

Our guests love to compare t-shirts - read to discover why



By Karen Zach, Around the County

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Well, I've met some amazing people in my various walks of life, but no one like today's gals. My first introduction was via an e-mail from retired North Montgomery teacher, John Walker, who basically got these two remarkable ladies together. In fact, they meet every month for comradery (you'll understand why here shortly) and when he told me their story, I was compelled to meet them, too. So, prepare to be amazed!

Now, this week's Around The County has another twist – the reveal is immediate – no fooling, meet Layton Pearson and Penny Carey right here, right now but read on for some wonderful details about these amazing gals' lives!

They became friends in a most unusual way. Layton had graduated from North Montgomery in 2017 where she was a cheerleader and swimmer. Her favorite class was English with Mr. Walker and he was her swimming coach, as well. She said, "I was just mediocre!" I find that hard to believe! The next fall, she and a friend decided to go get a hammock to relax. They attached it on the friend's porch. Trouble is, the pillars broke on September 23rd (yep, she's ready for a first anniversary here) and demolished her leg. First thought was it wasn't too awful, but it was bad, really bad!

Layton's sister, Ariel was also in our group with Mr. Walker, me, hubs and Penny. Ariel didn't realize how bad the leg was, either and didn't even go to the hospital right off, thinking her beloved sister had slightly hurt an ankle. She's made up for it, being a big cheerleader for Layton ever since. "She's very supportive, cheers me up when I'm down and makes me food. Not just tacos like I do, but chicken, salads and everything!" Ariel says she loves Pinterest and a lot of what she makes comes from there. Speaking of goodies, Mr. Walker even brought us homemade chocolate chip cookies. Seems the girls expect a treat each time they meet! They were certainly delic!

Layton faced lots of problems with healing, and finally with half her foot gone, she made the decision to have her leg (from the knee down) removed. She couldn't believe the outpouring of support that came from her friends and whole community, the culmination being a volleyball game with proceeds going to her cause. It was through a Facebook message from a friend that Penny Carey began to enter Layton's life.

The message was something like, "Penny, I think you could do this young gal some good!" Why you might ask? Because Penny, too, is an amputee and knew just what Layton was going through. Both have had about a dozen surgeries after their accidents. I don't think we can even imagine the horrific experience to be whole, then have part of our body gone? Penny knew how to help Layton much more than most, and John Walker knew the girls needed to get together, thus he facilitated a meeting with Penny and Layton, plus Ariel and they've been meeting ever since. Ariel described Layton as "staying positive even as hard as the whole ordeal was." Mr. Walker noted that both the girls present an amazing human spirit!

Oh, those girls. They were making jokes comparing t-shirts, "I survived amputation. I'm not afraid of you!" Or, the one that made Layton really laugh, "I'm on my last leg!" Their comment was that you just must look at the humor in it all! When we commented how little Layton ate, my husband even got involved telling the girls their next leg should be hollow so they could fill it up, never being hungry again. Layton noted that she had lost 30# but was beginning to eat better and was really looking forward to going to Las Vegas for her 21st birthday with her sister. Happy birthday, sweetie!

When Layton and Penny had their first meeting, Penny brought Layton a care package with amputee items in it, including a foldable cane, which they both said is helpful as one never knows when the need might arise to walk up a hill or in the rain, thus extra support needed.

When the girls walked in to the Breakfast Company, I could never have told they had half of a leg gone. They both walked beautifully and Penny's foot looked just like the other one, her gorgeous toenails on both feet painted alike. Their perfect walk was due to gaiting they told me. I learned lots of new words or a new usage for old ones from our little get-together!

As a lawyer, Penny is on her feet quite a bit. Although she currently lives in Lebanon where she has an office as well as one at Castleton, she grew-up in Montgomery County, with parents, Sherry and Dave Carey, with a brother and sister. Elated, she was telling us about officiating her nephew's wedding (very shortly) as well as making their Chantille Cream Cake. Her very favorite thing to do is hang-out with family but she does enjoy reading historically-based mysteries and baking as you see. Her law specialty is civil-related federal litigation and bankruptcy work. She wasn't involved in a lot of things at North she noted, because she worked all the time at McDonald's. While putting herself through Purdue for her undergrad degree, she worked at Morris-Bryant. IU is where she obtained her graduate degree. Definitely, one smart lady! The story of Penny's accident (on a county road off 32) also on a September (2013) day about brought tears to my eyes and certainly made me mad. A young man was bent over to get his cell phone and hit her car head-on. He was badly hurt in the wreck, and ended-up declaring bankruptcy (ironic, huh) thus all the hospital bills, amputee expenses and being off work for so long were all on her shoulders. Hoping to keep her leg, the infection was so bad that in October, she opted to have it removed from the knee down, as well. More irony – same month, same legs for the girls, but very different accidents. She feels lucky that at least her insurance has paid for the last two legs. I didn't realize that the part of the leg left changes in size and thus the prosthetic needs to be replaced. She is on her fourth.

Both gals agreed getting their license back and being mobile was a big ego-booster. Of course, Layton's parents (Scott Pearson and Angela and Hank Swazay) and her sisters and nieces and nephews and friends help too. She particularly sang praises for her boyfriend, Christian, who is such a support. He had recently taken her kayaking and she loved it. Trying to swim again, though, is almost impossible as the balance is just not there anymore. For sure, she'll try about anything, having yet lots of plans for her future. She had been working at Buffalo Wild Wings but found afterwards that being on her feet at such a fast pace was too hard. Currently, she works in the office of Cox & Pritchett. Also, she had been going to Ivy Tech to become a nurse and will likely continue that plan. I did remind her that most nurses are on their feet all the time and she quickly let me know that she'd not let that hold her back! What an amazing young lady! Layton and Penny's mutual feelings of being strong, independent and having positive attitudes described them perfectly!

Travelling is something they both enjoy, Layton having recently been to Hawaii and had a wonderful time. I asked her how she did walking on her leg. "Great I guess. I was so busy having a blast, that I forgot about it!" Penny told us that she was planning a trip to Ireland soon. Why stop there? So, we all got into the conversation, suggesting other European places she should go. Layton was so caught-up that they decided perhaps she'd just join her! Love it! Hope they both get to go and have an amazing trip. Both gals gave such praise to SRT where they go regarding their prothesis. "They are great folks, knowing from their own experiences in some cases, just how it is!" With their help, neither ever doubted they could not be whole again! We all discussed how few amputees we see out and about, as well. "It just depends on the person, how they feel, and the care and support they get!"

The girls facebook pages are full of spiritual and uplifting comments, such as the one Penny sent to Layton: "When you have been through what you and I have endured, it is a blessing to open your eyes every morning, be grateful to still be in this life!" One on Layton's is my favorite. It's a quote with a poppy (which, by the way, means fantastic) background that notes, "Something will grow from what you are going through and it will be you!" Both of these amazing women indeed grew inwardly from their experience and I was so thrilled to meet them (thanks John) and be able to feature them in this week's ATC!



Photo by Karen Zach Layton Pearson, Penny Carey, Ariel Pearson and John Walker