



“To Plant a Garden is to Believe in Tomorrow”

With the help of Grand Prosthetics, Keith Orlenko’s life is in full bloom

By Savannah Mandeville

Keith Orlenko loves to garden. The Grove, Oklahoma, resident can often be found digging in the dirt, at the nursery buying beautiful varieties of flowers and shrubs, and looking for new ways to beautify the world around him.

But in 2002, he got some news he feared would put a stop to his gardening days forever.

“One day my right leg went numb and ice cold,” he said. “I didn’t know what was happening, so I went to my doctor and found out I had a blood clot. I ended up undergoing vascular surgery twice that year, but my doctor eventually told me I would have no choice but to have it amputated.”

The thought terrified him.

“I couldn’t accept it,” he said. “I had to go home and think it over before I could agree to the amputation.”

By this point in time, Orlenko’s foot and ankle were suffering severe trauma and infection due to lack of circulation. Within a week, the pain had become so unbearable Orlenko agreed to the surgery.

His leg was amputated below the knee at Freeman Hospital in Joplin.

“I was devastated,” he said. “I was such an active person, and losing my leg ... I had no idea what to do with myself.”

When he left the hospital, he was given a pair of crutches to get around on. With the help of his wife, he did alright day-to-day, but the crutches were awkward and left blisters and callouses on his hands. Orlenko also began to experience frequent occurrences of phantom limb, or the sensation a missing limb is still attached. On four separate occasions, he forgot his leg was gone and fell while getting out of bed.

Something had to change.

By early 2004, Orlenko was exploring the possibility of getting an artificial limb. One day, he was at the pharmacy and his pharmacist told him the only place to go was Grand Prosthetics & LightWeight Artificial Limbs & Braces in Grove. The pharmacist said he had clients who had been fit by all area prosthetics providers and had observed that Grand Prosthetics had returned his clients to the highest quality of life.

So Orlenko made the appointment that would change his life forever.

Immediately, owners Dave and Beverly Helms created a custom prosthetic for Orlenko, adjusting the sizing and curvature of his new leg to his specific needs until they achieved a perfect fit. Beverly taught Orlenko the proper way to wrap his stump for the ultimate comfort and support and helped him practice walking on his prosthetic until he was confident to use it on his own.

“I’ll never forget when I first walked,” Orlenko said. “I was like a baby walking for the first time. It was so exciting.”

Living with a prosthetic leg is second nature to Orlenko now. He puts it on each morning when he wakes up and removes it each evening before bed and doesn’t give it much thought throughout the day.

And, perhaps most importantly, Orlenko is back in the garden.

His handiwork is visible all over the grounds at Grand Prosthetics & LightWeight Artificial Limbs & Braces. The building is never without beautiful landscaping under Orlenko’s watch.

“It’s my way of saying thank you to Dave and Beverly,” he said. “What they have done for me is so wonderful. They helped me find happiness again.”

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