

Athlete Profile (National)

Amy Riter – Moving Forward

For Amy Riter of Canton, Ohio, the end of 2008 couldn't come soon enough. Although she was golden last year after competing in her first ever National Veterans Wheelchair Games and was voted Most Valuable Female Athlete at the Ohio Wheelchair Games, it was a tough year for her personal and family life. As she adjusted to her new life in a wheelchair after having a tumor removed from her spine, she was faced with more abrupt changes. Only a month after the passing of a very dear friend, Riter lost her home and its entire contents to fire.

"Everything has changed," she says. "Every bit of my life is different. My seven-year-old son doesn't understand. He still wants mommy to get up and play with him like before, and that's hard." Riter also has a three-year-old daughter. "I want to be an inspiration to my kids. I want them to know that this isn't the end of my life, it's just another chapter."

Despite the setbacks, this new chapter is off to a good start. Because Riter had renters' insurance on her home, the contents were covered. Now, she and her family live in a more spacious home that is wheelchair accessible. With the events that altered her life so drastically the in the past year and a half behind her, this Navy veteran is ready to move forward and embrace the blessings around her.

"There's more to life than just sitting in this chair," she says. Riter has a strong resolve to embrace life and inspire others, especially her children. She credits her tough skin on her experience as a woman in the armed forces. She served in the Navy as a machinist mate (mechanic) during Desert Storm from 1994-96. "Being a woman in the military is a wonderful experience," she says. "It is really empowering to work with the best." At the National Veterans Wheelchair Games taking place in July 2009 in Spokane, Washington, she will again be among the best. Riter was introduced to the Games by a recreation therapy staffer at the VA medical facility in Cleveland where she receives care.

"You can either get out there and do something in your wheelchair, or you can succumb to it – and that's never an option," she says. "Being at the Wheelchair Games really put my situation into perspective for me. I had an unbelievable time and the people I met made it worth the trip to Omaha (for the 2008 event)."

This year, when Amy Riter makes her next trip to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, it will be to Spokane, Washington, but she's ready for it already. After all, there is a lot to look forward to in 2009.

