



## National Disabled Veterans

# Winter Sports Clinic

### Skier Profile

## Aubrey Youngs – Adventuring into the Unknown

For Aubrey Youngs, a 26-year-old U.S. veteran from Newburg, Ind., enlisting in the National Guard provided a way to explore the world. Unlike many young women her age, she was excited when she received the news that she'd be heading into the heart of a war zone.

Youngs joined the National Guard at the age of 20 and was first deployed in March 2003 to Camp Atterbury in Atterbury, Ind. She trained for three months as a truck driver in vehicular operations and maintenance, and the thought of going to Iraq excited her. "I was really looking forward to seeing another country and experiencing a new culture," she said. To her disappointment though, Youngs' initial mission was cancelled. After returning to school and completing just one semester, she was deployed a second time in March 2004. This time, she got her wish and was sent to Camp Phoenix, just outside the city of Kabul.

Upon her arrival, Youngs was reassigned from vehicular operations to maintenance and supply. She worked in an Army warehouse in Kabul, stocking, restocking and taking inventory of equipment. On February 8, 2005 while loading inventory onto high shelves, Youngs had a devastating accident. While trying to come down from the top supply shelves, she fell 15 feet onto the concrete warehouse floor. "The next thing I remember is waking up on the floor," Youngs said. "I felt like I was in a dream. I tried to move my legs and panicked when I realized that I couldn't. After that, I blacked out again and didn't wake up for eleven days." While unconscious, Youngs was first taken to Landstuhl, Germany and then was flown to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C. Her fall resulted in spinal cord injuries so severe it rendered her a paraplegic.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Youngs regained consciousness. The next few weeks were filled with surgeries and trips to the intensive care unit. Eventually, doctors fused two long rods into her back. A month later, she was flown to VA's Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Mo., to be admitted to the spinal cord injury unit. "I was excited to be closer to home," she remembers. "When I arrived at the hospital I was treated like a celebrity because I was the only female inpatient and the nurses loved me."

Youngs spent the next few months rehabilitating. She said, "Rehab was really rough for me. I had always been extremely independent and learning to rely on others frustrated me. Also, I had a head injury and often went into vertigo during my sessions." In November 2005, Youngs finally returned home to Indiana. "I was very excited to finally be home. I was also pretty nervous. I didn't have as many people around me who knew what to do with me in a wheelchair."

Youngs now attends DeVry University, earning a degree in game and simulation programming. She will graduate in May and hopes to get a job in her field soon after. Since her injury, she's gotten very involved in sports and this April, she'll take to the slopes for the third time at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. "This year I'd like to try to ski from higher up on the mountain," she said. "I'd also like to work off the tether more and just get better at skiing on my own." Youngs wasn't always so secure in her skiing ability and says that the Clinic has helped her confidence tremendously. Aubrey Youngs encourages other, less-confident disabled veterans, to join her on the slopes. She tells them, "Remember, you aren't the outsider here. We're all vets and we're all disabled. Just try it once!"

*[Above information provided by veteran.]*

