

Against the Current: Haley Scott DeMaria's Story

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After a tragic bus accident, Haley Scott DeMaria's life was transformed. Today she spreads her message of hope across the country, and back at her Phoenix alma mater, Xavier College Preparatory.



Haley Scott DeMaria began competitive swimming at age 10, swam on the Xavier swim team as a teen, and then for the Fighting Irish at Notre Dame University, where she attended college. She was good—very good. Then at age 18, on Jan. 24, 1992, her life was forever changed when the Notre Dame women's swim team suffered a fatal bus crash, leaving two dead, many injured and DeMaria paralyzed from the waist down. After multiple surgeries over the next few days, DeMaria and her family were told she would not walk again and that she'd better learn to live life in a wheelchair. But that was unacceptable for DeMaria, who vowed to walk—and swim—again.

It took two months, but against all odds, DeMaria did begin to walk again. Some might say it was a medical miracle, but DeMaria credits her family's support as well as her own unfaltering hope and stubborn willpower as the keys to her recovery. By October 1993, she was back swimming for the Irish.

Recovering from the accident and swimming again were incredible achievements, but the message of hope and faith that DeMaria shared, from the very beginning of her ordeal, was what won her the Spirit of Notre Dame Award, the Executive Journal Comeback of the Year Award (1993), The Honda Award for Inspiration (1993-94), and The Gene Autry Courage in Sport Award (1994), among others. She was also named Woman of the Year at the National Women's Leadership Conference in Washington D.C. (June 1994) and a fellow at the Institute for International Sport in Rhode Island (June 1995).

DeMaria's recovery came full circle when she returned to Scottsdale in 1996 to teach and coach at Xavier for four years, saying that her journey taught her to be a more patient teacher. She now lives in Maryland with her husband and two sons, and is an active inspirational speaker. She travels the country speaking at schools (always returning to Xavier for a special visit), churches, businesses and colleges, spreading her message: "It will happen to you. You will face a challenge that is very difficult and it's O.K. You can still come out of it living a happy, healthy life."

DeMaria is also an author of the book, "What Though The Odds," which tells her story of hope, survival and dealing with loss. The book took five years of dedicated research to complete, and is in its second printing now.

Returning to Arizona at least once a year, DeMaria says, "I appreciate it more now than [when I was] growing up. I love running on the canal and the sunset over Camelback Mountain." Life today is dedicated to family and to telling her story and sharing her message of hope, she says. "It's been 17 years [since the accident] and everything has been defined by it."

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