

**FIRE AND IRON.** Miss Kitty's brothers and sisters in firefighting, a well-crafted carbon and steel prosthesis below her knee, and a gritty determination have helped her make a quick recovery from her amputation.



FHCN PHOTO BY NERISSA JOHNSON

## STEPPING FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE AFTER AMPUTATION

To see an indomitable spirit in action, spend half an hour with Kathleen “Miss Kitty” Dolan, a captain and paramedic with Pasco County Fire and Rescue.

“I was on a motorcycle trip with three other women on September 3, 2006, heading to a bed and breakfast in Apalachicola, when a car crossed the center line and hit us,” says Miss Kitty.

One of her friends died at the scene, and Miss Kitty says that if two off-duty paramedics from Alabama had not chanced to be in the area, she and another of her friends would likely have been lost there as well.

As it was, her friend’s leg was so

badly injured that it was removed there on the roadway, and Miss Kitty remembers fading in and out from the shock of her own injuries that would later require the loss of her leg below the knee.



DAVID S. GORIS, LCPO  
JONATHAN J. ROY, LP  
ART GAGNÉ, CP, LP  
JOEL SMITH, CO

“That was a lifetime ago,” she acknowledges, “but I have *chutzpah*. I decided to do whatever was necessary to get back on my feet. I wanted to get back to work, ride my motorcycle, go

scuba diving, and get down and work in the garden again.”

When she was stable enough to be released from the acute-care hospital, the men and women in her station picked Miss Kitty up in her own department’s brand-new ambulance. “When we got close to home, 25 of the bikers in my motorcycle club, Fire and Iron, escorted me to HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital,” recalls Miss Kitty. “My brothers and sisters in service brought me home.”

### Quick progress

It was at HealthSouth that Miss Kitty learned about Sonlife Prosthetics and Orthotics and discovered the talented and supportive

allies who would help her realize her goals for recovery.

Prosthetist Art Gagné, CP, LP, visited Miss Kitty at HealthSouth and was immediately impressed by her attitude.

“In Miss Kitty’s work as a paramedic, she sees injuries like the one she sustained all the time,” Art observes. “She knows that it’s important to push toward recovery, and she did that from the very beginning.”

There was one delay: After Miss Kitty’s initial amputation in September, she required another surgery in January, so she couldn’t be fit for her first prosthesis until February.

“Miss Kitty was in good physical condition because her career requires her to meet all the standards every firefighter does,” notes Art. “She also followed instructions for her recovery, so the swelling in her residual limb came down quickly. We did a lot of work refitting her sockets as the limb reduced.”

Miss Kitty’s first prosthesis was intended to help get her up and moving again, and it served its purpose well. “Up until I got that prosthesis, I was in a wheelchair,” reminds Miss Kitty. “When I finally got my prosthesis on Valentine’s Day, nobody told me I shouldn’t immediately try walking with a cane, so by the following weekend, I’d bought a cane and left the chair behind.”

Now, Art is working on a new prosthesis for Miss Kitty that will stand up to the rigorous

lifestyle she plans to reclaim.

“Her new leg will be made of carbon fiber and titanium,” he describes. “It will be durable and strong enough for her to perform all the physical tests involved in her work with the fire department as well as to put her leg down and balance her motorcycle.”

Already back at work, Miss Kitty says she is eager to put that new leg to the test.

“If it hadn’t been for the hard work and excellent attitude of Art and everyone else at Sonlife,” she theorizes, “I might not be recovering this quickly. They’re all terrific, and I’m very appreciative.” **FHCN**—Billie S. Noakes

### Inspired solutions

At Sonlife Prosthetics and Orthotics, caring professionals put their years of experience to work for you. To learn more about their full range of prosthetic and orthotic services, please call or visit one of their offices.

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