



TAKING ACTION

ARISTOTLE DOMINGO and the AMPUTEE COALITION OF TORONTO

By Max Warfield

Aristotle Domingo looked at his life in 2017 and thought, “No, this can’t be it,” and then did something about it.

“I was a new amputee then,”

the Toronto IT manager tells *thrive magazine*, “and I found myself sitting on the couch, out of shape... it was not what I wanted. I got other amputees together and formed the Amputee Coalition of Toronto (ACT) after finding a void in the support system. When I left the hospital I felt alone, yet I wanted to feel part of a community. I went to the United States and came back with knowledge to share in Ontario after becoming a certified peer visitor.”

To become a certified peer visitor, one must be recommended by a doctor, have been through a year after amputation, clear a background check

and be mentally and emotionally stable. Certified support is then placed in a data base and called on when the occasion arises.

“Now I go to people either pre-surgery or post-surgery to help them cope,” explains Domingo. “They often don’t even know which questions to ask. I share my experience and lessons learned, so they feel like they are not alone, like, ‘look at him – he made it through.’”

The certified peer visitor training is completed in a day of instruction on effective talking points, privacy laws and the etiquette of speaking to those in hospital.

“My certification is from the United States, so I get calls to help people in Buffalo and Detroit as well. We can use Skype or Facetime if it’s too far.

A packet of information is sent that’s very helpful. I try to bring the best of all of this to fellow Canadians. I direct new patients to our ACT website as a starter, a place to begin, and then of course it is a personal journey that is unique to that person.”

While The War Amps does awesome work, Domingo felt more could be offered for adults who might find themselves sitting on a couch as he once did. “The Amputee Coalition of Toronto meets monthly... not in a circle of folding chairs in a church basement, but out there, doing activities,” Domingo emphasizes. “Amputees might not realize that they are not alone, that some pain is part of it and other aches should be dealt with, and that there is so much you can still get out and do. We meet at



Photo by Archie Allison

Blue Jays games, go bowling, go axe throwing (yes, there are leagues!); we have a farm event planned. All of this and more is possible; you just might have to find a new way to do it. For example, the Jays game might bring worry about a tiny chair or steep steps. We find an area in the stadium that is accessible to all of us and make it happen. We have a member who came to our bowling meeting in a wheelchair and knocked them down. 'I didn't think this was possible!' she told us while having fun. We found an alley that permitted street shoes

instead of the smooth bowling shoe, an obstacle that might stop many of us. There are different ways!"

There are also social barriers for some who are shy or feeling sensitive about being an amputee. "Some might not get out because it will mean people staring at them," Domingo knows. "In a group, it doesn't matter. They aren't staring at you as an individual when we are out, they might stare at the group which doesn't matter. We don't care; we are having fun. It is so important because being sedentary will lead to future problems –

"The Amputee Coalition of Toronto meets monthly... not in a circle of folding chairs in a church basement, but out there, doing activities."

obesity, high blood pressure, depression. We remove barriers and enjoy things like we used to in a new way. When an amputee discovers 'I can still do this' it is special."

There are more benefits than just the physical exercise. "People open up in this venue. It's organic. They are with like-minded friends who freely offer what they have learned, tactics that have worked for them. You don't feel alone, but part of a community."

Domingo offers a story from a barbecue that ACT had where a woman shared a problem she was having that was causing her pain. "She was limping. I know from experience that when someone's gait is not right, there is a problem, one that will progress from the origin to somewhere else — the knee, the hip, the back, or perhaps cause loss of sleep. It's best to deal with an issue at the start and not over-compensate and create new issues. Her solution to avoid pain was to sit on the couch; she didn't realize it was fixable. While feeling comfortable enough with us to talk, she described her doctor's visit, mentioning her



stump pain to her prosthetist, and how she was told everything was normal. It is not normal, we all insisted to her, recalling our experience. It turned out she went for a second opinion, found a doctor with whom she communicated more clearly, opened up, and solutions were found. Now she walks fine. People tend to be intimidated by their doctors when they need to speak up!"

The value of community is impossible to overstate. "Hearing 'I feel that way too!' is powerful," maintains Domingo. "It is validating. Everyone can learn from others."

Domingo has parlayed his experiences into becoming a known voice for amputees, using the group's good name and social media to advocate for the needs of the amputee community. Television and movie producers contact him as a resource. He has played parts in commercials and

"We... enjoy things like we used to in a new way. When an amputee discovers 'I can still do this' it is special."



helped in finding amputees who might fill a specific role. A busy role model now, active and ever-expanding his social network, Domingo finds little time for his couch.

Domingo and his friends can be found at www.amputeecoalitiontoronto.ca

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Max Warfield was born in Ridgefield, Connecticut, now making his home on the southern shores of Lake Ontario. A correspondent for the *Lockport Union Sun & Journal* and the *Niagara Gazette*, Warfield has also written numerous novels.