

# Unconquerable Spirit

## Double amputee David Lockhart doesn't know the meaning of giving up

Article and photos by Savannah Mandeville

For David Lockhart, the day that changed his life started out like any other.

It was May 1987. He got up in the morning at his home in Gentry, Arkansas, and made the commute to Siloam Springs for his refrigeration job at Simmons Foods.

He was assigned to work inside the ice auger, a giant screw-like machine that moves ice. It was shut down for the day for routine maintenance, and Lockhart was busy cleaning it when the unthinkable happened. It kicked on unexpectedly and the sharp blades of the auger began to spin. In an instant, both Lockhart's legs were severely cut below the knee.

He was immediately life-flighted to Washington Regional Hospital in Fayetteville.

"I was in shock," he said. "I was awake for the entire flight, but I couldn't really think about anything. I didn't know what to think."

The doctors tried to reattach his left leg, but the surgery was unsuccessful. He would live the rest of his life as a double amputee.

He was only 29 years old.

"When it first happened, I didn't know what to do. But I didn't feel sorry for myself," he said. "I knew I had to keep going. I had a family – my daughter was only four years old at the time."

After a year of healing, Lockhart received his first set of prosthetic legs.



"The prosthetics company I went through didn't really explain what was going on or how to use them," Lockhart said. "I was pretty much on my own."

Nevertheless, Lockhart persevered. He went right back to work at Simmons Foods and stayed there for 17 years working in security.

But he had a lot of problems with his new legs. They were so uncomfortable that he opted for his wheelchair most of the time. Despite his different abilities, he found new ways to work and live as independently and productively as possible.

Then, in summer 2006, Lockhart's life changed again.

The caseworker in charge of his workman's compensation told him about Grand Prosthetics & Orthotics LightWeight Artificial Limbs & Braces in Grove, Oklahoma.

"The first time I went to Grand Prosthetics, I was in my wheelchair and brought a walker," he said. "They took one look at my stumps and couldn't believe it. They were in bad shape."

He still had the same set of prosthetics he first received in 1989.

Owners Dave and Beverly Helms fitted Lockhart with a custom-made pair of legs, adjusting the sizing and curvature to his specific needs until they achieved the perfect combination of comfort and support. Beverly Helms helped Lockhart practice walking on his new prosthetics until he was absolutely ready to use them on his own in his day-to-day life.

"When they fitted me with the new prosthetics and it didn't hurt, all I could say was wow. Before, I never knew that they weren't supposed to hurt."

Today, Lockhart's prosthetic legs are just a small part of his everyday life. He puts them on each morning at 3 am when he wakes up and they don't come back off until his day is done in the evening.


"You know they're on and you know you're wearing them, but there's no pain. I don't give them much thought throughout the day," he said.

"I go fishing at least once a week, I mow my lawn with a push mower, I can do just about anything I want to do. If someone says I can't do it, I try to anyway!" he said with a laugh.

Since Lockhart's first set of prosthetics 12 years ago, he has been fitted with a new pair every two years. The Helmses and their son, Andy, who also fits prosthetics, have become like a second family to Lockhart. He's even been known to bring his catch of crappie in to his friends at Grand Prosthetics & Orthotics LightWeight Artificial Limbs & Braces.

"If I hadn't met David and Beverly, I wouldn't be walking. I'd be in a wheelchair," Lockhart said. "They changed my life."

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