

Beyond the Horizon: Janice Harris's Story of Recovery and Renewal



Janice Harris spent her teenage years much like any other --- moving from state to state, making friends, and enjoying life. But just 18 days before her 21st birthday, a tragic event forever altered her world, leaving her paralyzed from the neck down.

The day that changed everything began with a violent hostage situation. Janice was held at gunpoint by a friend who had just robbed a store. In a desperate attempt to escape the police, he dragged Janice out of her hotel room, wrapping his arm tightly around her neck as they made their way to a car. As the kidnapper opened the car door, the police fired, killing him instantly and striking Janice in the neck. "By the time we got to the car and opened the car door, the cops fired, and we were down. I woke up two to three days later in the ICU," she recalls.

It took three days for Janice to regain consciousness after the ordeal, and when she did, a nurse delivered the devastating news.

"She said, 'Baby, please just don't try to move right now, you've been shot.'" Janice immediately panicked, trying frantically to move, but her body wouldn't respond. Her world, once full of promise, shattered in an instant. "My whole world came crashing down," she says, reflecting on the faint memories of those early days after her injury.

Adjusting to life in a wheelchair was an overwhelming challenge for Janice. The thought of living the rest of her life without the use of her legs led her to a dark place. "I thought my life was over. I tried to end my life that first year," she admits. The idea of life in a wheelchair seemed impossible, and it took years of hard work for Janice to finally accept that her life, though different, was still worth living.



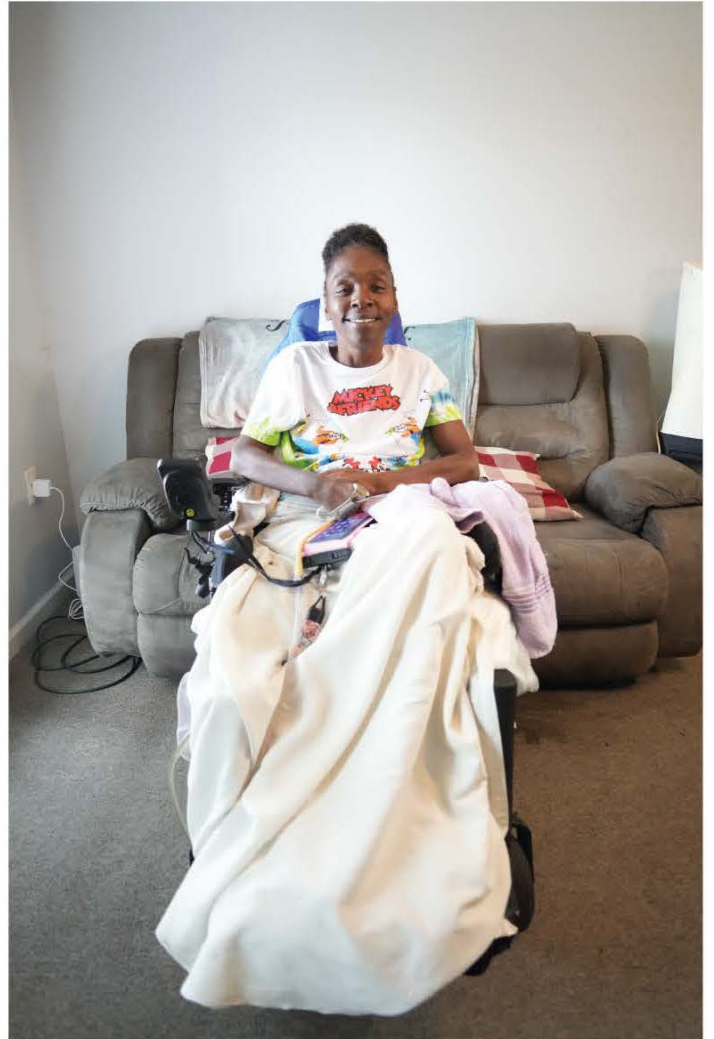
Three years after her injury, Janice began to embrace her new reality. She credits her renewed sense of purpose to the support of her family, friends, and faith.

"Everyone motivated me and let me know I can do things, making me get out and do things like a normal person," she says, smiling. To those closest to her, Janice remained the same vibrant person she had always been.

"To this day they try to hand me cups and stuff if I ask for something," Janice laughs. Her big personality often distracts people from noticing her wheelchair; they see Janice for who she truly is. "I'm just able, not disabled. I'm just able to do a little bit, but I can do a lot for my injury," she says with pride. Her friends, too, saw her as the same talkative, outgoing person they had always known, making her transition smoother.

Janice also sought out resources to help her navigate her new life. Thanks to the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs' Head and Spinal Cord Injury (HASCI) waiver, she was able to access the services and supplies she needed. The waiver provided her with essential medical supplies, easing her transition. "Without my supplies, I'd probably have to go in a store and buy supplies, and I couldn't afford that," she says. These resources were vital as she began to build her new life, but at her core, she remained the same Janice.

"I feel like I'm still the same as if I was on my feet. I'm just doing newer things in different ways now," she explains. Janice practices what she preaches by pursuing an online education at the University of Phoenix, where she is working toward a master's degree in psychology with the goal of entering the Human Services field. She hopes to be a guiding hand for teens who remind her of herself.



"I started out as an at-risk teen. Anything that can help people when it comes to resources, I'm all for it because I was helped. I just want to return the favor."

From juvenile detention centers to earning diplomas, Janice's life has transformed since her injury, and she now draws strength from her journey. She once felt defeated before even beginning, but her injury taught her resilience and sharpened her outlook on life. "It bettered me. It bettered my perception of life," she says. For others going through recovery, she offers this wisdom: "If you believe in a higher power, put your strength in God first. Also, life is not over. We can do all things."

