



# Inspirational Stories

**ASPIRE:** to long, aim, or seek ambitiously; be eagerly desirous, especially for something great or of high value

**B**odybuilding is a community of individuals that aspire to be stronger mentally and physically, aspire to be self confident, aspire to achieve goals, aspire to be MORE. The industry is evolving on stage and in the fast pace social media world however, the fundamentals of bodybuilding are consistent to hard work and dedication that ultimately equals something great or a high value reward.

Overcoming obstacles, persevering, and surviving can be seen in so many stories. If you are inspired by someone and become your best, then you in turn, can be the inspiration for the next person. Each of us has a story to share.

“Rayz Above” is the philosophy of Liquid Sun Rayz, to aspire or to rise above is what led them to become our Inspirational Stories Sponsor.

As you read the stories of IFBB Pro’s Xavisus and Sarah Gayden, Hoda Jarrah, Matthias Maines and Ashley Futo, the 2018 Courage Award Winners, realize that we all possess the ability to rise above any and all challenges in our lives to become an INSPIRATION to others.

## XAVISUS GAYDEN

IFBB Men’s Physique Pro and 2X Olympian

Age:39

*Occupation: United States Marine Corp Career Planner, IFBB Men’s Physique Pro, CEO, XGFit Boardshorts, Online Coach, Heatrock Recording Studio, LLC and Father*

*Sponsorships: Liquid Sun Rayz, Evolife Apparel*

## SARAH GAYDEN

IFBB Bikini Pro

Age:35

*Occupation: Founder/Owner of Sarifitness LLC, Owner/Chef of Fit Fusion Nutrition and Meal Prep, IFBB Bikini Pro and Mother*

*Sponsorships: Liquid Sun Rayz, Body by O*



**24** hours to a day, right? Have you ever felt like there just aren’t enough hours in the day or wondered how in the world you could get through the day, much less have the time to get to the gym for weight training, cardio, eating healthy and even prepping for a show? Not to mention; they are married, parents to an active toddler, IFBB Pros, Entrepreneurs, live healthy and have discovered that sharing the things they are passionate about makes them stronger. Sarah & Xavisus Gayden have found a way to have it all and it is our hope that after reading their story, you will too.

## WHO THEY ARE

Xavisus Gayden became a United States Marine in 1998. After his first deployment, he turned to fitness as a way to overcome a divorce. While he began competing in bodybuilding in the natural organizations in 2009, he soon switched to the NPC. “Everyone was so welcoming and I developed some really strong relationships my first year of competing, including some influential words of wisdom from Jay Cutler. When Men’s Physique was introduced in 2011, I found it suited me well and in 2013, I earned my pro card at the NPC USA Championships.” A few years later with the popularity of the Men’s Physique category, he saw an opportunity for customized board shorts for the competitors and it led Xavisus to create his company, XGFIT. As a sponsor of Joe Pishkula’s NPC Border Klash 2019, Xavisus is providing boardshorts to the Men’s Physique overall winner. Currently, Xavisus is a Career Planning Officer with the Marines, and enjoys coaching his fellow servicemen and women from all over the world online.



Sarah Gayden was a certified flight attendant from Venezuela prior to coming to the United States. Once arriving, she chose a different path and enrolled in culinary school with dreams of beginning a meal prep company, now known as Fit Fusion Nutrition. Now living in San Diego, she began her own business in 2012, SariFitness.com, a fitness apparel line for women. In 2013, she starting training with Kim Oddo and turned pro in 2015 at the NPC USA Championships. Most recently, Sarah was signed as the first Body By O sponsored athlete.

## HOW THEY MET

By 2013, Xavisus had also moved to San Diego. He knew everybody at the shows and was always there to help out and support the NPC, the promoters, the shows and the competitors. So anybody that needed help, he was available. That’s how he met Sarah; offering to help her with her vendor booth at the shows. Eventually, he shared his idea for customized board shorts with Sarah and asked for her advice and assistance in starting his business. It led to dinner and margaritas and they have been together ever since.

## AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

Xavisus was deployed in 2015. When he returned, Sarah put her competition career on hold so they could begin building the family they dreamed of, and Baby X (Xander) was born. “Having Xander has brought us closer together. We both agree, family is everything to us. Date nights have become family time. Making memories and doing fun things together like hiking, the trampoline park, or jogging with Xander is what we want. We work hard and

put in long days to make our relationship work, provide for our family, build our businesses, and work towards our dreams. There are times when life is challenging but nothing we can’t overcome. When you believe that God has a reason, it makes you stronger. Family, friends and fans can see how our lives have changed and how we have grown and will continue to grow together.”

Encouraging Sarah to compete again, Xavisus would say “just because you had a baby doesn’t mean you can’t go after your competition dreams.” Sarah says, “It was an adjustment and a challenge but with husband and my mom’s help we have managed.” Grateful for where I’m at, but even more excited for where I’m going.” Sarah states, “Everyone has their own strategy when it comes to reaching their goals, mine is blocking distractions. That includes people who don’t add anything positive to your grind! Scheduling and mentally organizing my day/week is key for me. I am a Virgo, so organization and attention to detail means the world to me.”

## THE FUTURE

“Our goal is simple, we want to compete at the Olympia as a family. We want to set an example for Xander, show him that his mom and dad are committed to him and to each other and to living a healthy lifestyle. Leaving this legacy is important to us. When asked, “how do they manage to make it all work - marriage, family, competition and business, they respond by saying, “challenges come and go and the biggest challenge with this competitor lifestyle is having a partner on the same page. We learn a lot about ourselves and each other. There are no limits, if you want the dream you have to LIVE the dream.” They are truly inspiring.



**HODA JARRAH**

Female Bikini Competitor, Fitness Model, Role Model, and Social Media Influencer

**H**oda was born in 1980 in Tehran, Iran, at the start of the Iran - Iraq war. She fell in love with the muscular tone of the body when she first saw Arnold's movie, "Pumping Iron". She began exercising at age 11 with a combination of very basic equipment and martial arts. Her father was opposed to bodybuilding for his daughter. She was scared but pushed forward. Her goals went against her religion and traditions, but she had a dream.

Armed with a bodybuilding book and YouTube videos, Hoda began her journey. Occasionally she would ask for help but was met with sexual pressure, the suggestion of steroid use, or ego-inflated trainers. It almost made her quit. To continue her journey, Hoda realized she would have to emigrate to the U.S. She finally entered her first NPC bikini competition in 2015. Over the past 4 years, she has competed in six shows, qualified for a national level show and finished in the top 10 in her class against people from across the nation.

On a visit to her home country, Hoda was forced to spend time in the Islamic regime cold dungeon for the crime of representing the country of Iran during her competition and flying the flag. She was tortured and threatened with life imprisonment and it took time to recover. But having endured that experience, she says, "I feel there is nothing I can't face; nothing that can keep me from achieving my dreams. It has made me stronger. One day I hope that I can return home."

When asked what inspired her to live a lifestyle that is "taboo" in her country, Hoda responded by saying, "I decided at a young age that I wanted to fight to live for myself. I was a female raised in a traditional Muslim family and felt blamed and bullied for everything I did. In my heart, I knew the old ways are not the way of my generation. I wasn't going to be intimidated by what others think or say. It's a fact, I am an immigrant woman from a Muslim country. I have struggled and fought alone and on my own and paid my own way. It is important for me to live happy and whether Iran is proud of me or not does not matter to me. What does matter to me is

the story of my fight and journey to achieve my dreams, so that I may inspire others.

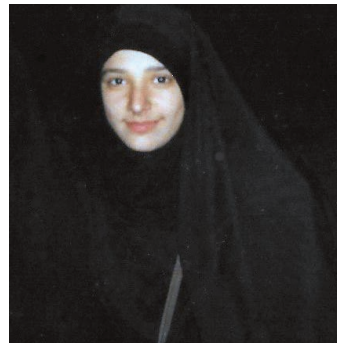
"For the past four years, training has been my lifestyle and I look forward to stepping on the stage again. In the meantime, I am sharing my journey on social media because I want to have a positive impact on all females." It is no doubt that this social media influencer with over 200,000 followers will be making a difference for the female competitors in this industry. Hoda was shocked at the insults she initially received on social media from both people who oppose women in bodybuilding and women who wish to succeed. It was stressful but once again, she persevered.

**I encourage women to:**

1. Follow your dreams
2. Be aware of where you are and where you want to go
3. Have a detailed plan
4. Know that anything worth having, doesn't come easy.
5. There will be distractions and setbacks but keep moving forward until you reach your goals."



Photo by npcnews online, 2018 NPC North American Championships © AMIR MARANDI



**MATTIAS MAINES**

2018 Courage Award Winner

**T**rust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (John 16:33 ESV)

These are words of courage that I grew up hearing in church. And, I always thought I understood this verse until I had to opportunity to really put my faith into action.

My story of courage begins at the 2017 Arnold Classic in Columbus Ohio, but first I will give you some background. I was a successful power lifter for years accumulating pro totals in several competitions. In October of 2016 I totaled 1,862lbs at 230 body weight (650 squat, 485 bench, 727 dead lift) qualifying me to compete at the 2017 Arnold Classic. This was going to be my big moment, my opportunity to show my best!

After months of training the day arrived in March of 2017. I planned to squat 700+, bench 500+, and dead lift 750. My opening squat attempt of 630 was fast and easy. My next planned attempt of 700 was mentally complete, I just needed to knock it out to move on to the next. When I stepped back with the weight, the bar moved down my shoulder on one side due to my shoulders sweating. And, with confidence I said to myself... It's just 700lbs, get it done. On my decent, my left quad tore causing me to drop without tension. The fall ruptured both quads, tearing them completely from the bone.

As I laid on the ground with the crowd in dead silence, the first words to come to my mind was thank you God for the opportunity. (Followed up with feelings of anger, disappointment, and disbelief.) I knew that I was about to have the most difficult battle of my life.

I was immediately rushed to the trauma unit in Columbus for emergency surgery. After wiring my quads back to the bone, I made my way back to Georgia. I regrouped for 10 days before returning to the gym. I decided to set a new goal, and work to develop each muscle for my first bodybuilding show in 1 year

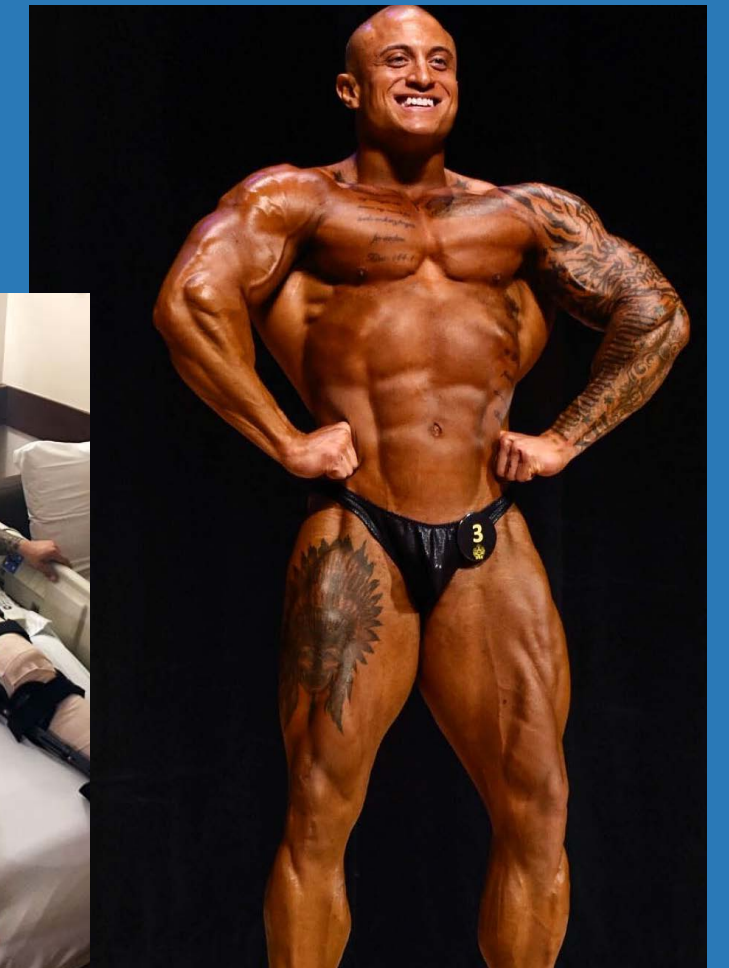


(NPC Battle at the River). I remained in my wheelchair training for nearly 3 months. With the help of God, my wife, friends, and family I was able to come back better than before.

It was a long road of recovery, wrapped in strong emotion, changed perspective, and continuous prayer. But, the character building months of learning to walk again to the joy of holding my sword up at my first bodybuilding show was something I would never take back.

In one year, I went from being in a wheelchair to winning the True Novice Heavyweight, Novice Heavyweight, Novice Overall, and 4th place in the Open Division at my first show. But, greatest of all, I gained an understanding of real strength and courage. I learned to trust the Lord with all my heart, and recognize that HE knows what is best.

**"I learned to trust the Lord with all my heart..."**





## ASHLEY FUTO

2018 Courage Award Winner

I grew up as a very active and athletic person. I ran track, cross country, and played soccer. I have always worked out at the gym and loved every minute of it. I was as healthy as can be and going to Hiram College to get a Pre-Veterinarian Degree. That all changed in 2009 when I began having debilitating migraines. So bad, I had to leave Hiram and my athletic career to go home and figure out what was going on.

My family doctor suggested I get an MRI, which showed a large tumor in my brain. Next, I went to University Hospital in Cleveland to meet with a neurologist and surgery was set for two weeks later. The tumor was cancerous but even though it was located in a tough spot, I chose to have the surgery. After the 2nd brain surgery, and seven weeks of radiation treatment, there was partial vision loss but more importantly, I am now cancer free. I beat cancer!

It was a tough battle, and a battle that would continue. Three days after my last surgery I began having hundreds of small Epilepsy seizures daily and even Grand Mal seizures. Another two years in and out of the hospital, led to a third brain surgery to attach leads directly to my brain. After monitoring

me in an attempt to figure out where the seizure activity was coming from, the leads were removed, and a final brain surgery to completely remove my temporal lobe was done. I almost lost my life after the surgery, and I lost much of my memory. But through it all, one thing remained. My love for fitness and for helping others.

Over the past ten years I have grown up quickly and learned the importance of love, life, and happiness. I know I went through what I did, to show others that we can do what we put our minds to. We can get through whatever life throws our way. From the start of this journey I have always counted on a dumbbell to pick me up and keep me going. In 2015, only one year after the last surgery, I competed in a bodybuilding show. I felt like that was the proof that ANYTHING is possible. Accomplishing our goals is more mental than anything, and I hoped that if others could see me make it through my illnesses and surgeries and compete in a bodybuilding show, others might feel that even when they are going through tough times in life, they can get through it, endure it, persevere and overcome it! If beating cancer and Epilepsy has helped just one person, I feel I fulfilled my purpose in life.



**“Cancer is tough, but we can be tougher!”**

Each morning, with my head wrapped in a scarf, burnt to a crisp from the radiation, I would go to the gym, and lift. That was my time to forget about everything else in my life and focus on what made me happy. My doctors have told me that it is part of the reason I am still alive today. Working out has kept me motivated and a strong fighter. It is not just about how you look, or how much weight you can lift or squat; it is about how it makes you feel. For me, it makes me feel successful. I can do anything, and so can anyone else!

Winning this contest would be ABSOLUTELY life changing for me. Fitness has saved my life over and over, and helped shape me into the competitive, driven, motivated person that I am today. I would never be who I am without it and I want others to know just how great it is and how much it can help anyone get through situations we face in life. Cancer is tough, but we can be tougher!