

Girls that Scuba

Paralyzed teen shows the world it's still possible to scuba dive

ScubaStars

21 Mar



We first heard Amber's story a few months ago when a video of her was shared to our [Girls that Scuba group](#), and it was one of our most interacted posts. Scuba girls from all around the world offered Amber their support, love and encouragement, and in return Amber's motivation and fearless attitude inspired us all to work even harder to achieve our dreams. Now, we have the honour of speaking to Amber and hearing more of her incredible scuba story. Over to you, Amber:

Read to the bottom to see how you can support her

I have a c5 spinal cord injury, basically, that means if you put your finger at the base of your neck and head, that is my injury level. I have paralysis from this spot down.

I do use my arms, with a limited outcome because my triceps no longer transmit messages to the rest of my arm. My hands have some function but nothing that requires pinching or delicate maneuvers. **From the mid-chest I have no movement**, only spasms. If a body part moves, it is because I picked it up or a spasm warns of a non favourable position or outcome.

My accident happened while training for the U.S. Barefoot Nationals. I had been competing and winning at the national level for several years. There are three events - tricks, slalom and jump. **I was the defending national champion in tricks and runner up in slalom in 2013.** I had decided to add jump to my resume in 2014. I was with my coach one week before the tournament, basically just touching up my trick run and decided a few more jumps would build my confidence. Then, while my coach and teammates watched from our boat, **I tripped on the water and at 43mph and hit the jump head first.** I immediately knew I was injured and fearful for my life. I had broken my neck in several places and my right arm was disfigured. I was physically unable to help myself, but my mind was alert the entire time.



As you can imagine, I never pictured myself in the water again. My parents, family and friends and mostly my coach were concerned. I had been a "water bug" my whole life; swim team for years, diver in high school and I even taught swim lessons and guarded as my job.

After months of physical therapy I was introduced to adaptive sports—something that both motivated and scared me! It was during this transition to my new normal that I met Sarah Arends-Repka and Scott Alm. Scott suggested I try SCUBA, my first reaction was, "Are you crazy? Six months after nearly drowning and you want me to do WHAT?". A few weeks later I was introduced to [Diveheart.org](https://www.diveheart.org) and decided I could not let the fear consume me any longer. **I showed up at the pool and was diving within an hour! I was hooked.**

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People underestimate the power of SCUBA. When I am diving I can pause my disabilities. Meaning, the playing field is open again, I can participate with everyone else, with equal abilities. I can be as independent as others, there is no wheelchair, no spasms and no constant pain. I swim freely without gravity as my enemy. My arms are more functional and my muscle strength is growing- as is my confidence!

Most of the challenges associated with my SCUBA experiences come long before I hit the water. Many of the obstacles are accessibility issues and then people who think I am unable to dive! Because I have trained with Diveheart and their volunteers I feel confident in my skills. I do not like having people doubt my ability. As with any sport, I have a few accommodations - I use a full face mask, hand signals and slate board to communicate with my other divers. But many able bodied people also use these tools.

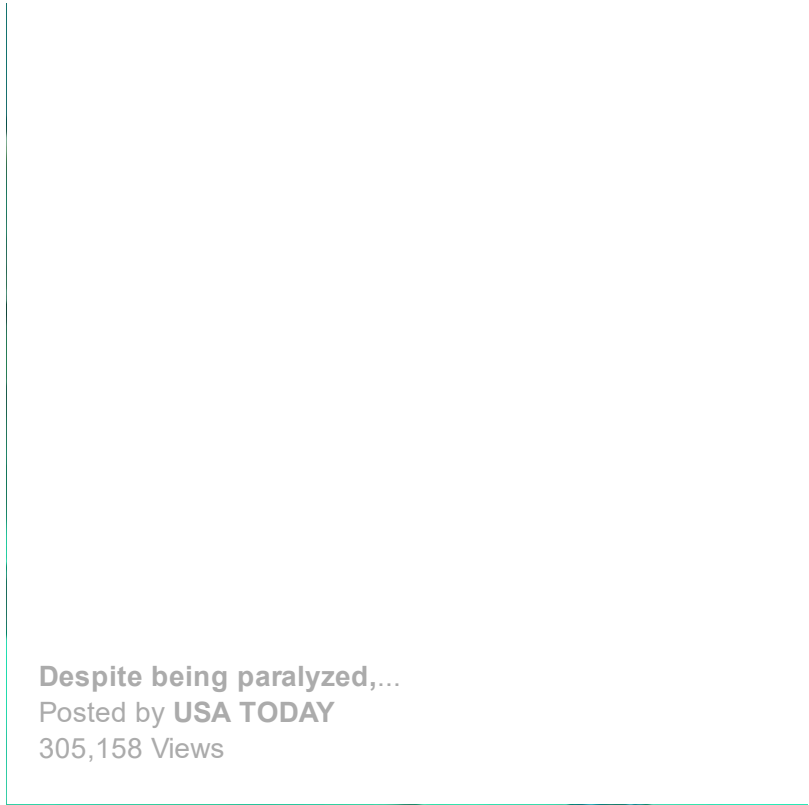
Jim Elliott, founder of Diveheart.org, is my champion! He has made it his mission (and now mine) to get as many people with disabilities as possible diving and experiencing the many benefits it has to offer, both physically and mentally.



I have been very lucky to experience some of the best diver buddies and instructors. The SCUBA "family" has been gracious and welcoming to me. **Jim Elliott, founder of Diveheart.org, is my champion!** He has made it his mission (and now mine) to get as many people with disabilities as possible diving and experiencing the many benefits it has to offer, both physically and mentally.

Advice? With any new adventure, surround yourself with people who know the ropes. Don't be afraid to push your limitations, but do keep safety in mind at all times. Keep an open mind, relax and breath! Ooh,

then plan your next dive, you're hooked!



Despite being paralyzed,...
Posted by USA TODAY
305,158 Views

Amber, we love you, we support you, and we can't wait to watch your journey. Big things are coming your way, girl!



Amber is aiming for a new manual wheelchair and shower chair to help with her independence and has set up a [GoFundMe page](#) to help her reach this goal. We've just donated, have you?