

A great man

✘ Ten years ago, I interviewed a young man whose story left an indelible mark on my heart.

Twenty-four year old Cesar Humberto Zarate had lost his right leg, above the knee, in a landmine incident in Peru, while fighting for his country. The Peruvian Army sent Cesar and two of his injured comrades to the world renowned Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore to receive prosthesis.

While this type of injury could have devastated any active twenty-something, what I saw was a sweet, witty 24-year-old who handled a life-changing accident with humor and grace.

At the time, he told me, “There are two ways you could approach this. You could feel sorry for yourself and have people say, ‘pobrecito,’ (you poor thing), or you could work, have fun and learn to walk and have people say ‘Ese hombre grande’ (That is a great man).”

The lives of Cesar and his comrades were certainly different and filled with challenges after the accident, but the three men were driven by family and ultimately, their Catholic faith. I was 23 at the time I conducted the interview, and I remember being inspired by the overwhelming and deep faith of these men. No self-pity or complaining – only faith.

“I think my accident is a test that God has given me in order to continue my life and to keep loving him,” Cesar said. “Because I love him very much.”

That was 10 years ago. Today, Cesar is 34 and back home in Peru, where he seems to be living a happy life. I know this because after 10 years, he found me on Facebook. We are communicating in broken English and Spanish, but what a lovely friendship to form at a Christmas, and what a timely reminder to be thankful for all the blessings in our lives.