

# Skier Profile

## Anita Shorb – Hope in the Face of Darkness

For Anita Shorb, being the first woman in her family to enter the military was an honor, after a long line of fathers, uncles and grandfathers. In 1974, at the age of 21, Shorb left her Omaha, Nebraska home to join the Navy. Her love for language drew her to the Navy's Defense Linguistics Institute in Monterey, Calif. A few months later, she developed an infectious disease which caused her to lose her eyesight in the left eye. Doctors were baffled by this vision loss, but Shorb was determined to go on with life as usual.

She continued to serve out the remainder of her tour in the Navy as a Cryptologic Technician Interpretive (CTI). She met Dale, her husband of 31 years, in the Navy. Together, they raised a family while stationed in Japan and Italy. Because of her failing eyesight, Shorb decided not to reenlist and was honorably discharged in 1978. Since Dale was still on active duty, the family continued to live abroad. In 1984, ten years after losing sight in her left eye, Shorb was diagnosed with histoplasmosis and lost the sight in her right eye, resulting in complete blindness. "I thought I had to give up everything," she said. "I thought this was it."

In the face of despair, Shorb found hope through a visual impairment coordinator at the Denver Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, who introduced her to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. "I couldn't believe there was actually anything out there in terms of sports for blind people," Shorb said. "I had always been active – I played volleyball, was a member of the Navy softball team and I swam. You name it, I played it!" Shorb, who had never skied much before, was surprised at the tremendous therapeutic value of the Clinic. "I had skied once when I was a teenager and ended up in the trees," she recalled. "Now, I am a much better skier even though I'm blind. You just don't have that fear any more." After coming to the Clinic for 10 years, she is now classified as an advanced downhill skier.

Shorb encourages younger veterans returning from Iraq to come to the Clinic and get involved. "When you first get injured, you think your injury will just go away in time," she said. "You have to learn to get used to this, and it can be a tough transition. Not having contact with anyone else with a disability can be extremely depressing. The Clinic gives us a chance to belong, to meet some new friends and feel normal again." She looks forward to this year's Clinic as she hopes to take on more of a mentor role for some of the newer participants.

Since her injury, Anita Shorb has remained active as an eight-year member of a beep ball team (softball for the visually impaired) and presently skis in Winter Park, Colo., with the National Sports Center for the Disabled. Now 51, Shorb is the mother of five and grandmother of four. She and Dale reside in Aurora, Colo.