

Dani Burt

A journey of trust with the world's first female adaptive surfing champion

"My medical team wanted to wait until I could talk again to tell me my right leg was gone. I thought my leg was still there since I had phantom limb sensation."

It was 2004, and Dani Burt had just awoken from a five-week-long medically induced coma.

"I remembered my motorcycle crash and knew I was in the hospital, but I had no idea the extent of my injuries. Since I was out for so long, I couldn't move at all. I couldn't sit up, roll over, change position. Nothing. I also couldn't talk because I was breathing from a tube coming from my neck. I didn't know what to really think at that time. I was completely overwhelmed."

Eventually she knew something was very wrong: "I took my friend's hand and placed it on my right thigh. He told me it was gone. At that moment, I felt completely destroyed. I could barely move, I couldn't talk, and now I knew my leg was gone. I was so upset because if I had had the choice, it wouldn't have been this. I had to be placed on suicide watch."

Dani didn't try stand-up surfing until after she lost her leg, but she had developed ocean prowess from a childhood of bodyboarding and skateboarding in her home state of New Jersey. Even as a child, she felt that the ocean was her place of solace, an escape from the toxic life of her upbringing, somewhere she could just be herself.

One of the many uncomfortable situations amputees face is accepting assistance through recovery and rehabilitation. A person truly knows vulnerability when one needs full assistance to get to the toilet or even to reposition in bed. The mental strength of enduring such radical vulnerability—not to mention the encompassing pain—pushes one beyond their previous boundaries.

