

W E D N E S D A Y  
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F R O M T H E E D I T O R

*‘Mildly inconvenienced’  
 Iraq war vet aims for Paralympics*

**M**elissa Stockwell, who works at Scheck & Siress in Oak Park, swims a lot—nearly 20 miles weekly. The 27-year-old practices nine times a week, totaling 17 hours (seven practices at two hours each, two at 1½ hours apiece). Why is she swimming so much?



**BRAD  
 SPENCER**

Stockwell has a goal in mind come April, exactly four years to the week that her life changed forever, yet in many ways, stayed the same.

It was 2004, Stockwell was a 1st lieutenant in the U.S. Army and stationed in Iraq.

She was helping lead a supply convoy. I think you know where this is going.

Stockwell is alive and well, breathing every day, smiling, laughing, swimming, walking, running, doing everything you and I can do—in some cases better. She currently lives in Chicago with her husband, Dick, himself also an Iraq War veteran, and both are contemplating moving out to the west suburbs someday. Oak Park is a definite possibility, says Stockwell.

We could use someone like Stockwell permanently in Oak Park.

“There’s really no reason to feel sorry for me,” she says, convincingly.

How can you, anyway? While you’re sitting there ignoring all those dreams, goals, or New Year’s resolutions you set, Stockwell is living hers. At the age of 18, she joined the Army, something she had wanted to do since she was



**BREAKING THE WAVES:** *Melissa Stockwell, who works in Oak Park and may someday call the village home, is hoping to compete at the 2008 Paralympics in China.*

a little girl. Stockwell got married in ’03—in a helicopter painted as a U.S. flag hovering above Las Vegas. In ’04, she finished the New York City Marathon on a handbike. She’s competed in numerous triathlons. She once swam from Alcatraz Island to the mainland of San Francisco.

Another childhood dream of Stockwell’s was representing the U.S. as a gymnast in the Olympics. That will never happen. But last Friday she left for Colorado to train for the U.S. Paralympics Swimming Team Trials with hopes of competing in the ’08 Paralympic Games in China.

You want gory details, but you don’t need them to know Stockwell as a hero, a survivor, a soldier, a person. I’ll tell you this: There was a bridge, a Humvee, an improvised explosive device, an explosion, a crash, and a war. Somewhere in there Stockwell lost her left leg, but it doesn’t seem too far gone.

“Just because I don’t have a leg doesn’t mean I can’t do the things I dream about,” she says. “I’m extremely happy with where my life has brought me; actually, I’m quite thankful.”

So in April, Stockwell will be competing to fulfill yet another dream. If this one doesn’t pan out, she says it’ll only make the next one that much more rewarding.

“I like challenges. I’m sure I’ll find something to occupy my time.”

As for the war and its critics, Stockwell offers a unique perspective.

“Time will tell whether the war was right or wrong,” she says, and it’s apparent she’s answered this question many times over. “Soldiers have died. I lost my leg. I’d like to think it was worth it, but time will tell.”

Stockwell says she does not see herself as “disabled,” simply “mildly inconvenienced.”

You just can’t feel sorry for someone so heroic.