



**PURPLE
WARRIORS**

**DESTINY
STRUGGLE
ACHIEVEMENT**

**WE ARE
IBY**

Registered Charity N°: 1169153

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THIS IS WHAT PURPLE WARRIORS MEANS TO ME

Natasza is 32, ex-Army (Royal Artillery) and suffers from multiple conditions. She lives in Pershore with her husband, another Purple Warrior.

This is her story:

I spent 7 years in the Army. In 2005 I deployed to Iraq. Whilst on patrol one day, we came under sustained mortar and small arms fire and I was injured in both legs. Despite the best efforts of the paramedics initially and then a proper hospital back in Germany, the trauma to my legs had triggered an incurable nerve disease that leaves me in excruciating pain 24 hours a day.

I survive because I constantly use Fentanyl (and a range of other medications); Fentanyl is one of the strongest opiates, stronger than heroin or morphine. I wear two Fentanyl patches all the time for a continual feed and also have Fentanyl 'lollipops' to suck on when I need an instant 'hit' to relieve pain.

The pain was so bad to begin with that I even lost the ability to speak properly. In 2008 I was also diagnosed with PTSD and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis. I fell into deep depression. I became a total introvert, not even wanting to answer a phone or meet anyone. I was also wheelchair-bound for a while. Slowly I forced myself to walk again and I can now, but always with crutches. This is me now for the rest of my life.

I heard about Purple Warriors in May 2016. Looking back, I've no idea why I was drawn to it then, or how I managed to summon up the courage to go along. But I did and it has changed my life utterly!

It was the best thing I have ever done in my life, and I mean that.

Suddenly I had a new focus, and was brought together with like-minded people who were genuinely a new kind of family from the very first day. I actually met the person who is now my fiancée that first session too!

Purple Warriors takes me into a most wonderful new world of opportunity and I no longer feel like a burden – I'm a contributor!

I've been a Purple Warrior from the very first day and attend every event I can. I can't see me ever stopping paddling and being part of Purple Warriors.

I receive the most outstanding support from new but now lifelong friends. It was an absolute privilege to represent Purple Warriors in Hong Kong and I would love nothing more than to go to the World Championships.

I've had the most amazing journey and yes there is so much ahead. I really owe so much to Purple Warriors. They will be part of my life forever! I feel alive again and that is absolutely priceless!

Make Purple Warriors your next challenge.

Quote from Natasza:

**I feel alive
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Colin is 39, ex-Army (Scots Guards) and suffers from complex PTSD. He lives in Liverpool and has a young family.

This is his story:

My partner heard about Purple Warriors in about July 2016 and persuaded me to try it out. I was in a bad place and she was basically fed up with my mood swings and general attitude; she was desperately seeking an outlet for me that could help me cope with my condition and be a better person. Very reluctantly, I agreed to give it a go.

In August 2016, I travelled to London for a Purple Warriors training session. I had doubts throughout the journey and nearly turned back several times.

I arrived the night before the session and stayed with a Purple Warrior who lived locally. I still felt ill at ease and really didn't want to go. He persuaded me to at least try one paddling session and then make up my mind.

The following day my inner mind was trying to convince me to pull out and run away but the guy I was staying with was very strong-willed and basically coerced me into going along. And am I glad he did!

As soon as we arrived at the session, I felt at home for the first time in years. The banter, the team spirit, the welcoming attitude of everyone just made me feel at home immediately. Then, when I actually went paddling for the first time in my life, I felt transformed. I have never felt like I did then. It was almost as if someone had lifted a massive weight off my back and I could stand up straight and proud again.

I remember clearly that I got out of the boat with a smile on my face – the first time I had felt so good for a very long time. I couldn't wait to get on the water again and again.

I take a lot of medication for my PTSD and it isn't always effective. But dragon boating is – the effect of paddling on the water and being in a boat with others is more beneficial to me than medication.

I love it. I love the paddling and absolutely love being amongst Purple Warriors. They have given me new meaning to my life and made me look outwards rather than withdraw into myself. I know I'm a better person – my partner has told me!

Our family is closer, I'm fitter and less prone to mood swings, and I now have goals to go for. My GP has also noticed the difference and has said that Purple Warriors has brought greater benefit to me than traditional medical interventions.

I have raced with Purple Warriors in the National Championships, Hong Kong and other regattas and nothing now makes me more proud than when I pull on the Purple Warriors race top. It's weird but just wearing that top makes me feel better.

I still have dark periods when my PTSD tries to overwhelm me but I now have a support network of Purple Warrior mates who I can call and they give me the support I need to fight back. My family see this and my partner and our three children attend all of the Purple Warrior events – they also love being around the Warriors and one of my daughters has also joined the team as the drummer!

Basically, I was on a downward spiral until I joined Purple Warriors and I was terrified of where that was heading. Now, I'm living a life that has meaning and direction and that is down to Purple Warriors. Goodness only knows where I'd be now if that Purple Warrior hadn't basically forced me to go to that very first session but so glad he did. I'm alive again!

Make Purple Warriors your next challenge.

Quote from Colin:

Purple Warriors
in a few words?
It saved my life
... period



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Glyn is 49, ex-Army (Royal Artillery) and has a prosthetic leg.

This is his story:

Whilst still serving, I had a serious car accident and badly damaged my right leg. After numerous operations to try to save it, I finally had to agree to it being amputated (in 2014) and a prosthetic fitted.

This affected me much more than I ever thought it would and I went into deep depression for over a year. I felt worthless and was embarrassed to go outside my home. My life had come to a crunching halt.

Then a fellow veteran mentioned he had heard a new club had been formed – Purple Warriors – and reckoned I should give it a go. I first went along in September 2016 and I haven't looked back!

The camaraderie is absolutely fantastic and everyone there is always willing to help you out. Mind you, I get the mickey taken out of me the whole time about my prosthetic but that's what would have happened in my Army days and I actually love it (and I give as good as I get!).

In fact, aside from the physical rehabilitation that the paddling has done for me, I reckon the constant ribbing from muckers has done wonders for my mental state. We are always there for each other and I know I now have a large extended family to call on when I'm struggling, and they never let me down. I'm also there for others too.

I've joined a civilian club too (in Exeter) because I enjoy the paddling so much and this allows me to train several times a week. But it is the days training or racing with Purple Warriors that I look forward to the most.

The Boss insists we race against unimpaired crews and, you know what, I love it. Once I'm in the boat, no one can see my prosthetic and I can paddle my heart out without being self-conscious. And, when we beat some of these crews (which we often do now), nothing gives me more pleasure than knowing I've done so in the company of a bunch of mates who all suffer from something bad but who give their all for me as I do for them. 'Empty the tank!' is regularly ordered during a race and we all know that everyone will.

I raced with Purple Warriors in Hong Kong and I've never been prouder of a team I've been a part of. The reception we got there was incredible, and the results we achieved unbelievable – I cried there; often not as I used to after I lost my leg from self-pity, but because it was so emotional to have achieved so much.

2 years ago I felt life was probably no longer worth living – 2 years on, I'm energised, I'm focussed, I'm fitter and I have the best bunch of mates you could wish for.

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Quote from Glyn:

I now have a large extended family to call on when I'm struggling



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Craig is 43, ex-Army (Army Catering Corps, Royal Logistic Corps, then Royal Army Veterinary Corps). He has Multiple Sclerosis. He is married with a young son and lives in Frimley.

This is his story:

I spent nine years in the military as a regular (1990-1999), then was recalled, in 2003, for Gulf War 2. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2009. I had not been feeling right for a few years before that and knew something was going wrong with my body; at the time I just didn't know what. The diagnosis cleared up what was wrong with me and gave me something to work with.

However, it was also a serious blow to me mentally as the realisation of how this condition would likely progress sunk in. I started to think that my life was effectively over. Over the next few years my condition did deteriorate much as predicted by my doctors and I now need to use a stick to walk short distances, and a wheelchair for the rest of the time. The prospect of doing anything really fulfilling seemed remote. I became quite depressed.

Then, in early 2016, I heard about the launch of Purple Warriors. I was always a team sports player but this was a sport I'd never even heard of! However, the promotional material really got me interested and I went along for the first launch event in May that year. And I'm hooked!

Purple Warriors has given me back self-confidence and self-belief. It has shown me I can still do things even though I have a disability, and challenged me to do them well. It has pushed me physically and mentally and got me to achieve things I never thought possible.

Purple Warriors is like a big family to me; we might not see each other from one month to the next but it feels only like yesterday when we do meet. The banter is non-stop and the friendly abuse I always get when I have to be helped out of the boat (every time!) always brings a smile to my face (even if it seems to shock onlookers not in the know!). Our immediate families are also pulled into the mix, nobody is left out. It is like being back in the Forces; we get each other and, more importantly, will do anything for each other. If I am having a bad day when the MS is getting to me, my fellow Warriors come to mind, and I only have to think of what they go through day to day, and how they handle themselves and this gives me the lift I need.

The feeling of being in a proper team again is amazing; being in that boat and knowing that everyone is giving their all to get the boat over the line as fast as possible; there is no feeling like it. My wife notes my excitement levels rising as we get closer to a Purple Warriors day and we both reckon it has done wonders to keep me going despite the debilitating effects of my condition. Our motto is Destiny-Struggle-Achievement; I will always now struggle with my MS but the sense of achievement when paddling with Purple Warriors is huge and lifts me every single day.

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Quote from Craig:

Nothing makes me prouder than calling my fellow Warriors my brothers and sisters