

Ralph

Support network and positive attitude help double-amputee remain independent

Ralph isn't used to sitting around. And even though he's lost most of both legs, he refuses to feel sorry for himself or spend his days locked up in his Middletown home.

The youngest of seven kids, Ralph had plenty of responsibilities on his family's farm in Indiana. From baling hay, to raising and selling rabbits, to outrunning would-be robbers at the family's roadside vegetable stand, Ralph did it all.

"We were poor," Ralph said, "but we didn't do without."

When Ralph graduated from high school, he did what many of his friends were doing at the time – he enlisted in the Marines and went off to Vietnam. But that's a subject he would rather not discuss. Instead, he remembers the time he spent "getting his head straight" after the war, at his aunt and uncle's place in Mexico – playing softball on the beach and fishing. He might still be there had his father not gotten sick.

Ralph's father worked at Alcoa and was big in the union. After his dad's death, Ralph went to work there as well. A series of layoffs and other jobs eventually brought him to Butler County where he worked for the *Middletown Journal* for more than 20 years. During that time, Ralph got married, raised seven of his own kids, and got divorced.

Life happened, and Ralph admits he lived hard. He developed diabetes and congestive heart failure, had bypass surgery, and eventually enrolled in the Butler County Elderly Services Program (ESP) when it became difficult for him to manage things like housekeeping and shopping.

Then, at age 69, Ralph had to have part of his left leg amputated because the veins in the leg had deteriorated. After the surgery, he spent three weeks in a nursing home and wondered how he would cope when he got home.



A double-amputee, Ralph receives help from his daughters and Butler County's Elderly Services Program to help him remain independent in his home. Despite all he has been through, Ralph tries to stay positive and cautions others to avoid self-pity: "It'll drive you crazy. You just need to accept what it is," he said. "Sometimes you can't figure out the reason – I sure can't!"

Elderly Services Program Client Story Continued...

A home health aide was already helping Ralph with housekeeping and errands, but his ESP care manager, Lois, made arrangements for things that would make it easier for him to adjust when he came back home – a bath bench, grab bars and other equipment. “Anything I need, she takes care of it,” Ralph said.

Two years later, Ralph lost most of his other leg after a small sore on his little toe turned into gangrene. The infection was stubborn and doctors had to remove more and more of the leg until it finally stopped spreading.

It takes fortitude and determination to bounce back from an ordeal like that, but Ralph has a remarkable attitude – he cautions people in similar situations to avoid self-pity. “It’ll drive you crazy. You just need to accept what it is,” he said. “Sometimes you can’t figure out the reason – I sure can’t!”

Ralph also has a strong support network. Besides support from ESP and his daughters, a friend built a wheelchair ramp so he could get in and out his front door; an occupational therapist became a trusted friend and taught him tricks that helped him relearn simple tasks like getting dressed. This support gave Ralph the confidence and determination to retrofit his car so he could still drive with the assistance of hand controls. Though he is not able to work in his own garden as much as he would like, he can still drive around and look at others.

Though he admits to bouts of depression and suffers from phantom pains in his missing legs, Ralph is thankful for the support that has enabled him to remain independent in his home. “Without help from Lois (ESP), Gene (home health aide) and my daughters, I’d be in a nursing home – or worse,” Ralph said.