

From Tragedy to Triumph: Ashley Williams' Journey of Resilience and Advocacy



"I just dropped. I was in shock." Ashley Williams, a Columbia native, reflects on how she sustained her spinal cord injury which left her unable to walk. In 2012, Ashley's boyfriend unexpectedly shot her twice in the chest, causing her to immediately collapse to the floor, changing her life forever.

"I didn't see it coming," she recalled.

Ashley, 20, at the time of her injury, says she lived a good life, but made it hard on herself.

"I enjoyed hanging out with my friends or playing XBOX when I wasn't working," Ashley said, "I made it rough on myself, some of the decisions I made, some of the people I hung around."

After her injury, Ashley had a difficult time adjusting to her new normal. She couldn't imagine living without the ability to walk. Three months before she turned 21, she had given up.

"I thought my life was over. I didn't know anyone with a spinal cord injury, so I didn't see a life for myself," Ashley stated.

While her friends and family treated her the same, it wasn't until a year after her injury that Ashley was able to accept her new life. With the support of her cousin, Ashley enrolled in South University where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology, falling in love with understanding how the mind works. After discovering her passion for learning, she went on to obtain her master's degree in clinical mental health counseling.

Today, Ashley works as a case manager helping others with head and spinal cord injuries adjust to their new life through the same resources Ashley sought out after her injury. Because of the resources provided by the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs and the Spinal Cord Injury Association, Ashley was able to gain services such as attendant care, and vehicle modifications to help her better transition to her new normal, igniting her desire to help others, and live again.

Ashley's advice to others with a similar injury is to keep living your life: "Life does not stop like I thought it did. You can make your life what you want it to be, it's just a new journey."

She also encourages anyone in an abusive relationship to seek help, and to take warnings seriously.

Ashley advised, "Do you love your family, your kids, what would they do without you?"

Ashley's outlook on life changed, and she loves giving others a hopeful perspective after their injury. "It's not all bad," she says. "I can still do whatever I want to do. I surf, I get on roller coasters at theme parks. It's been helpful to do those things successfully, and still have a good life."

Ashley's injury changed her life, but it didn't end. Her injury uncovered a new journey encompassing newfound passions, growth, and advocacy for others. She's grateful for the new outlook her injury has given her, and the way she views life.

She concluded, "It really changed my life. I was somebody totally different. It helped me grow; I wouldn't be who I am today."

