



The GROCERY STORE is **MY** Battlefield

*Minor Aggressions
can Take a Major Toll*

By Rouzalin Hakim

As an amputee, I think I speak for many of us in the disability community when I say that we face a variety of unique physical and emotional challenges. Some of those challenges are easier to overcome than others. I have overcome many of those in my journey, but this is my personal battlefield.

Before I begin, I want to be transparent with whomever is reading this. This topic is surprisingly difficult to write about. Not due to the topic itself, but because I don't know how many readers will relate.

If you're just tuning in for the first time and haven't read my previous editorials in *thrive magazine*, here's a bit about myself. My name is Rouzalin, and I am a two-plus-year above-knee amputee who quite often finds herself experiencing every possible stage of this recovery process. The ups, downs, and in-betweens, as well as the ones hidden around the corner that no one prepares you for.

My life was completely twisted upside down two and a half years ago, and when I woke up, I had no idea what it would now be like. So, I took it upon myself to share my journey from day one right to this moment.

As most of you can relate, in the beginning I had no idea what to expect and how to deal with things as they unfolded. So many questions ran through my mind

that I couldn't even keep track of my thoughts at some points. However, two years later, I know one thing for sure: nothing is linear. We don't go through stages of recovery in sequence. Sure, we might not feel the stages as deeply as we once did, but they're certainly visited just as often.

So, what does my life as a two-year amputee look like? As you know, everyone leads different lives, and this is what I've created. In the beginning stages, I was more lost and confused than I ever imagined I would feel in my lifetime. The grief led to deep depression and anger, so much anger. I had led such a healthy and happy life, and it was all taken away from me within minutes. Everything I had worked for and dreamt of was seemingly stripped of me, and I was not okay with that. I didn't have anyone to turn to because I didn't think anyone would understand, and even if they did, there was nothing they could do to help.

Nothing was going to change, and it was extremely difficult to accept. I had to adjust every detail of my life to adapt to one that I didn't want. I'm wired to change the things I don't want in my life. If I didn't like a job, I would work hard to get a new one. If I didn't like a certain circle of friends, I would socialize and create new ones. If I didn't like the environment I was in, I would change it to one that brings me happiness. But this, an amputation, how do you change this? You don't; you change you! I've said this before,

and I'll say it again, I've come to be reminded that we are extremely resilient beings. We can be up to the challenge whether we know it or not. Allow me to shed some light on that.

Time can be our worst enemy or our best friend. While I was slowly healing both physically and mentally, I was also doing some incredible things without even knowing it. I started back to work virtually, connecting with some colleagues. I tested new prosthetic devices which was really exciting. I went back to the gym. I started to write for *thrive magazine* which has become my new passion. I learned how to run again which was exhilarating. I even bought myself a new motorcycle! I've traveled alone, won awards, and even started volunteering as a peer visitor.



I've found that no matter what I'm doing, it doesn't seem that big in the moment, but looking back and reflecting paints an incredible picture of all my unfathomable accomplishments over the last two years. I'm very proud of who I've become and what I've done since my injury. But, day to day, I still face so many challenges. I can work on myself as much as possible, but I cannot change others.

I live alone and take care of my day-to-day tasks on my own, so I'm often out by myself. I've never seen another amputee anywhere in my community, so as you can imagine, I get quite the looks when I'm out and about.

I wish it stopped at just looks, but I get pointed at, stared down, and asked some incredibly rude questions. It tears me to pieces when a child is pointing and staring while asking their parents "what's wrong with that lady's leg?" The kids I can forgive; they don't know any better. They come from a place of innocence and pure curiosity. The adults however, sometimes make me wonder what's wrong with the world.

Those little actions, whether verbal or nonverbal, from others we encounter every day are certainly bothersome, and sometimes I just say to myself "whatever" to wash it away. Yet, together and over time they add up and take a toll. Constant reminders of our differences. Those subtle offences can even be quite unintentional by well-meaning others, but noticed by me. The grocery store is my battlefield. I feel like I'm in a fishbowl when I'm there.

People don't realize how much that can affect us for the remainder of the day or maybe longer. Some unsolicited questions have no boundaries and can pierce our most tender wounds. I want to lash out and scream that it is none of someone's business and to please adopt some decency and respect for others – me in particular. But I must remind myself that I can't control the actions of others. I can only control myself.

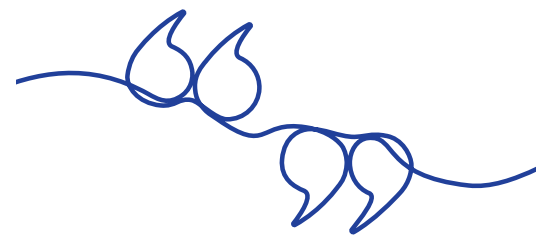
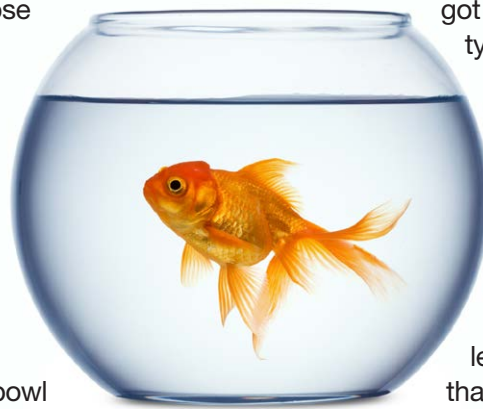
Nonetheless, it still breaks my heart and takes a toll on my self-esteem. Sometimes I carry that wound with me for days. I wish people would realize that we are just as human as they are.

At one point it was getting so hard for me to simply grocery shop, that I was driving over an hour away from home to a more secluded town, where I wasn't getting bothered as much.

It's a rare occasion when I go out without getting some sort of comment from someone. I must also point out too, that sometimes I get really cool comments from

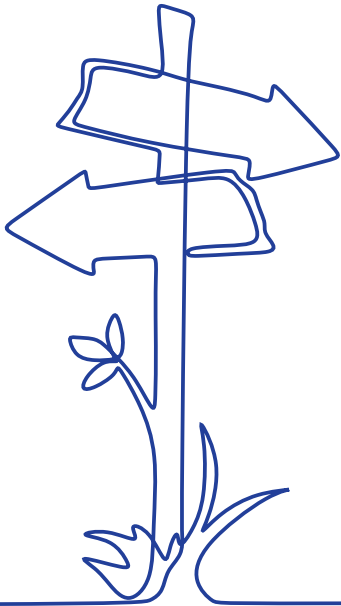
strangers. People have stopped me to ask to take pictures of my leg because it's so unique. I've customized it to suit me and I'm really proud of it. I've had car wrap designers ask me for advice on the "look." In Mexico, the locals were in awe of my prosthesis and I got treated like royalty because of it.

Whether it's a flattering compliment or a gruesome question or comment, it still makes me feel different. I've learned though, that different is not always bad. It's hard to digest, but this is my life now and I can do endless things with it.



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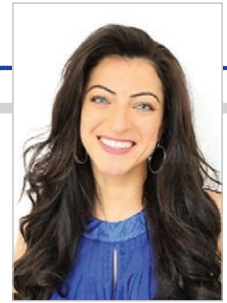




Yes, it's more difficult for us but I believe we are so much stronger than we give ourselves credit for. We have the ability to overcome those everyday micro-aggressions and the insensitive grocery store shoppers we encounter. Once you build confidence by owning who you are, you become unstoppable. You're entitled to the feelings you have, no matter what they are. But never forget how strong you can be.

The best part of this journey is reflecting back and being grateful for what you've overcome. Appreciate yourself. Life will always challenge you but if you can rise above what you can't control, then you can rise above anything. Be proud of yourself for passing through your hardest moments while everyone around you might have thought you were fine. Stay true to yourself.

Regardless of where you are in your journey, if you have questions or simply want to reach out for any reason, contact me at writing2roz@gmail.com.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

As a relatively new amputee (2+ years), working through new emotional and physical challenges informs Rouzalin Hakim's work as a peer mentor and freelance writer, regularly contributing to *thrive magazine*. She volunteers at trauma centres, and represents her community as an actor, model and podcast guest.

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