

E05: 44 Surgeries, 4 Amputations, and Still On Top ft. Vaughan DeBarr (Transcription)

00:00

Intro (Marcia): This is Disabled Girls Who Lift. We are reclaiming what's rightfully ours one podcast at a time. It's Marybeth, Chloe, and Marcia bringing you the thoughts and unpopular topics to you get out of that ableist comfort zone.

00:15

Music Jingle

00:24

Marcia: Hello listeners, welcome back, or welcome for your first time if it's your first time. This is episode 5 of Disabled Girls Who Lift. My name is Marcia and I'm from South Florida.

00:35

Marybeth: Hey y'all it's Marybeth from California, and joining us today we have our guest Vaughan DeBarr. Some of you might know her as @leglesslifter on Instagram, absolute badass. She was a left below-the-knee amputee in 2013, left above-the-knee amputee in 2017, right above-the-knee and bilateral above-the-knee in 2019 June of this year. She's on her on her road to 2020 Paralympic Games--we'll talk about that timeline for her as well as the 52 sports in a 52 [weeks], holy shit! That includes boxing, strongman, powerlifting, swimming, kayaking, paddleboarding, canoeing, oh my God, all of the seasons you can think of-

01:25

Marcia: All of the things

01:26

Marybeth: And all the sports within those. We are so excited to have her join. Welcome, and thank you Vaughan.

01:33

Vaughan: Hi everybody this is Vaughan. Thank you guys so much for having me on your podcast, I really appreciate it. I just thought I would start off by telling you guys a little bit about my journey and how I got to where I am today. Most people wonder, 'Oh how did she lose her legs? Was she a diabetic, did she lose them in a bomb, did a shark bite 'em off?' You know?

01:55

Marybeth: That's what I say about my hand.

01:57

Vaughan: And then when I when I tell him they're like, "What, no way!" So here's the 'What, no way' for you guys. When I was 7 years old I was attacked by a pitbull dog below the knee on my left leg. Back in the 70s and 80s, they didn't amputate so over the course of 33 years I went through 23 major surgeries trying to fix what was completely broken. My left leg was six inches shorter than my right, I never had a special shoe to make me even so my gait was crooked, and at age 40 (in 2013) I went for my annual check-up with my vascular surgeon. Friday--I mean sorry--Wednesday, May 3rd, 2013, I had a vascular ultrasound, the tech stopped in the middle of it and said, "I'll be right back." She was gone for about 20 minutes and I was like, "What the fuck is going on here?" Then the doctor came in and I knew this is not good, and he said to me, "Vaughan, we got two choices here: we can do this this Friday or next

Friday,” and I said, “Do what?” and he said, “We need to amputate below the knee because your foot’s dead,” and I said, “Holy shit, can you get my husband? He’s in the lobby, he’s playing video games.” And I-
[laughter]

3:10

Marybeth: Which should have been done 20 years ago...

3:13

Vaughan: Yeah, actually should’ve been done when I was seven because if it would have happened today I would have been amputated and life would have been great because I would have just lived my life as an amputee.

3:23

Marcia: Yeah

Vaughan: So I chose the following Friday which was May the 10th which I probably should have just chose that Friday because then I had nine days to think of--or seven days--to think about getting this done. So I had my amputation below the knee in 2013, and of course anybody that is an amputee will tell you you go through depression, anxiety, self-doubt, some suicidal tendencies--not that you’re gonna act to it, you’re just like, “I don’t want to live anymore, this is it, my life is over,” then you need a bunch of food and you gain a bunch of weight, and for me I got up to 315 pounds in a year. One day I looked in the mirror and I didn’t know who I was, and I was like holy shit I’m a big, fat, Butterball turkey, and I need to do something about it. So my son who was getting ready for the Army said to me, “Mom, why don’t we go to this gym up the road?” So we went down there and we joined the gym, and they had unlimited fitness classes. They had a special--ten bucks--unlimited fitness classes, one free personal training, I was like...

4:22

Marcia: Mmm, sign me up.

Chloe: Dang

4:24

Vaughan: 10 bucks. If I don’t go, it’s ten bucks.

4:28

Marybeth: Yeah

Vaughan: So the first day I went, I walked in there and I met some amazing trainers that were just like, “Hey, if you need any help from us just ask us. We’re not gonna charge you, you know, we understand what you’re going through, not physically understand, but we could see that you really want to lose weight and get back into your life.” So I started doing TRX classes and cardio kickboxing and Zumba. Zumba was my thing. I signed up for Zumba- Let me tell you, I went to 5:00 a.m. Zumba-

5:01

Marcia: Oh geez, you’re not fucking around with Zumba!

Vaughan: I went to 11:00 a.m. Zumba, [inaudible]

5:06

Marybeth: You legit burned a shit ton of calories

5:08

Vaughan: You know? But you know what, that helped. That helped get off the weight that I had gained, so I lost like 88 pounds in like six months like just cardioing my booty off. And then my friends were like, “Let’s do a 5K,” and I was like, “I can’t do a 5K--amputee. And I don't have one of those special things that I've seen on the Olympics. Whatchu talking about? Those things are like \$15,000! It’s not happening.” My friend said, “Listen, is the worst thing happens is we walk. Let's just go do it.” So I signed up for my first 5K, got out there, we jogged a little, we walked a little, jog a little bit more. I was like, “Hey, this isn't so bad,” and I finished. So you know, I ended up signing up for like--with a regular prosthetic foot--ten 5Ks, a couple 10Ks, and then I did the Disney Half Marathon. Never again ‘cause I'm crazy, but the funny thing about that and I'll tell you in a minute is, so while I was in the gym I noticed a bunch of kids in the corner deadlifting, and you know, doing the Big Three--the squat, the bench, and the deadlift. ‘Man I see those kids over there all the time. I wanna know what's going on.’ So I go over there--and by the way these kids are actually friends of mine now--I go over there and I'm like, “Hey, what are you guys up to?” and they're like, “We're powerlifting. We're getting ready for a meet.” I said, “Well, so what is powerlifting?” and the kid says, “You know, you squat which is this movement, and this guy's like deadlifts is this movement and the bench is over there.” And I said, “Oh, that looks really fun,” and he goes, “Don't worry about it, you probably can't do it.”

6:46

Marcia: Oh, here we go

6:49

Marybeth: Call ‘em out. They’re your friends now, call ‘em out.

6:54

Vaughan: Yeah, you know who you boys are from USF powerlifting teams. Anyway so I just marched my booty right up to the front desk of that gym, and luck was on my side that day because the manager's name is Willie, and I said, “Willie, I need a powerlifting coach. I want to try this,” and he said, “Well I'm partnering up with Eric Talmant, who by the way is the godfather of raw powerlifting, and we’re opening up a gym in Riverview and we'd love for you to come down and train with us for free. We'll help you.” So that was the beginning of my journey.

7:26

Marybeth: Damn, wait so this was all in 2013 still?

7:30

Vaughan: 2014, at this point it was in 2014. Yeah.

7:34

Marybeth: Okay, so it's still within the same year.

7:35

Vaughan: Yeah and in the first year I went from, “Hey let’s go be a cardio queen,” to “You know what, this powerlifting stuff is fun, I'm gonna do it.” And then I got introduced to David Bates, who owns Powerlifting Watch, who kept all the records for all the powerlifting across the world in every Federation, so he came out. He had this really cool machine that measures the distance and the time of your deadlift--from the time that you pick it up, to the time you finish the lift, it measures the time, it measures where the movement is the fastest, where it's short, and it helps you figure out how to improve your deadlift.

8:13

Marybeth: Yeah

8:14

Vaughan: And you know, I don't know if you keep a journal when you guys lift but I've kept a journal of every lift I've ever made in the gym. You know, the 3x3x90...

8:24

Marybeth: Yeah yeah

8:26

Vaughan: So I have my journal still and my first benchpress was 98 pounds and it was hard.

8:35

Marybeth: Holy crap

8:36

Vaughan: And you know, my PR before my bilateral amputation was 290--can you believe? 98 pounds in 2014 to 2018-19 with a 290 PR. If anyone doesn't believe they can lift weights, they're losing their minds.

8:57

Marcia: Yeah, absolutely.

8:58

Vaughan: My first deadlift was 125. I ended with a great PR of 350, and it was all because I had proper training, I learned proper technique, and I never gave up even when I went from a BK to an AK, which was powerlifting. So in 2017 I was living in Denver, Colorado for my job, and I was training at a 24-hour access gym, went in there a snowy day, didn't think about the snow packed in my foot shell...

9:28

Marcia: Ah...

9:29

Vaughan: So I'm squatting at 5-5-5:30 in the morning, there's only one other guy, and he, like me, we both have our headsets on jamming out, I'm squatting lightweight, 125 on the bar, and as I'm warming up the snow starts melting. And I think it was maybe on my fifth or sixth squat that my foot slipped on that wet water, and I went straight down with the bar on my back on to my knee...

9:58

Marcia: Oh!

9:59

Vaughan: And literally laid there screaming for the poor guy with his headphones on and he finally turned around and was like, "Holy shit!" Came over, took the bar off of me. He's like, "Can you stand up?" I said, "Dude, my knee hurts so bad I don't know what's going on," and he literally thankfully was like 380 pounds, probably squats 700, picks me up, carry me to his car, and drove me the 32 miles it was...

10:28

Marcia: Oh!

Marybeth: Shit

10:30

Vaughan: To an emergency room because I lived in mountains at the time, and when I got there they said, "Guess what, you have shattered your entire kneecap and we can replace it but because you're an amputee, probably not a good idea because it cannot- artificial knee will not be able to sustain the weight that you put on it that makes it attach to your prosthetic leg, and therefore we'll probably need to go above the knee." At that point I was like, "Can you fix me up, so I can get back home to Florida because my vascular surgeon's there and I'm not letting anybody I don't know operate on me."

11:03

Marcia: Mm mm. No, never.

Vaughan: So they put me on a leg sling, got me fixed up, I flew to Florida the very next week, and on July 17th, 2017 became a left below- a left above-the-knee amputee, an AKA. So I'm like, "I'm a badass right," I'm thinking this this is gonna be easy.

11:28

Marybeth: Mmm-hmm

Vaughan: And then I go, you know, I had my amputation. I was hammering them, "Please let me get a prosthetic," and they're like, "Well you know you need to wait like 9-16 weeks," and I was like, "I don't have time, I got..."

11:40

Marybeth: "I got shit to do!"

Marcia: "I've got places to be!"

11:44

Vaughan: "I got the Arnold in March, I do not have time for you people," and they're like, "Okay," so my doctor says to me, "I'll make a deal with you. I will sign the prescription for six weeks out if you promise me that you're not gonna lift heavy and let me explain to you why. Even though your scars are healed, your bone is still tender from the saw cut, and we don't want you to get a split in the bone," and I got, I was like, "Alright." So I walked for the first time on August 30th, which happens to be my birthday.

12:15

Marybeth: Oh shit

12:17

Vaughan: So literally you know from July 17th to August 30th I was up on a prosthetic

12:22

Marybeth: Yeah within a month

Vaughan: Yes, crazy crazy. I mean even the prosthetists are like, "You're out of your mind," but I got back-

12:29

Marybeth: And how was the physical therapy the first time around--2013--how long did that take you?

12:34

Vaughan: I became an amputee on May 10th and I walked on June 21st, so I do have a fast healing body, I am blessed with that. Thank you for DNA and God, you know. So I got on my AK leg, and I started right back at the gym, like September 1st, and started busting my butt, training, doing whatever I could to get back in the game. I had decided that I was going to do the Thanksgiving Throwdown that year. I mean I was like, “Hey, it's gonna happen.” I didn't do the Thanksgiving Throwdown because as an AKA it's a lot harder.

13:12

Marcia: Yeah

13:13

Vaughan: Even how to sit down with a bar in your hand, or a deadlift, let alone picking it back up without hitting your butt.

13:21

Marcia: And what kind of knee did your prosthetic have?

13:24

Vaughan: So I ended up getting what's called a KX06, a mechanical knee, and my prosthetists at that time told me, “This is going to be the best for you because it's- you're gonna be hard on it. If you go straight for a microprocessor, which costs anywhere from thirty to seventy-five thousand dollars, you're gonna break that thing in the gym.” So he says, “This thing is like thirty-seven hundred to four thousand dollars, and when when you're ready you'll get a microprocessor but we'll start off with this knee,” and I was fortunate enough to have 50 Legs, which is a charity here in Florida that helps amputees get prosthetics by that...

14:01

Marcia: Oh nice

Marybeth: Holy crap

14:02

Vaughan: But yeah, so that I could save the Medicare money for the thirty-five thousand dollar prosthetics.

14:09

Marybeth: Exactly

Marcia: That's awesome

14:10

Vaughan: I only need one leg, you know, so you buy a \$3700 or \$37,000 leg with your Medicare? I'm gonna go with the more expensive one, and even if I had the GoFundMe or crowd raise the money myself, I would have done it because you know that's a big big difference, but the positive was I had to learn how to walk with a mechanical knee. And what that means you have to work harder, you have to flex your quad, you you have to flex your hamstring, you have to tighten your entire thigh every step you take, and make a kicking motion so that you can create the kick in the in the knee itself to walk. So you know, I did that, and on December 18th or whatever, the American Barbell in Gainesville was having a Christmas- Ugly Sweater Deadlift Party, and I went there and I deadlifted.

15:04

Marybeth: Hell yeah

15:06

Vaughan: And I was like, “I’m back. I’m not great, but I’m fucking back,” and that was- that was all that mattered to me. So I was able to do, in 2018, Battle of the Bay and I also competed in the Arnold Disabled Strongman competition in Columbus, Ohio in March, followed up with The Jenn in 2018, and after- I fell at The Jenn deadlifting. It was because my leg was too big because I had lost more weight because I actually burned more calories as an AKA than as a BK because you work harder to walk, and so I decided I’m gonna take a break. I’m not gonna compete for the rest of this year, in 2018. While that was happening, I was also having problems with my right leg, and I thought, “Why can’t- why am I having all these problems with my right leg? I mean I’m healthy, nothing happened to it,” and my doctor said that over thirty-three years of over-compensating--actually at that point 40 plus years--of overcompensating on my right leg, I had created vascular disease to spread to my right leg. So I was beginning to have neuropathy on my foot, and at first I was like, “You know what, I’m just gonna ride this out.”

16:17

Marybeth: [Did] you feel any pain at all? Or it took a doctor visit to find out?

16:20

Vaughan: I was feeling tingling you know that-

16:23

Marcia: Pins and needles, neuropathy pain

16:26

Vaughan: Yeah, but it was happening like an hour consistently and I was like, “Dude this isn’t normal, this isn’t your foot fall asleep for an hour.” But so when they told me, “Well we’re probably gonna have to amputate at some point,” I said, “Do I have to do it now?” and they said, “No you still have some feeling,” so I was like, ‘I’m gonna ride this shit out. I’m gonna lift as much as I can as often as I can until that time comes and I’m gonna have to lose my leg, my right leg.’

16:53

Marybeth: Did they provide other options? It’s it’s really funny because before this, you know like 20-30 years ago, they’d have been like no amputees--amputation’s not an option at all, and now they’re providing that as every single option.

17:05

Vaughan: So I did try a bunch of different options. I got on a bunch of nerve medicine that was supposed to decrease the neuropathy, I got my sugar checked you know, I am a diabetic and when I was diagnosed my A1C was like 10.1, but for the past year and a half it’s been under under 6.5, so 6.4, 6.1, so I’ve got my diabetes in check, I got my diet in check, so you know I’m- At this point, you know, I’m a lifter, you’re a lifter, we all work on our bodies, our diets, what we’re putting in there, and I’m actually very conscious about sustainability, GMOs, pesticide-free, range-free, you know every, hormone-free. I’m like, all of those things, that’s what I do, and so I decided, ‘Yeah I’m gonna ride the shit out.’ Well one day I was lifting in the gym and my foot fell asleep, I couldn’t feel it, and so as I’m picking up the bar I felt nothing. And I just fell. And I realized that, you know, this isn’t gonna work, so I went to discuss the whole surgical options with the surgeon and the first thing he says to me is, “You know what, we can try these stents where we put these stents in your artery to open them up to allow the flow, but we can’t guarantee that they’ll stick,” and I said, “Okay, so what happens if I have the surgery and you put stents in my arteries and my veins, what happens if it doesn’t stick?” Goes, “Well we could do the surgery, we can continue to do the surgery until it works.” I said, “So you’re talking three or four major surgeries to try to fix this right,” and I said to myself, ‘You know what, I have been through

28 plus surgeries as a child to my adulthood, two of them amputations, okay? I'm not, I'm not trying that because if the end results still ends up being amputation...'

18:49

Marcia: Yeah, it's not worth it.

Marybeth: Exactly

Vaughan: Why would I want to put myself through all of these surgeries to be out on rehab, physically laying in bed for weeks on end.

18:57

Marcia: Back and forth, back and forth...

18:58

Vaughan: And so I said, "No," I said, "You know what, let's just do this let's just you know cut it off.

19:04

Marcia: And the other thing about the stents also--because that was something my vascular doctor talked to me about as well and he's like, "Well you know what, if we do this we're gonna mess with like integrity of how your veins work and it's gonna be you know altered for your life," so like, that's the other part of it. Like okay, am I gonna fuck up my veins now and maybe fix it or do I just go all the way in?

19:26

Vaughan: Yeah. And that's where I was. I felt like I was so invested in the situation that it was like every time you open me up I'm risking myself to infection-

19:35

Marcia: Yeah

19:36

Vaughan: Any other kind of danger to my body. So you know what, I'm just- let's just cut it off. So we agreed that I would become an RBKA, scheduled to surgery for the 23rd of June of 2019.

19:51

Marybeth: I love that it was your personal choice though, I mean...

19:54

Vaughan: Yeah. It definitely was.

19:56

Marcia: You definitely have a good guy on your side because it's not even always...

Marybeth: Exactly

19:99

Vaughan: He didn't force me, he gave me options, and he let me make my own decisions at the end of the day.

20:04

Marcia: That's how it should be.

20:05

Vaughan: And I'm a fortunate amputee because people who wake up from a car accident

Marcia: Yeah

Vaughan: IUD or whatever, they wake up... They were not able to prepare themselves mentally and physically, emotionally, not just themselves but the people around them who are all freaking out because you're telling them you know, "What do you mean they're cutting your other leg off? Can't they do something?" But I had to explain myself to them, and explain to them the damage I was gonna do to myself if I continue to take all these surgeries and the end result was still gonna be the same, and I had to explain to themselves that I'm tired of being in pain, I'm tired of dealing with neuropathy, I am tired of all of this. So on June 23rd, I'm in the OR, prepped, IV in my arm, Dr. Johnson comes in and looks at me and he goes, "I just read your chart. Are you sure we said BKA?"

21:04

Marcia: Don't do that, what?

Vaughan: I said, "Of course I am sure." "You're a powerlifter. I I designed your amputation based on you lifting heavy weight on your bone."

21:13

Marybeth: Oh shit

Vaughan: "Let me tell you something right now young lady. You're gonna be uneven. You're gonna be putting so much stress on your right leg all over again, and when you--not if you fall--when you fall again, you might shatter that kneecap and be right back in here," he says, "So I'm gonna tell you right now. I'm recommending that we go AKA right off the bat. Let me tell you why. Balance. You're gonna be perfectly balanced for the first time in your life since you were seven years old, your legs are gonna be the same exact size and height. That means when you start walking, your gait's going to be perfect. If you're a BKA on one side and AKA on the other, you're going to have a little bit more difficulty learning to walk when you put your legs on because you're you're not even. You're you're kind of cockeyed. When you swim, what's gonna happen with your buoyancy? You're still going to tip to the right."

22:04

Marybeth: Just so our listeners know: BKA's below the knee

Vaughan: Yes

Marybeth: AKA is above the knee, still bilateral and on the right side.

22:11

Vaughan: Yeah. So I decided right there. I was like, "Alright go for it." Of course my husband was like, "What? No!" because as a non amputee there's a, "Oh my god, you're losing more of your body."

22:24

Marcia: Yeah

22:25

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22:59

Vaughan: The science behind it made total sense to me as an amputee, but I was like, "Just do it. Let's just get this shit over with. I want to go home and start learning to walk again."

23:10

Marybeth: And it'll keep you in the game. He cares about your...

Marcia: That guy's on it.

Marybeth: Yeah

23:16

Vaughan: Yeah I mean he's been my--I mean that medical, that vascular group--has been my vascular group since the first amputation. I've had different surgeons because the previous ones left, but they've all been on the same team and they've all been part of my care from the beginning, so they know who I am. This isn't just like oh a random doctor showed up and said something. This is like, they know my history, he knows what I'm going through, he knows what my goals are, and what I want to do with my life, and based on that he makes this amputation designed personally for me. Not just- I'm wheeling into the room and the guy's cutting a leg off like he does every Thursday. [laughter] He rounded rounded the corners, rounded the edges of my bone so they are smooth and round, so that if I do fall on my stump while I'm just around the house, that it's not gonna make a straight impact and could cause a splinter or split because it's rounded. So there was a lot of things involved, and you know I could go on about that forever but I'm just gonna fast forward really quickly to: I got out of the hospital and I knew that I wanted to get a hysterectomy this year too, so I scheduled one in August. I've got pretty big bi- biceps--they're about 19 inches around, both of them--and I have not been able to use a blood pressure cuff on them for years, so I consistently, when I go to the doctor [I] get my blood pressure taken with a forearm cuff. When I went into the hysterectomy that morning, I went into the surgery with the forearm cuff for my blood pressure on my right forearm, hysterectomy lasted four hours, I woke up, I thought, 'I'm gonna be feeling a little bit of cramping, some menstrual you know issues... I was screaming, "What the fuck did you do to my arm?"'

25:03

Marybeth: Mmm...

Vaughan: I felt like somebody cut my biceps out, and I found out that the anesthesiologist assistant made- took it upon herself to leave the O.R., get a bicep cuff, left the bicep cup on my left arm for three and a half hours during surgery, and my right arm for an hour and a half, compressing every minute. Guess what I got?

25:24

Marybeth: (whispers) Shit. While you were asleep.

Vaughan: While I was sleep, they gave me Rhabdo. So if you don't know what Rhabdomyolysis is, it is the break down in the muscle--the protein in your muscles. Famous Dana Lynn Bailey recently came out this year that she had Rhabdomyolysis caused by overuse of steroids, so my first panic was, 'You got Rhabdo, people think you use steroids.' That's not possible. You're going to the Olympics. You can't take anything. You can get tested, any chance that can happen they can call you right now and say, "Meet me in an hour, pee in a cup, we're testing you."

26:01

Marcia: Right

Vaughan: So I'm like, "Okay," so I asked them, "How the hell did I get it if I'm not doing anything wrong?" and they told me the blood pressure cuffs basically broke down the muscle. The average CPK level, which is your creatine protein something level in a normal human being is 120-268. Mine was 3,997.

26:26

Marcia: Off the fucking charts. And who needs to check a blood pressure every minute? I don't...

Vaughan: They do that in surgery, that's weird, I didn't know that.

Marcia: Do they?

26:33

Vaughan: Yeah anytime they open you up-

Marybeth: But they didn't listen to putting pressure cuffs on your wrist.

26:37

Vaughan: Needless to say, there is definitely a lawsuit happening because I ended up going into rehab- I could not even lift my fingers or even my arm up the first three days, nothing. I had no- my arms hurt so bad. And they couldn't-

26:52

Marybeth: And you were just in there for a hysterectomy, you know?

Vaughan: Yeah

Marybeth: You were only supposed to stay for one night

26:58

Vaughan: [inaudible] the one time. That way while I'm healing my stump, I can heal from the hysterectomy, when I go get my legs... And the plan was to go-

Marybeth: And now you have all this bicep shit!

[Laughter]

27:12

Vaughan: So my goal was after the hysterectomy was to fly up to Oklahoma City where I get my prosthetics, from a company called Martin Bionics. They sponsor me, so they provide me my prosthetics at no cost for my athletic abilities to use their sockets, but I couldn't go so I had to postpone until October. In the meantime, I was in rehab my arm- I couldn't even lift a three-pound dumbbell. When I'm pressing 75 pound dumbbells on a regular, I couldn't do a three-pound dumbbell. So here we go again. Am I gonna go to the Paralympic Games? I don't know, I'm not a hundred percent. I can't even bench a hundred pounds right now, so I don't know. But you know what, anything is possible with the grace of God and my mindset that I might still can go, but I need to be benching 3 something to go okay.

[laughter]

28:06

Marcia: You don't want a poverty bench? You still want those numbers?

Marybeth: They know who you are. So this happened in August. How's it all going now? You're going through a lot of physical therapy. I see like all of the videos on Instagram...

28:20

Vaughan: Yeah, so I am going through physical therapy but not for my arms, that's for my legs. I'm doing my own physical therapy for my arms myself, at home and in the gym, and I'm doing that by doing the same thing we do as lifters. You know you start out with low weight with high reps, and then you get that low- that low weight becomes light, and then you add weight, and you continue to do high reps, so I would say I'm at about 70% back to my my benchpress, and my- and my arm- dead- dumbbell press, anything to do with my arm. I got my legs last--I came home last week after being in Oklahoma for three weeks--so I got my legs, and I'm obviously walking with a walker. And I think that probably by the end of this year I'll be done with the walker, but in the meantime I am going in the gym with those prosthetics. I am rocking it as far as trying to figure out how to deadlift again and how to be a powerlifter.

29:19

Marybeth: Wow, so you are back in the gym again.

Marcia: Yeah, so do you have a coach still or are you just kind of winging it or?

29:25

Vaughan: I am so blessed. I have like five coaches. I work with- I work out with Tony Conyers--if you don't know who he is you know, 60 year-old, one of the strongest men in the world with over a 1200-pound total powerlifting raw, (he just set a bunch of World Records), Richard Ficca, owner of Gorilla Bench Training Center, over 600-pound bench in the top 40 of all-time bench presses, Jenn Rotsinger, one of the strongest women in the world in the 123-pound class--she just went in represented the United States at Worlds for the IPL. So I've got Jen, I've got Tony, I've got Rich, I've got my friend Josh Davis--he's an Olympic powerlifter who's gonna start helping me learn about Olympic lifting--why not?

30:14

Marybeth: Olympic weightlifting? Shit, add that to your list.

Vaughan: So you know, [inaudible] who is a coach for IronBound Barbell, he taught me how to squat so we're gonna get back into that game soon. He's also a judge for the USPA, the APF, IPL, so I've been blessed with the you know amazing lifters and influences in the powerlifting community from the beginning, from ah you know, 20 years ago.

30:41

Marcia: And you just kind of, just magically fell into that, it wasn't even-

Vaughan: Yeah, I was like... Like I said Eric Talmant, who is you know now retired, but he was my first powerlifting coach, and you know I I went to ROM 9 which is you know longer being called- and I got to compete in ROM 9, you know. Anyway so between that and I have a full gym at home that I'm able to work out if I cannot get to Gorilla Bench, or Strong Life, or get to the Powerhouse, but that leads me into this conversation that you've been dying to hear about 52 Sports in 52 Weeks.

31:23

Marcia: What is that? What are you doing? What's happening?

31:26

Vaughan: So this last year at--in December of last year--at the FIBO Fitness Expo I met this gentleman called Hall Brown, Mr. Retention, and he interviewed me for his podcast about being [inaudible] lifter. And he hands me his business card. On the back of it, it says, "52 Sports in 52 weeks," and I said, "What's this?" and he explained to me that him and a bunch of guys to raise money for charity committed to doing 52 sports in 52 weeks and they did it all in Brazil, and every week they did a different sport, so they literally either commuted to Brazil from Australia or stayed there for vast amounts of time, and they did 52 sports in 52 weeks. And here I am thinking, "What! I want to do that!" and he said to me--this is when I was still in LAKA--yeah and he's like, "Well let's start thinking about it, let's project it

for 2020, find all the sports, do all those things,” and I said, “Fine.” When I became a bilateral, he sent me a lot of, you know, encouraging messages on Facebook, Private Messenger, just to let me know, “Hey, I’m thinking about you. I’m rooting you on.” Whenever I’d make a post or or do anything he would always comment, “We’re behind you.” So I was sitting in that hospital bed and I thought, ‘You know what, I’m still gonna fuckin do it as a bilateral amputee.’ And that means it’s gonna be really fucking hard because I hardly can walk right now, but I think that anybody that is disabled can honestly testimonially say, “Goals get me going.” If I have a goal, I know that I’m gonna do it. My mom used to say, “Men need a purpose and women need a reason,” and I used to think about that all the time and think, ‘I don’t know what she’s talking about,’ but now I get it. You know, I need a reason to live, I need a reason to get out of bed everyday, and that reason is is to prove to other people all over the world that just because I’m disabled doesn’t mean I’m not a person. And I know you ladies feel the same way because you know what that is all about, and my message is: I might be- I might not finish- I might not make it and place in a race. I might be the last one, but I did it. So I am the turtle and you can be the hare, but damn it I’m gonna finish the damn race. No matter what it is, and you know it could be as far as me taking this walker today and put my legs on and walking from here to the sidewalk, I’m gonna do it. And there’s a reason that I’m gonna do it, and that’s not just for me is you know all of us disabled women and men need to stick together and send the same messages. Just because I’m missing an arm, a leg, a couple arms, couple legs, or all of those things, that doesn’t mean I’m not equal to you because I’m still a person. I still have feelings and emotions, and I still feel pain and joy and happiness. I just have to do it in a different level, and if that means it takes me three hours to get ready every day to leave the house because I got to put my damn legs on. then that- that’s what I got to do, right?

34:38

Marybeth: Yeah. And I mean everybody should live by that. You are your own competition. I don’t know why- like especially in sports like powerlifting, strongman, you are breaking your own personal records. Yeah you have other people competing in your weight class all around the world, all around the nation, but you will always be who you’re competing against.

Marcia: Exactly

35:00

Vaughan: I had- I have agree with that because I met a woman when I was getting my legs that I had to give her the “My Journey” speech. I’m on my own journey, you’re on your own journey, where we end up on that journey doesn’t matter. I hope to intersect with your journey at one time in life, even if it’s just to give you that motivation to continue your journey. I was squatting at the gym one day and there was a guy on my team, his name is Ethan, and I did a Motivational Monday. I was in tears and I said, “I’m in pain and I want to quit, I want to go home, but I remember why I’m here and so I’m gonna keep on doing it.” I mean I really was 100% vulnerable on this Live Facebook video, wipe my tears and hide it, but I posted it and I was happy about that. And I finished squatting for the night, I was in so much pain, I took my leg off right there in the gym, and got in my wheelchair and rolled out. I got home that night and Ethan sent me a message and said, “Hey Vaughan, I don’t know if you know this, but I’m a veteran and I was in Iraq, and I sustained a lot of damage to my spinal cord in my hips, in my lower back, during that situation and I live in pain,” he said, “and I was squatting tonight and I was ready to just say, ‘fuck this, I’m going home,’ and I glanced over to the right and I saw you. And if this bitch is gonna keep squatting, I gotta keep squatting.” It’s about I motivated him that night, right? And there’s [inaudible] that I go and there’s a guy named Andy Burns that competes in the USPA, and he doesn’t have any use of either one of his legs, he’s a veteran, and he gets out there and he’s benching, and does sled hockey, so I always tell him, “You’re my accountability partner, dude. If I go on Facebook and you’re bitching about your life, I’m gonna say something. And if I get on Facebook and I start bitching about how I want to quit powerlifting, and I want to stop doing all this stuff, I need you to call me up and tell me, ‘Have you lost your damn mind, lady?’” [laughter] You know, I don’t know if you guys believe in God and it’s okay if you don’t, because I do believe in God and I, you know, I believe that you know, I don’t just believe that I was told this, that I have the favor of the Lord on my side. Obviously, I mean I’ve been through hell and back and I’m still kicking, so somebody’s holding me up. And Tony

Conyers came to see me in the hospital after my second amputation and asked me, “Was I done crying?” and I said, “What?” “Are you done crying?” And I was like, “I guess,” and he goes, “Good, because you got work to do. God put you on this planet and he has a plan for you, and that plan is to show people that you can't sit on the couch and say, ‘I'm not going to gym today because my I hurt my back picking up a pencil off the floor at work today,’ or you know, ‘my shoulders hurt,’ or you know, ‘oh my whole body aches, I'm recovering from the flu.’ So fucking what?” I'm in the gym, missing a leg, or both my legs now, you're missing an arm, she's missing you know two legs and an arm, she's got a invisible illness called Fibromyalgia. You can't see her pain. So when you're in the parking lot and you see somebody get out of her car of a handicapped spot and you think, “Damn, that bitch is tight. She's healthy, she's got a fit body. What the fuck is she doing there?” Do you know what her bones feel like? Does she have brittle bone, if you touch it you might break her arm? Does she have Fibromyalgia? She have chronic pain, chronic back pain? There's so many disabilities out there that you cannot physically see.

38:43

Marcia: Preach, speak on it.

Marybeth: Stop making assumptions.

38:47

Vaughan: You know? So people, if somebody is disabled you might not be able to see it, so if those people are in the gym and they're crying inside and, “Oh my god, I'm gonna die,” and they keep going, get up off your asses and get in the gym and stop making excuses because if we can do it--us Disabled Ladies Who Lift--you can do it. Okay, so you know I do believe that I have lost my limbs and I've been put on this journey that I'm on to motivate, inspire, and show people that dedication can get you somewhere. Consistency can get you somewhere. Believing in yourself and taking care of your body can get you somewhere. So my message that I always put out to people is: It just takes one step at a time, whether you've got legs or not is you can get there. So that's my story-

Marcia: Preach on it

Marybeth: Thank you for that.

Vaughan: You know, I'm really proud to be a member of Disabled Girls Who Lift because you know what, as long as I can put prosthetics on, I'm gonna deadlift, I'm gonna learn to squat, I'm gonna learn to go surfing, I'm gonna learn to- I don't know, ride a horse-
[laughter]

39:58

Marybeth: Rockclimb, paddle-

Marcia: Fuck it, I'll ride a horse. Who cares?

40:01

Vaughan: Yeah, I mean there's so many things- I've shared my story with people and I said, “Hey, I'm gonna go try paddle boarding. I've had so many friends of mine and supporters of mine say, “When you do that one, I want to go with you.” And to me that means I am doing my job, I'm inspiring people to say, “I'm gonna get up off my couch and I'm gonna go freakin skydiving with Vaughan DeBarr. If she's doing it without legs, why can't I?”

40:29

Marybeth: Yeah, and not only that like I need to applaud your support system because when you say- when you list your goals, they don't look you up and down and say, “Are you sure you want to go paddleboarding? Are you sure you wanna ice skate?” They are right by your side.

40:45

Vaughan: Yeah, and I am so blessed that I am in an awesome strength community. The one thing about Strongman and Powerlifting is, like you said, it's not a competition. You're your own competition. So everybody is cheering you on when you go up to that platform. Everybody's cheering you on when you try to pick up that stone, or use the yoke, or whatever you're doing. And it's not just those two sports. Let's talk about tennis, let's talk about hockey. It's a team sport, but disabled people are playing it now. The Paralympics is blowing up with sports

Marybeth: Hell yeah

Vaughan: Water volleyball. I mean there's so much you can do, and all you have to do- the first step is go to the United States Paralympics .gov site, and look at all the sports, and then click on where can I do this at in my town, and you might not find one in your town and the center might be two hours away, but plan a Saturday to spend there. But as disabled people, it's our job to prove because we've already been labeled unable to do anything except being disabled. So today I'm gonna let you know I'm not handicapped, I'm handi-capable.

41:57

Marybeth: There you go

Vaughan: Capable of doing what we want to do. And it might take longer for you, because again we're all on our own journey, but as these ladies will tell you, if you need help I don't care if you call me or you message me on Facebook or Skype or whatever, I will take that call. I will take that message, and I will listen to your story because I've been there. I've been depressed, I've been suicidal, thought I felt worthless, I have fat anxiety, I have over ate myself into depression, and there's a way out. There's a way out, and that starts with positivity. And sometimes the people around you aren't your friends and your family because they just put you down. But sometimes you have to identify yourself with the people that are good for you and the people are bad for you, and I can tell you right now you can divorce your family. You-

42:51

Marcia: You can love from a distance, it's okay.

42:53

Vaughan: You can divorce that aunt that every time you come to her house she says, "Wow you look fat." "Well guess what auntie, we don't need to talk. You can still be my aunt, I love my cousins, your kids are great, but I don't have to sit next to you at a family function."

43:09

Marybeth: 'I'm putting you in the toxic file.'

Marcia: Yeah. 'You're- you're on the love-you-from-a-distance family plan, that's okay.'

43:16

Vaughan: And you know, so if you have people in your life that constantly make you feel like you're not good enough, or you're not whole, that's the biggest thing. If you're not whole. Let me tell you something. This is a shell. Who I am inside is more than whole. I am overflowing with positivity, I am overflowing with love and hope and, you know, kindness and generosity. So if you see us out there, disabled people, you know, offer to open the door. I might say, "No, I got it," but you offering lets me know that you care, and you understand that it's a struggle. So-

43:58

Marybeth: Yeah there's always a light at the end of the tunnel, and if people right now are not willing to listen to you, not willing to support you, keep talking. You'll find that person who will or who will relate, like just like your friend at the gym.

44:14

Vaughan: Yeah, you know and those are the people you don't even know about that are watching you, so you're blessing not just the people around you that tell you you're bless- they're blessing- you're blessing them, you're blessing people you don't even know that you're touching. Because if somebody's going to tell you, "Hey, you helped me today," think about all the people that are too scared or too shy or too ashamed to even say that, "The only reason I kept going in the gym was because the lady with one leg or the lady with no leg." So you know, I'm just gonna say a couple more things before we end, and the first thing I'm going to say is that, you know, whether you're disabled or you're not disabled, you can do anything you set your mind to, and if you really want to do it set some goals. Make realistic ones, don't make I-want-to-lose-200-pounds-in-a-month goals. I have a goal list and some of those goals are long-term goals and some of those goals are simply one-day goals. I have a blog, it's called LivingMyBestBlessedLife.com and every day I post on there and I talk about my eating habits--because I do have an eating problem, I love chocolate--who doesn't? I love foods, I love chips and dip are my freakin- if somebody has chips and dip, I'm done. I mean I would just want to give in, but this blog for me shares with people my struggle, my lifestyle struggles, I talk about the people that support me, I talk about people that have hurt me, and you know on a daily basis those things happen, but I want to share with the world that, you know, it is a struggle and it- I might make it look easy if you see my videos of me powerlifting or strongman or pictures and, you know, but all you're seeing is that movement right there. And in my blog I show the failures, you know, fall down seven get up eight. Those things happen. There are failures. I talk about the eating problem I have, and the fact that I've been trying my hardest to eat sustainably, you know, grain-free, hormone free you know, GMO-free, but more importantly I'm trying to take care of my body because I want to live a long time to be able to spread my message to everybody. So if you are someone that is struggling, you're not alone. We're all out here. You just have to find that one person that could be your accountability partner or the shoulder that you need at any moment in time that will listen to your tears and your crying and your anger and your frustration and make sure that that person you can do the same for them. You can listen to their strengths, their struggles, and their anger and their sadness and their happiness and their, you know, successes because when you have that person there for you it makes it a lot easier whenever it's not going right, for you to call somebody so they can remind you about the better parts of things. Like, "I know you fell today. I know that your back hurts and your legs hurt, you don't want to put the prosthetics on, but remember why you're doing it. For yourself." You know, and the most important thing is you have to do it for yourself, not for other people from the get-go. If you're doing it for your husband, you're probably not going to succeed. If you're doing it for your kids, I hope you succeed but the truth of the matter is you're always gonna find an excuse. When you do it for yourself, the only person that you disappoint the most is yourself and that's the most disheartening feeling in the world, you know. So whenever I see chips and dip and I know that this is not my free day, I have to convince myself that that's not good for you, don't do it, and then when I do it, that is such an achievement. I'm gonna call my friend Amy up or call my nurse and say, "I was at this Great American Teaching yesterday, and they had big sub sandwiches, and they had pumpkin rolls and pumpkin pie, and all this great spiced pumpkin spice stuff, so yesterday was a vegetarian day for me. I ate the fruit."

48:11

Marybeth: Yeah. That's an accomplishment within itself.

48:15

Vaughan: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about so... You know when I end every one of my blogs that I post is, "Carpe Diem," and if you don't know what that means look it up.

48:26

Marcia: I'm loving it.

Marybeth: Let me- let me tell you, Vaughan, you are a lot of what we embody here. You are 100% raw, we are the good, the bad, and the ugly--that's a lot of what we cover here, so thank you for sharing all of that.

Marcia: Yes definitely, thank you for sharing your story, thank you for spreading your light, thank you for dropping all those fantastically placed f-bombs, you know, all good stuff.

48:55

Marybeth: And now we are going to church.

[laughter]

48:59

Vaughan: Thanks you guys again for having me, and you know what I'm just gonna throw one more f-bomb out there before I leave, and that's: Just Keep Fucking Lifting. Just keep fucking lifting. Thank you, ladies.

49:11

Marybeth: Yeah, and before we we end, I want to plug in her GoFundMe. It's titled, "Help Vaughan Get Back on Her Feet and Back to Life," it is a link that is on her profile.

Marcia: We'll put in our show notes as well so you could just click it and help her get along.

49:30

Vaughan: I appreciate that. Thank you so much.

49:32

Marybeth: We extend that to you, sorry, you have my number. If you need to call us at 2:00/3:00 in the morning, wherever you are, don't hesitate.

49:43

Vaughan: Yeah, I just have just added two accountability partners so you guys have my number, you're welcome to call me.

Marcia: Yes

Vaughan: And you know, if you're in the parking lot and somebody's like, "Bitch, why you park in disabled?" Do what I do--if I'm wearing pants I pull up my legs, or I say to them, "It's none of you're damn business, I got a placard, talk to the freaking state."

Marcia: Oh my gosh

50:05

Vaughan: Thanks, ladies.

Marybeth: Thank you.

End.

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50:07

Outro 1 (Marybeth): Thanks for listening to Disabled Girls Who Lift!

Outro 2 (Chloe): Don't forget to follow, rate, and like us on Spotify, iTunes, and Player FM. You can also find us on Instagram @disabledgirlswholift