



Shelley's new arms



Shelley Durrant waits patiently while Cullen Hayes, center, and MacJulian "Mac" Lang check the fit of her prosthetic arms after making some changes in the back shop.

By Kyle Odegard
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TIGARD - Shelley Durrant shrugged her left shoulder and an electric motor whirred, bending her elbow and sending her hand up toward the ceiling.

MacJulian "Mac" Lang, the Northwest clinical director for Advanced Arm Dynamics, quickly adjusted a harness and sensor pads to make it easier for the Bellfountain woman to move her prosthetic limbs. They repeated the exercise and other drills before Lang took the arms back to his shop for more extensive tinkering.

On the morning of Oct. 3, Durrant was digging fence posts with a tractor-mounted auger when her clothing got caught in the rotating mechanism, and she lost both of her arms. The critical injury required more than two months of hospitalization and rehabilitation.

It was during those stays that Lang began working with Durrant to help her adjust to her new arms.

Durrant has had her right arm since late February, and she started weekly occupational therapy in Corvallis to practice using it. She got the prosthetic for her left side about two weeks ago.



Her real right arm has about four inches left, but her left arm was removed at the shoulder and took longer to heal.

Lang stressed that the current prosthetic sockets and frames were just rough drafts, but that in the summer, Durrant should have the finished versions made with light-weight carbon fiber and titanium, so she could only have to take them off to go to bed.

Combined, the limbs will weigh 7 to 8 pounds, which is less than the limbs Durrant lost. "But it will feel heavier," Lang said. "It will always feel a little bit different to wear it."

Lang has worked with soldiers, loggers and others in dangerous jobs, but he said Durrant faces more difficulty than most patients, because she lost both her arms high up, so doesn't have a real hand or even longer limbs to help her put on her prosthetics.

One of his goals, however, is to have her be able to don her arms herself.

Still, Durrant has a distinct advantage working for her, Lang said.

"She has a very positive outlook on her life, even after going through an amazing trauma."

Now the 39-year-old practices using her new arms and hands every day, but she still heads to the Portland area every week for a three- to four-hour session with Lang, who gives her advice and makes any necessary adjustments to the arms.

"I'm not proficient with them yet," Durrant said. "It's going to take me a long time to figure out everything."

But the mother of two girls is working hard to adjust, even when she's playing around.

Last week, Durrant went out to the Alpine Tavern with friends and shot pool. Durrant joked that it was ugly, but she sank some balls.

"Doing things like that; that's advanced stuff with the arms," Durrant said. "I try it, and I get frustrated, and then I try it again."

Debby Durrant said it's been difficult for her sister to learn how to move her hands and arms by flexing specific upper arm or shoulder muscles.

"We thought that when she got her arms, everything would be back to normal," she said.

Both the arms move up and down at the elbow electronically, and Durrant can lean against objects to move the elbows toward or away from the body. The hands can be positioned manually, and electronically squeeze or rotate. (Durrant joked about having fun this Halloween by spinning her hands for trick-or-treaters.)

To Durrant, the arms and hands represent freedom, independence and the ability to again enjoy her hobbies.

She still needs help with the little things, such as eating lunch or brushing her teeth, but she has big plans: Durrant wants to use her new hands to garden and do odd jobs around the farm, such as walking a field and picking up twine from hay bales.

"I'd like to start driving when I can," she said.

Her daughters still are getting used to the arms however, and she doesn't wear them too much when at home. The skin on her shoulders is still healing, so they feel uncomfortable.

Her family hopes to build a Habitat for Humanity home on their land. Those who would like to contribute to the family's medical related expenses or permits for a new home can do so at Sterling Savings Bank and US Bank, where funds have been established in Shelley Durrant's name.



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