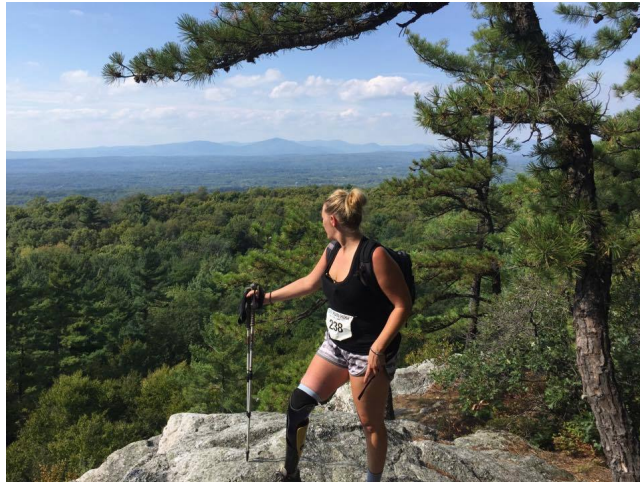


Local Woman Connects with Others Through Hiking

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Local Woman Connects With Others Through Hiking

By Eric Wagner

Hikers are drawn to the trail for all sorts of reasons. Some hear the call of the wild and simply can't pull away, while others want to socialize with close friends and family on group hikes. For Brooke Artesi, it was a combination of the two that kept her coming back for more.

"I have been hiking forever," Artesi reflected, "One of my favorite things about hiking is that it's never the same. The leaves are going to change, the weather might be different; nothing stays the same."

And while hikers all share a common bond over their love of the outdoors and fresh air, Artesi has one notable aspect that separates her from the rest of the group.

At the age of 15, Artesi was boarding a passenger train with friends when her right leg was severed at the ankle. It took several months of physical rehabilitation for Artesi to get back on her foot. But it wasn't so much the physical recovery that she had to overcome as it was finding others to connect with who shared the experience of losing a limb.

"This was before the internet, and frankly the biggest problem was that there was no one my age to connect with," Artesi recalled, "You never really met amputees."

In spite of her injury, Artesi has harbored a long-term love with hiking. Her husband Steven first introduced her to the trail over 15 years ago, and she hasn't looked back since. Together,

the loving couple has spent many long afternoons hiking the Appalachian Trail, a historic path covering over 2,000 miles along the East Coast, as well as other local sites in New Jersey and New York.

When asked about how she felt about hiking with one leg and what she would say to others sharing a similar disability, Artesi was candid and humorous.

"I wasn't always good at it, especially while carrying my four-month old baby," Brooke joked. "Just get out there and try it!"

Artesi has dedicated her life to sharing her story in an effort to reach others who have gone through similar experiences, while also providing empowering to those in need. The embodiment of "when life hands you lem-

ons make lemonade," Artesi is a certified prosthetist and orthotist. Whether she's providing exceptionally crafted prosthetics for her patients at Sunshine Prosthetics and Orthopedics at her practice in Wayne, or volunteering with various support groups and charity organizations, Artesi is determined to provide help and inspiration however she can.

During her journey, it's often times on the trail that Artesi finds inspiration herself. She has admired from many other figures during her time hiking. Niki Rellon, a young female hiker sporting a prosthetic leg that she met through Facebook, is one such figure.

"I was hiking at Bear Mountain on the Appalachian trail and ran into this guy who told me about a

girl hiking the entire trail on a prosthetic leg," Artesi explained. "This has been one of my lifetime goals, so I reached out and we became friends on Facebook. The furthest I've ever gone in a single day was 20 miles on the Shawgone Ridge Trail in New York, but hiking the whole Appalachian Trail is on my bucket list."

Most recently Artesi has combined that passion for hiking and connecting with fellow amputees through her newly formed hiking group called Adaptive Hiking.

Focusing on local hikes on Pyramid Mountain, the group is open to comers of all levels of experience. Adaptive Hiking was conceived with the idea of bringing others with disabilities- not strictly amputees-outside and onto the

trail.

"It's brand new! We pick dates once a month going all the way through October," Artesi exclaimed. "Everyone is welcome, and if some people only want to walk a little bit, we adapt to all levels."

When asked about what she hopes to accomplish by starting Adaptive Hiking, Artesi responded simply by saying that everyone deserves to enjoy the outdoors, no matter their condition.

"I believe everything happens for a reason," Artesi explained. "If just one person reads this article and joins us on a hike, that would be great."

Artesi's latest hike was set for Pyramid Mountain on May 20. Strap on some hiking boots and meet her there for a future hike!