

'A true success story'

Double amputee Mary Anna Giffin's progress in walking 'miraculous'

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EMC News – Miraculous is a word used to describe something so astounding as to suggest a miracle.

Physiotherapy assistant Dennis Thomson feels it's a fitting term in assessing the progress of Mary Anna Giffin in walking following the amputation of her second leg a year ago.

"She is one determined lady," he says of Giffin, a double amputee, who has astounded both staff at the Broadview Nursing Centre where she is a resident and medical personnel alike with her phenomenal rehabilitation.

Giffin acknowledges that she never thought she would walk again when she was informed her right leg would have to be amputated just below the knee because of a pressure sore that had opened up right to the bone. She had already lost her left leg below the knee four years ago due to a blood clot so when she received the latest news, she was not surprisingly demoralized. At one point, the 53-year-old even considered not having the surgery and reconciled herself to the fact she would likely die. Her daughter Jennifer however convinced her to undergo the operation and the amputation was done in early 2009.

Thomson who is employed with the Family Physiotherapy Centre in Ottawa and provides a wide range of physiotherapy services to residents of both Broadview's Nursing Centre and Retirement Lodge started working with Giffin in the spring of last year.

He initially worked with Giffin on balancing and weight bearing exercises. Along with doing exercises in bed to strengthen her quadriceps muscles using therabands, tin cans and ankle weights, she was encouraged to stand on her one prosthetic leg.

"Initially, she could only stand for a few seconds," Thomson recalls, "then we worked up to 10 minutes."

After Giffin got her second prosthesis, her first attempt at standing was on June 4.

"She stood for six minutes," Thomson related. "We just progressed from there."

On July 13, the resident of Broadview entered the Rehabilitation Unit of the Great War Memorial Hospital site of the Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital for three weeks of rehab.

"They just taught her more techniques on how to ambulate using artificial legs and use a walker," Thomson explains. "She came back to us and hasn't looked back."

At the outset when Giffin got her second prosthesis, her goal was to be able to shuffle to the bathroom by herself. The fact she can now walk around the nursing centre is due, she says, to a lot of people having faith in her. A few examples she cites are Dr. Kate Stolee of the rehab department who she calls a "guardian angel," her daughter and "biggest believer" Jennifer and, of course, the staff at Broadview.

"I'd like to thank the staff here," she said. "They were all so supportive when I was learning to walk. It was just incredible. They really cheered me on."

Giffin won't soon forget the feeling of exhilaration the first time she was able to walk with the two prostheses.

"I was just off the ground with happiness," she remarked. "I was just so happy. I have my independence back."

What has made Giffin's progress so amazing, according to Thomson, is that not only has she been "way ahead of what we expected," but she has also mastered walking with very limited eyesight. Because of her diabetes, she is "practically legally blind" and requires injections in her eyes every two weeks.

Giffin who is described by Jennifer as "a true success story" believes she is walking today because of her determination.

"I was absolutely determined," she said. "I wanted to do it."

Thomson can certainly attest to Giffin's resolve.

"She has been a real treat," he stated. "No matter how difficult or how painful, she was determined to carry on."

And Giffin has been doing just that. She has a wheelchair in her room at Broadview but never uses it.

"I just walk all of the time," she said.

Giffin's message to others who may be experiencing similar health challenges is "you have to work hard and you can do it."

"If I can do it, anyone can do it," she stated, adding, "it is so worth it to be walking again."



Submitted photo
Mary Anna Giffin smiles with pride as she and physiotherapy assistant Dennis Thomson are photographed at the Broadview Nursing Centre with the Olympic torch of Mary-Anne Morin, who was a torchbearer during the Olympic torch relay in Casselman. Morin's father, Paul Bourrie, is a resident of Broadview.