



National Disabled Veterans

# Winter Sports Clinic



## Skier Profile

### Roberto Cruz – Relentless

On August 14, 2005, Army Specialist Roberto Cruz stood in a guard tower protecting the main gate at FOB Danger in Tikrit, Iraq. He heard a single sniper shot in the distance. Four seconds later, he dropped, paralyzed. Even on his back, he refused to believe he'd been hit until a buddy showed him blood. The blood from that shot changed his life forever.

On the way to his spinal cord, the bullet destroyed the main artery in his left arm, collapsed his lung and fractured a rib. Doctors at FOB Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, saved the arm, which was the good news. When he got to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., however, Cruz learned that he would be paralyzed for life and was never going to walk again.

"It was so hard," the 25-year-old said. "My parents were there. They were crying. I was crying. I wanted to die for a second. It was so rough."

Coming from a closely knit family, Cruz's parents and brother left everything behind and went to his side. "When they came, I started recuperating really fast," Cruz said. "That helped me a lot." So did daily visits from a young woman he first met online while he was in Iraq. In January, they had a daughter, Layza Lee.

After his Army discharge, he was transferred from Walter Reed to the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, Florida. "The therapists there were so great," Cruz said. "They got me up. They got me walking again." Now, Cruz can walk short distances with the help of a cane.

Now living in Tampa, Cruz still visits the VA Medical Center for occupational therapy. "I don't want to stop working it out. It might come back," he said. "They told me I was going to be paralyzed for the rest of my life, and here I am walking, so hopefully one day my hand will start working, too. I'll never give up. Never."

Since his injury, he competed in the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska, where he won three medals: gold in javelin, silver in air rifle and bronze in discus. The achievements were significant since they were made using his right arm, which prior to his injury was not his dominate arm.

He also participated in the training camp of the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as a guest of the U.S. Paralympics, a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee. "I'm trying to learn, maybe make the team and go to the Paralympics. That's my goal."

Although he has never been skiing or snowboarding, Cruz isn't worried. "I'm going to have fun and try something new, so I can prove to myself that it's not over yet," he said. "There's a lot of stuff out there for me to do."

*Miracles on a Mountainside!*