

Strength and Determination

'It has been a miraculous journey for me'

By Savanah Mandeville

Bill Kirksey of Commerce, Oklahoma, never would've guessed that agreeing to help some friends repair a fence would completely change his life.

It was a hot summer day in 2008, and Bill was hard at work when suddenly a rusty wire snapped and cut through his boot and sliced his left foot.

After some time, he noticed the cut wasn't healing but was swelling and beginning to look worse. He knew it was time to see a doctor.

"I learned that MRSA had set in within 24 hours of the cut," Bill said.

MRSA is a type of staph infection that's difficult to treat because it's resistant to commonly used antibiotics.

That discovery led to 11 surgeries between 2008 and 2011.

"It got to the point the doctors told me the MRSA would spread to my heart, and I had only a couple days to live if the entire foot wasn't amputated," Bill said. "I had made up my mind, stubbornly, that I was not going to have the foot amputated. I knew my wife, Gaylene, wanted me to have the amputation, but it's a hard decision when you decide to lose a limb."

He swallowed his pride and agreed to the surgery.

"I had too much living left to do."

Bill's left leg was amputated from mid-calf down March 31, 2011. The procedure saved his life but presented him with a host of new challenges.

"I hated being in a wheelchair and having to look up all the time," he said. "I knew it wasn't for me."

What's more, Bill and Gaylene have never been the "sitting at home doing nothing" type. They love shopping at flea markets, playing with their 12 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, and being active in their church, Faith Tabernacle, in Commerce. In fact, Bill is an accomplished pianist and has been the church musician for 28 years.



They're also heavily involved in organizing Faith Tabernacle's annual church camp. Every summer, hundreds of people descend upon Commerce for the camp, and Bill decided he wanted to be walking again by the first day of camp. With his amputation occurring March 31 and the first day of camp being June 1, it was a tall order.

"[My prosthetist] kept saying, 'I can't do this for you, Bill. I can't put you in a prosthetic in five weeks,'" he recalled.

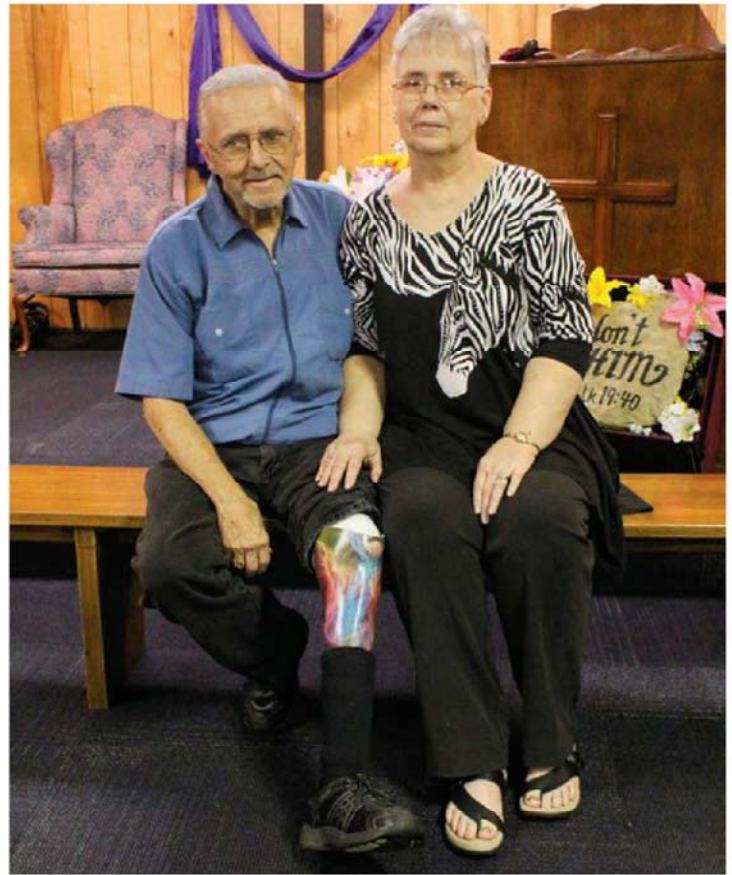
He persisted and, finally, his prosthetist agreed.

At 3 pm on the first day of camp, the leg was finally ready. The first camp meeting was at 7:00 that evening.

Just four hours after that phone call, Bill proudly walked into the church on two feet.

Bill may have had his prosthesis, but he wasn't out of the woods.

"There were all kinds of problems," he said. "It was so sloppy and big that it would fall off. The shoes were too big, so we had to cut foam and put them in the toe. I also got a lot of blisters."



One day, sitting in the waiting room at his doctor's office, Bill noticed a woman's colorful prosthetic leg and struck up a conversation.

"She told me she'd gotten it from Grand Prosthetics in Grove," he said. "She said how good they are, and how they don't quit until everything's perfect."

Shortly thereafter, Bill made the appointment. He said he'll never forget meeting Dave and Beverly Helms and their son, Andy – the family that owns and operates Grand Prosthetics & Orthotics LightWeight Artificial Limbs & Braces. They worked tirelessly to prepare Bill's custom prosthetic until it fit every curve of his leg to perfection. They taught him the proper way to wrap his residual leg for correct shrinkage and comfort and supplied him with durable, well-fitting shoes.

"I've had no blisters at all with the new leg from Grand Prosthetic," Bill said. "I can wear my leg all day long. It locks into place and never falls off."

For anyone who may be facing an amputation, Bill said courage and determination will improve their quality of life greatly.

"It's not an easy road, but if you get over the hurdle and not give up, you can have your life back."

— "I am glad a friend told me about..." —

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