

IN HER OWN WORDS

The Union of Laura Sauriol and Captain Ferris Butler



What began as a search for an activity outside of academics became an unyielding passion for service. I began volunteering in college with Operation Second Chance, helping the president of the organization with care packages, hospital visits, and errands. The spirit surrounding Walter Reed is difficult to describe, but undoubtedly inspirational, and I soon found myself visiting multiple nights a week, driving wounded soldiers to sporting events, the grocery store, or the airport so they could visit their families back home. On my regular visits around Ward 57, I met a lot of wounded service members, but not a single one from Maryland, until First Lieutenant Ferris Butler arrived! He had been injured in Yousefia, Iraq when his vehicle detonated an IED, while serving in the Army's 10th MTN DIV. He was sent to Landstuhl and eventually back to the States, where his family awaited his arrival. He was lucky to have family nearby, growing up just south of D.C. in Port Tobacco, Maryland. His devoted parents drove to Walter Reed nearly every single day Ferris was in the hospital, for four straight months. I got to know Ferris and his family as I visited each week, brought them dinner, and movies, and games to help pass the time. I never thought about dating Ferris, but he has always maintained it was love at first sight for him!

Ferris was eventually released from the hospital, but stayed on post as an outpatient to continue his medical treatment. In January 2008, after thirteen months of salvaging the remaining parts of his legs and feet, he elected to amputate his left foot and ankle. In late February, I ran into Ferris on post and seeing his new amputation, I decided we had some catching up to do! I began a regular schedule on Friday nights at Walter Reed, bringing patients in Ward 57 and their families dinner from area restaurants. I called Ferris to see if I could pick up a meal for him and he asked for his favorite Macaroni Grill dish, Lobster Ravioli! I picked one up for myself and that is how it began...we ate dinner together watching March Madness basketball. Every Friday for nearly two months we continued this tradition, and one Friday, I felt butterflies in my stomach as we said goodbye. I finally agreed to join him at the Melting Pot for dinner, although I still didn't consider it a date! We have been inseparable ever since.

Ferris spent our first summer together walking as a mid-foot amputee on his right side and with a prosthetic leg on his left side. He had been promoted to a Captain now, and at the end of the summer, he decided his mobility, and life, would be much better with a prosthetic instead of a partial foot. In September 2008, he elected to remove his right foot and ankle, and I got to be by his side this time. He was a perfect patient and felt completely relieved that, although he had endured over 50 surgeries to save the legs he eventually amputated, he was finally on the path to recovery.

Ferris went to a jeweler a few weeks after his release from the hospital, still in his wheelchair, to pick out an engagement ring. He customized a beautiful Simon G ring and held onto it for a few months before popping the question. One thing I love about Ferris is his attention to detail, and he wanted our engagement to be a perfect moment we would remember forever. He took me on a tour of the White House before Christmas, and received special permission to propose in front of the Blue Room Christmas tree.

We began thinking about our wedding, but Ferris' brother is deployed with the Navy and we knew we had to work around his schedule. We decided to have a quintessential Maryland Eastern Shore wedding and we fell in love with the Chesapeake Bay Beach Club. As we were finalizing the date, we received a call on Memorial Day weekend from the owner, John Wilson, who gave us such a special gift by offering to host our wedding. I have done nothing but smile when I think about our wedding day, not only because I am truly marrying my best friend, but because John has given us the wedding of our dreams. This wedding is celebrating both our love for each other and the end of Ferris' five year journey in the military. He will officially retire just a week before our wedding, and what a better way to celebrate the end of nearly three years of rehabilitation, than with the biggest party of our lives! John has provided an opportunity for us to bring together and humbly thank the countless people who have impacted our lives and supported Ferris when he needed it most.

There is so much about Ferris that I admire and love. He is so driven and goal oriented, he was the model infantry officer, completing Airborne and Ranger School, with ambitions of joining the Special Forces someday. The Army was his dream and every award, accolade, and soldier that served next to him was a testament to that passion. He was the American dream personified, joining his brother as the ninth generation of Butler's to proudly serve their country. His journey to accept his new life was long and difficult, but he has set his sights on new goals and dreams. He has given back to his fellow soldier by mentoring new amputees and volunteering with numerous non-profit organizations. He is my hero, although you would never hear him say that. I feel blessed to be a part of Ferris' life and I feel honored to be called his wife. His favorite song, which has become our song, "Life Less Ordinary" by Carbon Leaf, says, "Live a life less ordinary; Live a life extraordinary with me" and that is exactly what we plan to do.

