

Living In the Spirit of Gratitude

Susan Myrick, Born Without Arms, Shares Her Story

"I laugh because I really do feel grateful. I think that's the most important thing to leave as a legacy: To live with an attitude of gratitude."

Susan Myrick was born and raised in Cleveland, OH. As a graduate of Shaw High School who went on to attend Cleveland State University, Susan's life has been quite typical for a Cleveland native, except for the fact that she was born without arms.

"My feet worked just fine though," she said, "So I learned to use my feet as a natural ability. No one could teach me, so it just had to come naturally."

By the time she was a teenager, Susan had learned to clean the house, cook food, and even sew clothing with her feet. "I also learned how to drive with my feet when I was sixteen, which I think is one of my biggest accomplishments," Susan proudly explained.

Susan's family never treated her any differently because of her physical disability. "My mother always told me that God made me just the way He wanted me to be, so I never thought much of it." In time, Susan grew a burning desire to share this message with other disabled people, so she trained to become a teacher's assistant for special education classrooms.

For the next decade of her life, Susan helped elementary-aged children with intellectual disabilities learn how to read and do math. "I drew them in with my love so that I could teach them the most important lesson I have learned: that it's okay to be different."

Over the years, several former students have reached out to Susan to tell her that they chose a career to help others with disabilities because of her intervention in their lives. It is obvious that Susan has made a great difference in Cleveland simply by showing love to those who were often overlooked.

As Susan got older, she slowed down at a faster rate than most of the other people her age, so she had to retire early. But Susan was not ready to stop making a great difference in her community.

Instead, Susan thought back to her days at Camp Cheerful, a summer camp designed for children with physical and intellectual disabilities in Strongsville. "First of all, I remember seeing children who were born without arms *and* legs. It was made clear to me that things could always be worse, so I learned to live with an attitude of gratitude."

Susan also remembers seeing children who were left behind by their parents because they were unable to support a disabled child. "Thinking back to them, I made up my mind to become a foster parent." Over the next 20 years, Susan was a foster parent for ten teenage girls, including a few who were teenage mothers.

“Together, we learned that life is difficult, but that shouldn’t stop your success. We learned that difficulty is not an excuse, but a motivation,” Susan said as she reflected upon her years as a foster mother.

As she got older, Susan was injured and was given the opportunity to stay in McGregor’s Rehabilitation Center as she regained her independence. While in rehab, she learned to love McGregor’s beautiful and peaceful campus. She also learned that McGregor offers a full spectrum of care, from independent living to assisted living, and from skilled nursing to hospice. “When it came time to move into a senior living community, the choice was a no-brainer. I’ll never have to move again.”

Susan now proudly resides in the McGregor Independent Living Community. “Since the day I arrived, the staff have gone out of their way to make it handicap accessible for me. They put in a power door that can be opened with remote control, so that I can get into my apartment on my own.”

Susan concluded by expressing how grateful she is to have a group of friends at McGregor who sit together, talk, encourage each other, and, most importantly, listen to “music that soothes the soul” together in various places throughout the community. “I often look around and am grateful; when I count my blessings, there is never a shortage. This is the legacy I want to leave.”