

The Winner's Circle

by David Block

Highlighting Aimee Mullins Achievements

To say that Aimee Mullins is an accomplished person would be a gross understatement. At the ripe old age of 33, Mullins **HAS ACHIEVED** more than many people do in a lifetime.

At age 17, she worked for the Department of Defense, where her supervisor was Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She befriended Oliver Stone and appeared in his film **September**. She met FORMER President Bill Clinton on two different occasions.

Most people only receive passing mention in the newspaper for events like birth, marriage and death. Mullins' media coverage can easily fill the pages of a book.

2003: Rolling Stone Magazine named her to their annual hot list.
2001: Sports Illustrated named her as one of the "coolest girls" in sports.

1999: People Magazine named her one of the 50 most beautiful people in the world.

Mullins was born without fibulae (side shinbones). The day she turned one-year old, the doctor amputated her legs below her knees.

"It is strange, that I would have the surgery on my first birthday," said Mullins. "It just happened to be the day the doctor scheduled the surgery...The doctors didn't think that I'd ever be able to support my bodyweight by walking, so amputation was a way for me to walk with prosthetics so that I could have as much independent mobility as possible."

Mullins, who grew up in Allentown, PA and now lives in New York City, never viewed herself as disabled, not even while growing up: "I had to learn what every child has to **learn - you** have to accept yourself first. You have to value yourself first because confidence is what attracts other people to you. You develop a sense of humor, you understand that people will have questions, you understand that by welcoming the questions, you open up the opportunity for conversations and education. And then very quickly the artificial legs become a characteristic and nothing more."

Working for Colin Powell

At age 17, the Department of Defense picked Mullins and two other students to work for them out of hundreds of American applicants. Qualifications included high SAT scores and outstanding GPAs. She worked there from 1993 to 1994.

"The Department of Defense paid your college tuition, but you would become a full time employee of the Defense Department," said Mullins. "You'd have to study a major applicable to the Defense Department. I majored in foreign-service at Georgetown University." She graduated in 1998.

Mullins elaborated: "Colin Powell was my boss. I prepared

daily reports that went to the Joint Chiefs that they would then prepare for their daily briefings with President Clinton. Colin Powell was a generous and wise person to work for. I was very lucky."

When Mullins ran track for Georgetown from 1995 to 1997, she made history by becoming the first woman with a disability to run on a division one NCAA track team.

The Paralympics Then and Now

In 1996, Mullins represented the United States at the Paralympic Games in Atlanta, GA. Mullins observed that the media treats Paralympians with more respect now than when she competed.

"Improvements were starting to happen," said Mullins. "Atlanta was the first time that Paralympic athletes were allowed to wear the same uniforms as Olympians. Even though the Paralympic movement was and is part of the Olympic movement, over 10 years ago, it was treated like some stepchild that you'd keep in the attic. The Paralympics was barely discussed, had little media coverage and when it did, the media was usually patronizing."

Mullins roommate at the 1996 Paralympic Games was elite runner, Marla Runyan. Runyan also competed at the 1992 Paralympics in Barcelona, Spain.

Runyan, the first legally blind person to run in the Olympics in 2000 and 2004, recalled that reporters focused more on her vision problem than her athletic ability.

When I interviewed Marla Runyan for Disabled Dealer Magazine several years ago, she said that after the Olympics things changed for the better.

"Since the Olympics, people are more interested in seeing me run fast," said Runyan. "My vision problem is now a footnote. Now when my vision problem is mentioned, it's done with a lot of tact, respect and class."

Meeting President Clinton

Mullins met President Clinton after the Paralympics at the White House. "I was amazed that he not only knew who I was, but what my college (track) times were and the courses I was taking."

She met him again at the White House in 1998. Mullins remembered: "It was the night he was impeached. He looked like he aged a lot. He was visibly changed. Besides seeming exhausted, he was still the same affable man. I wouldn't have expected him to remember me. Right away, he remembered me. He has incredible ability to make you feel like you're the only person in the room. That's something that a lot of politicians don't do well."

Mullins is currently pursuing her acting career. Although she said that it's still in its beginning states, she has already made strides: She was in Oliver Stone's film, **September** with Nicolas Cage. Other credits include **Marvelous** with Michael Shannon (soon to be seen in William Friedkin's "Bug"), Martha Plimpton and 2005 Tony-winner Amy Ryan. In 2004, HBO named her to their list of up and coming actors.

What would Mullins say to people who lack confidence? "When someone says 'I want to travel the world, do films but can't,' I think, 'okay you just decided you can't.' Our society has become so lazy and so complacent. We just want a pill to fix everything. Nothing is going to happen unless you decide to make it happen."

For more information about Aimee Mullins, log onto www.aimeemullins.com



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Photo By: Reven Wurman