impoverished children in Mexico go to school and get an education. At age six she became a sibling of a double-arm amputee which has afforded Kimberly the ability to understand what life is like for amputee youth and to write with a unique and compelling perspective. Kimberly began her career as a radio/television reporter, laying the foundation for her love for writing magazine features and books that celebrate the human spirit and inspire.



Congratulations!
BODY POWER BEATS BIONICS!

2016 CYBATHLON Gold Medalist, TRS Founder & CEO
- Bob Radocy

Grip 5 'Patriot' Model

Boulder, Colorado | Toll Free: (800) 279-1865

VIEW OUR ENTIRE CATALOG ONLINE! www.TRSPROSTHETICS.com

TRS
 PROSTHETICS