

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix quadruple amputee defied all odds

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A St. Croix man who lost both of his feet and hands has defied all odds and began dancing and playing tennis once again. Kemit-Amon Lewis 37, a marine scientist who was a Coral Conservation Manager with the Nature Conservancy Caribbean program, helped develop coral reef restoration programs across the Caribbean.

All aspects of Mr. Lewis's life was very physical, from diving to dancing and even playing tennis. "I was on the water a lot, and I was on the tennis court a lot. I played tennis in college and continued to play after that. I also taught dance part-time," said Mr. Lewis.

However, in 2019 Mr. Lewis's life was turned upside down. On July 26th, Mr. Lewis stated he started to feel ill; he ran a fever and began feeling a little bit sluggish. As Mr.

Lewis's symptoms began to get worst, he decided to go to an urgent care, but while at the urgent care, Mr. Lewis's vitals plummeted, causing him to be rushed to the emergency room where he was diagnosed with a bacterial infection.

With Mr. Lewis's condition putting him in grave danger, he was flown off St. Croix to Broward Health through their international program. When he arrived, Mr. Lewis was in septic shock due to infection. According to Dr. Maxine Hamilton, who heads the program at Broward Health, Mr. Lewis was in critical condition when he arrived; she further explained that all of his systems were failing, beginning with his cardiac, renal, kidney, all the way to his liver and lungs. "By the time we got him, he already had multi-system organ failure and was extremely ill. He was taken to the intensive care unit," said Dr. Hamilton

Mr. Lewis was put in an induced coma for almost two weeks until he was finally considered stable enough to be awakened. "It was a long, long stay in a difficult battle, but we were able to fight for him and save his life and organs," said Dr. Hamilton. Sadly, as an unexpected result of his illness and treatment, gangrene advanced to his arms and legs. The treatment that salvaged his organs and his life had unvarnished oxygen to his extremities. Because of this, Mr. Lewis had to amputate his right leg, right hand, left fingers, and left toes.

Through it, all Mr. Lewis kept a positive spirit and was always highly motivated. He said, "one of the first things that they did was reassure me was that I would be diving again; I would be on the tennis court, and dance."

After months in the hospital and in-patient rehab, Mr. Lewis had to re-learn how to walk and dress himself; he also had to learn how to get in and out of his wheelchair. Eventually, Mr. Lewis received his prosthetic limbs and was able to take his first steps after sitting for months on a bed. "I'm able to live on my own now, cook for myself, clean myself, dress myself, and all that stuff that you don't think of. It's been making lemonade out of the lemons that were tossed at me last year," he said.

Mr. Lewis thanks his medical team, family, friends, and the fundraising support of the people in St. Croix. Currently, Mr. Lewis is a motivational speaker and lives in Coral Springs, Florida. He has begun dancing again, playing tennis, and even living on his own. He also has the honor of being the keynote speaker at the graduation ceremony for the St. Croix Central High School Class of 2020. Mr. Lewis hopes to eventually get a prosthetic leg that will permit him to run, swim, and even dive again