

Skier Profile

Aubrey Youngs – Adventuring into the Unknown

For Aubrey Youngs, 24, from Newburg, Ind., enlisting in the National Guard was a way to see the world. She was excited when she learned she was headed to the heart of the war zone.

Joining the National Guard at 20, Youngs continued her studies at the University of Southern Indiana. In March 2003, she was deployed to Indiana's Camp Atterbury, where she trained for three months in vehicular operations and maintenance. For Youngs, the thought of going to Iraq was exciting. "I was really looking forward to seeing another country and experiencing a new culture," she said. In March 2004, she was sent to Camp Phoenix, just outside Kabul.

Reassigned to maintenance and supply, Youngs worked in an Army warehouse in Kabul, stocking shelves and taking inventory. In February 2005, while loading inventory onto high shelves, she fell 15 feet onto the warehouse floor. "The next thing I remember is waking up on the concrete floor," she said. "I felt like I was in a dream. I tried to move my legs and panicked when I realized I couldn't. After that, I blacked out again and didn't wake up until eleven days later." During that time, Youngs was taken to Landstuhl, Germany and flown to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C. Her fall resulted in spinal cord injuries so severe she is now a paraplegic.

After regaining consciousness, Youngs' next few weeks were filled with surgeries and trips to the Intensive Care Unit. Eventually, doctors fused two long rods in her back. A month later, she was flown to the VA medical facility in St. Louis, Mo., where she was admitted to the spinal cord unit. "I was glad to be closer to home," she said. "I was treated like a celebrity at the hospital because I was the only female inpatient and the nurses loved me!"

Youngs spent the next few months in rehabilitation. "Rehab was really rough for me. I had always been extremely independent, and learning to rely on others so much frustrated me." In November 2005, she finally returned home to Indiana. "I was very excited to finally be home," Youngs said. "I was also pretty nervous. I didn't have as many people around me who knew what to do with me in a wheelchair."

Although right now she spends time on the computer and watching movies, this April Aubrey Youngs is committed to trying something completely new, adaptive skiing. "I do have some reservations about skiing since my injury," she said. "I was a pretty good skier before, and when my recreation therapist recommended I attend the Winter Sports Clinic I thought it would be nice to get back into a sport that I loved." Youngs believes that getting back into something she previously enjoyed will lift her spirits. "Doing something I once enjoyed so much will definitely make me feel better. I think that being a part of an event like the Clinic can help take away some of the self-pity newly injured veterans sometimes feel."

According to Youngs, "I'm definitely not the sit around and watch type of person." Like many, she is a little apprehensive about stepping outside her comfort zone. However, her strong strength of character will allow her to persevere and challenge the Rocky Mountains as she continues her rehabilitation on the slopes.