



Left: The day of Alicia's release from rehab, November 1986, with her father **Center:** On handcycle in Tokyo **Inset right:** Wearing bronze medal at the Tokyo Paralympic Games

prevalent, in part due to a rise in wounded war veterans who had lost limbs.

"I thought, hey, this sport really is something now," Dana said. "My competitive spirit got reignited."

THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE

In less than a year she had made it back onto the U.S. National Team, securing the very last spot for the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London, then diligently working to the 2016 Games in Rio—where she earned a silver medal—and continuing to the most recent Tokyo Games.

"Once I put my mind to it, and started training regularly and updated my equipment, I really did get back to the top of the field pretty quickly," Dana said.

Her love for the sport goes beyond the motivation of racing. The camaraderie she

has built with her teammates, and the support she has found in the para-cycling community, have been incredibly important for her mental health and wellbeing.

"I feel very much like I belong to this certain culture," she said. "It develops close bonds. I feel like I have some really close friends now."

Not to mention her family. When she's not loading her equipment into a van or onto a plane for far-off training trips and races, she's speeding along the tree-lined roads in Putney, making water stops at her mom's house or the occasional call to Carlotta for an emergency pick-up if things go awry.

"I feel like everybody in the community knows who she is," Cuerdon said. "The whole community is so proud of her and just wants to help. It's really heartwarming. It definitely takes a village. Even if she may not be aware of it, there are so many people

who will tell me how impressed they are and how amazing she is."

Cuerdon also works as the assistant director of development at The Putney School.

"In my role I talk to alumni all the time," she said. "I get to hear from the network of fans who are cheering her on from afar."

Dana's relationship with her hometown is a little more complicated.

"In some ways I feel like I stick out and I'm different," she said. "I navigate my way through life in a way that most people don't understand, and I can feel like a loner."

But it's also where she was born and raised. It's home.

"I've lived in other places, but I always come back to Putney," she said. "Being disabled is a really integral part of who I am. And this community is a really integral part of who I am. They co-exist."

In addition, Dana's daughter, Willa, is a student at the Putney School, and her ambition has certainly rubbed off.

"My mom always tells me to pursue my passions, however unrealistic or impossible they seem to be," Willa said. "In doing that I've had some pretty incredible experiences, so I appreciate her endlessly for that. She also takes life as it comes, one day at a time, and that taught me to be more flexible and easygoing. It's pretty incredible

how hard she works, and watching her train motivates me to pursue my own interests with renewed passion and drive."

Dana makes it back to The Putney School to watch her daughter in numerous plays and, of course, for Harvest Festival.

"I love being up there on campus," she said. "It's such a beautiful spot."

Although she can't change what took place there years ago, her experience has instilled new perspectives and fresh wisdom that she would give to her young self, or anyone else going through a similar situation.

"Your life can still be great," Dana said. "It's going to look different. But the sky's the limit. You can create what you want, you can be who you want. Don't be unrealistic but don't put unnecessary limits on yourself. You can find a way." ■

