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THE FOOTPRINTS of *Success*

Amputees achieve confidence through climbs

BY BENN STEBLETON

MJ Hancock, 16, made it up the steep face of Este Park's Old Man Mountain. She relied heavily on her rope and belayer for safety. But she did all the climbing herself; reaching for handholds, then pushing up with the fiberglass and metal technology that serves as her right leg.

She needed all of this—ropes, fingertips, prosthetic leg—to make it up the rock. But to even begin this physical and mental journey, she needed Brian Anderson to experience a fall nine years earlier.

Brian was scaling down a similar cliff in Hawaii in 2004 when his rope snapped. Everything below his right knee was torn. After several surgeries, he was able to keep his entire natural leg, but his ankle has been immobile since the trauma.

During the lengthy healing process, Brian and his wife Brittany latched onto a plan. They founded the nonprofit **Footprints Adventures** (FA) in 2009. The goal of the organization is to get people like MJ into countless outdoor activities that will empower them beyond their disabilities.

FA focuses on people with “limb differences and limb loss.” They put no age limits on whom they serve, but they do at least one trip each summer exclusively for youth. They want the kids to generate confidence and self-esteem early.

Climbing after MJ Hancock up Old Man Mountain was 18-year-old Deborah Gardner. Spunky Deb was born without arms in a Russian orphanage. Adoptive missionary parents brought her to their home in Spokane, WA when she was an infant.


“All you can do is problem solve and adapt,” Deb says to explain her climbing technique, but her advice extends far past the

rock. As a freshman, Deb has since brought her wisdom to Washington's Pacific Lutheran University.

Two days after the Old Man Mountain climb, David Demello, 17, of San Bernardino, CA scrambled up a FA utility pole. The beam inadvertently contacted the release on his left leg and his prosthetic dropped 20 feet to the ground. David hardly slowed down, adopting a hopping technique.

David lost his leg in a one-car rollover in the New Mexico desert. He was 13 years old. Four years later, he sees that cut as a positive catalyst.

“If I wouldn't have lost my leg, my whole life would've been different. I wouldn't have done all these things... It might be the best thing that happened to me,” David says.

Summer 2012 brings a new group of adolescents to FA. Kids will scurry up the Rocky Mountains and splash down the Arkansas River. Meanwhile, they'll achieve success that will impact them the rest of their lives. 



Deborah Gardner shows off her climbing technique. Photo courtesy of Footprints Adventures



MJ Hancock takes a leap. Photo courtesy of Footprints Adventures

HOW TO HELP

Visit footprintsadventures.org, email footprintsadventures@gmail.com or call 303.921.9368 to pursue the following options:

- Sponsor an individual's adventure through the Campership Program
- Donate financially through the website
- Give your gear to campers who don't have any
- Volunteer (Footprints currently needs a bookkeeper)
- Donate your car and Footprints will receive the proceeds
- Volunteer your equipment trailer or a 12- or 15-passenger van for one-time or permanent use