

YOUNG ADULTS

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# Paralyzed but Not Pessimistic

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After I was shot and paralyzed, my faith in Jesus Christ made the impossible possible.



**By Julieta Olmedo**

**E**ver since I was a little girl, I loved sports, especially football. I played whenever I could, and I dreamed of competing someday for Argentina in the Olympics or the World Games.

My dreams were shattered one day when I was 15 years old. I had just visited my sick seminary teacher and was riding my bicycle home when two gangs in my neighborhood started shooting at each other. A stray bullet hit me in the back.

When I woke up in the hospital the next day, I learned that I was paralyzed from the waist down.

## **The Question to Ask When Bad Things Happen**

While I was healing, family and friends would ask me how I was doing. I could see that they all felt bad for me, so I would console them by saying I was OK. Comforting others helped me, but I knew I wouldn't walk again and had to learn how to live with being paralyzed.

At the time, I had started going to seminary and was becoming active again in the Church. Seminary was the pillar that supported me in coming back and in not getting mad at Heavenly Father over what had happened to me.

In seminary our teacher taught us that when bad things happen, we shouldn't ask, "Why did this happen to me?" She said the question we should ask is, "What can I learn from this?"

It was hard to keep going and to always be positive, but my seminary teacher's question gave me a lot of strength. When I lost hope and when doubts filled my mind, I always returned to that question: "What can I learn?" That helped me get up every day, and it carried me when I felt like giving up.

As for the man who shot me, Heavenly Father blessed me not to feel resentment toward him. He eventually went to trial and was sentenced to prison. While there, he wrote me a letter, asking my forgiveness and telling me he had changed his ways. I told him I didn't feel any bitterness toward him and that I was happy he had changed.

## Finding a New Passion

For a few years after I was shot, I didn't feel like doing much. I missed playing sports, and I didn't know then that many sports have been adapted for people with disabilities. When

I found that out, my enthusiasm for sports returned. If a sport was new to me, I tried to learn it. And I gave it the same passion I did with football before I was paralyzed.

Soon I found a sport I loved as much as football—wheelchair basketball. Eventually, after a lot of play and practice, I was selected to represent Argentina internationally. I love the high level of competition between rival international teams.

I played on our women's national wheelchair basketball team in the Para-South American Games in Chile in 2014, during which we won a gold medal. Then we competed in the South America Championships in Colombia, winning a silver medal in 2015. I also competed in the Parapan American Games in Canada in 2015, where we qualified for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Later, after qualifying for the World Cup, we played in Hamburg, Germany, in 2018. And in August 2019, we played at the Parapan American Games in Lima, Peru.

## The Blessings That Help Me Endure

Sometimes I still get discouraged, and every day has its challenges that I have to overcome. But I thank my Heavenly Father for the wonderful family and friends He has given me. He has brought many important people into my life who have helped me face this difficult trial. Family support is vital in overcoming challenges—not just our physical challenges but our mental, emotional, and spiritual ones too.

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Because of the gospel in my life, I appreciate the many blessings my Father has given me and continues to give me. I know He loves me. Without faith in Him and Jesus Christ, I wouldn't have been able to endure this challenge.

Yes, I have to travel life in a wheelchair, but even with my wheelchair, I've still achieved many of my childhood dreams after all. I tell people, "Believe in our Father. He is with us. With His help, we can overcome our challenges. Don't lose your faith. Stay firm in the gospel. Set goals, and you'll achieve them. Our Heavenly Father will help you."

Along with supporting me in my challenges and goals, my faith also helps me live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Participating in tournaments can bring temptations, but keeping gospel principles and my standards in mind helps me make good choices.

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I try to help others through my example. I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't do other things some athletes do. It can be difficult to share my testimony or the scriptures, but I try to teach others by the things I do and don't do.

## Heavenly Father Has All the Answers

Sometimes we get angry with Heavenly Father because of hard things that happen to us or to people we love, but even if we don't always have all the answers to our trials, He does.

Heavenly Father doesn't give us challenges we can't overcome. As my seminary teacher said, sometimes bad things happen for a reason. And sometimes those difficult things can end up blessing us and others. If we hold on to our faith in the midst of our trials, our examples of faith may strengthen others who need help facing their trials and moving forward. ■

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