

20 MOST INSPIRING STORIES OF 2020



Photo credit: Mark Mason Media



Eric Liddie

My name is Eric Liddie, I am Deaf and my primary language is American Sign Language. I was a typical kid growing up; playing football, basketball, ran track and wrestled. I graduated with an Associate degree in Occupational Studies in Computer Integrated Machine Technology at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, NY. and received a Bachelor's degree in Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University in Washington DC and a Master's degree as a Clinical Rehabilitation Counselor at Auburn University in Auburn, AL.

In 2018, I had a full-time job and was a full-time graduate student. My marriage of seven years came to a sudden end. The stress of a divorce, left me feeling lost and I had no idea how to start over. My counselor suggested that I try doing the things that I had once enjoyed doing. I joined the gym for the first time starting slowly, going to the gym on the weekends but when I noticed a change not only my physical health but my mental health as well, I knew I was hooked and began going daily before work. I felt more confident and signed up for my first race, the Mud Factor Race!

I loved the atmosphere and positivity on race day! I continue to build my stamina and muscles. Working out and living a healthy lifestyle has made me more confident and genuinely happy. I now train at Crunch Fitness, have joined CrossFit, and continue to race and compete in Alabama and Tennessee including obstacle course events and half marathons. I even did a half marathon by myself after the event I was signed up for was cancelled due to Covid. I want to maintain my healthy lifestyle so I can keep achieving my goals checking things off my bucket list and plan to compete in the Spartan Race in Las Vegas, NV in March 2021.

Losing weight and then maintaining that healthy lifestyle is a challenge for anyone. I used positive mantras and quotes daily to help me stay motivated. One of my favorites is, "Training your mind to be stronger than your emotions" - unknown. This helped me stay on track and remain focused, even when I felt overwhelmed and wanted to give up. Like most, one of the biggest challenges was figuring out what and how to eat. I tried many different meal plans, but was not successful until I met Ron Wedgeworth, a personal trainer that helped me with the specifics of how and what to eat to keep my body healthy. Traveling for work, temptations and guilt from those who didn't understand my goals was hard, but I trusted my trainer, and stuck to the meal plan and it paid off! When I started working out, my goal was to get fit and have abs! I decided doing a bodybuilding show would give me a goal to shoot for in helping me achieve that goal. For me, when you sign up and pay for something it makes your goal more obtainable and makes you want to work harder. I didn't want to lose out on the money that I paid, so it kept me motivated to continue to train. My trainer is also the promoter for the NPC Clash at the Capstone bodybuilding show in Tuscaloosa, AL. He encouraged me and continually helped me with my training throughout this entire process.

I finally hit my goal and was able to see a physical change in my body. The sport of bodybuilding requires discipline and getting ready for a show can be overwhelming for any first-time competitor. I was fortunate to have Ron; without him, I would have been lost and may not have reached my goals. Ron asked me if I wanted to try the NPC Rocket City Classic competition that was only one week away. I told him I didn't think my body was ready and that I wasn't prepared. He said just have fun and it will be a good first experience. It was a good experience; overwhelming at times and there were times I even struggled because I am deaf and I wanted to make sure I was where I needed to be, when I needed to be there. However, all the meal prepping, and training were worth it! The competition ended up being successful and I had fun! I even competed at a second show, the NPC Beach Bash, three weeks later, placing in the top 5 in all of the classes I entered in both shows.

In my personal life, fitness is very important to me. Hope for my future is to stay active. Besides competitions, I also enjoy going to lakes or rivers for paddle boarding, hiking, running, workouts, and different competitions. I know my journey with Ron was successful and I am proud of myself for what I have accomplished. I am happy with my physical appearance and I honestly thought I would never feel this way. I have learned that it is about the journey and the experiences rather than what place you come in or if you win. Right now, I want to focus on continuing to weight train to build muscle and eat as much as I can! When I feel I am ready, I will do another bodybuilding competition again. I also want to continue participating in the obstacle course and running races as well as CrossFit training. It is rewarding to now see my peers excited to see my progress and actually ask me how they can get started! I plan to grow my knowledge and understanding of nutrition. I also want to take online classes with the National Academy of Sports Medicine and become a certified Professional Trainer. I have been encouraged by my friends, especially since there are not any Deaf personal trainers in Alabama.

Currently, I am a Case Manager for the Deaf. I serve and advocate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers in Alabama by providing technical assistance and training. I also participate in community education programs and partner with state and community agencies to make sure consumers get equal access to resources and information.

Being a part of the Deaf Community is my passion. As a child I had very limited access to language, communication and basic knowledge of the world around me. I struggled with feeling isolated and lonely because I was unable to communicate with my family members and peers. I grew up in rural Tennessee in an area with very limited resources and knowledge of what it means to be Deaf and how important early language acquisition is. Sadly, this is not uncommon in the Deaf community as many Deaf people struggle with access to language and resources. Since I have experienced many barriers in my life such as discrimination, audism, and language deprivation, I want to be a role model to the Deaf community by showing how you can overcome these struggles. I want to empower other Deaf people and show everyone that Deaf people CAN be successful. Being deaf does not prohibit you from obtaining your goals. My job as a case manager for the Deaf allows me to help support and encourage Deaf people to find ways to overcome their own obstacles.

My best advice for anyone that is thinking of starting their own fitness journey or may be struggling to keep going is to please do not doubt yourself after ignorant people told you you can't because I believe you can! When you are feeling tempted to give up, it's the little things that make the difference like, just taking a walk or talking with friends or planning and preparing by always making sure you eat before going to a party or gathering to make sure you can stay focused on your diet. Another of my favorite quotes that I consistently refer back to when I need encouragement is, "If you quit now. You will end up back where you first began. And when you first began, you were desperate to be where you are right now." - unknown.

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