



## **ROBERT PIERCE**

□ • **Leader & Times**

In 2011, just two days before Christmas, Denise Osborn Dickerson was on her way home in the Oklahoma Panhandle from Guymon to Texhoma, about a 20-mile drive.

About two miles east of Texhoma, she spotted a car in the ditch.

“We had some bad weather, and it was starting again,” □ she said. “They had actually spun off

and got stuck. They were from Wichita headed to California for Christmas break. They couldn't get out and couldn't get AAA there, so they were just sitting there. I got off the road as far as I could get off the road without getting stuck and got part of the family in my car."

Dickerson said as she was helping the people in the stranded car, another vehicle approached hers at a fast rate of speed, and that vehicle struck hers bumper to bumper with her body in between the cars.

Dickerson suffered numerous injuries as a result of the accident, particularly in her legs.

"I was in Amarillo for six weeks," she said in a recent phone interview. "I've had 13 surgeries so far. I'm holding off 14 till after the first of the year."

Dickerson has had a hard time getting prosthetic limbs to fit her legs, and at the time of the interview, she had just gotten her fifth artificial leg.

"It's just causing a lot of pain. I'm getting ulcers," she said. "We've just moved to Oklahoma City, and we're only 20 minutes from the best amputation orthopedic surgeon in the region."

Dickerson's time in Amarillo was spent between Northwest Texas Hospital and later inpatient therapy at Baptist St. Anthony's. Her first attempt at walking came in November 2012, almost a year after the accident.

"I had a leg, but it wasn't a very good leg. I broke my pelvis in four places and every other bone in both legs," she said. "I broke everything from my waist down. Fortunately, no internal injuries or anything."

In efforts to heal Dickerson, doctors straightend her leg and amputated her foot.

"I had a skin graft on my right leg," she said. "The hole was so big the bones would come out."

Dickerson said the doctor who performed plastic surgery on her was one of the best in Amarillo.

"With this type of injury, it really takes somebody pretty skilled to cover a spot like that," she said. "He did my surgery."

Prior to the accident, Dickerson was a fourth grade teacher in the Guymon school system and manager of the Northridge 8 movie theater, all in addition to being a single mom. Now, she finds herself on full disability.

"My mobility's not real great," she said. "Right now, I just walked through Walmart, and my lower back where my pelvis is plated and pinned, that's just killing me. My legs are killing me, and I swell real easy. I do tutor on the side."

A Guymon native who now lives in Mustang, Okla., a suburb of Oklahoma City, Dickerson said she has always had a strong faith.

"I was born and raised in church," she said. "My fiancé and I at the time were always in church, and I consider myself a pretty strong and faithful person. Two years and five weeks before my accident, my 15-year-old son was killed in a car wreck over by Texhoma. He died on Nov. 3, and I was teaching fourth grade and managing the movie theater. I just shut everybody out. I didn't turn to drugs or alcohol or anything."

As she continued to push away everyone in her life, Dickerson continued to work following her son's death.

"I was just kind of going through the motions," she said. "When this happened, they lost me in the trauma room, and I saw a gold chair with a light in it and my son walked up. He said, 'Mom I love it here, and I'm so happy, but you can't come right now because Kyle (another of

Dickerson's sons) needs you.' He just grinned and turn around and walked off. I was in a drug induced coma for 12 days. When I woke up, my husband now said 'You're different.'"

Unable to talk for 12 days because of a breathing tube, Dickerson made attempts to whisper to her husband while pointing at her legs, trying to tell him what happened.

"He said 'No, you're different,'" she said. "I started crying. I said, 'I saw Kody.' He said, 'That's it.' From then on, I just knew that this is what I needed to do. I help amputees."

As she has recovered from her injuries, Dickerson now helps moms with lost kids and speaks for groups at the Oklahoma Blood Institute.

"I speak to them about blood donation, and I just feel like that's why He left me here – to show these miracles happen," she said. "It was one thing in place after another. They stabelized me. The Texhoma ambulance took me to the Goodwell roadside park. They had to stabilize me to put me in the Guymon ambulance."

Dickerson recalled the time as emergency workers were getting her the attention she needed.

"They were calling for the helicopter," she said. "The helicopter wasn't there. They didn't think I'd live long enough to make it in the helicopter. They called Eagle Med out of Liberal. They had just taken somebody to Oklahoma City, and they had their landing gear down about to land in Liberal when they got the call. They landed at the Guymon airport and were waiting at the hospital when I got there. It was just one miracle after another, and the doctors said they have absolutely no explanation."

Dickerson said at one point, her hemoglobin level had gotten as low as 3 percent, a level unheard of particularly at the hospital she got treatment from.

"To this day, Northwest Texas Hospital has had no one live under 5 percent," she said. "They

said it's just not possible."

After the accident, Dickerson was frequently asked if she was devastated about the loss of her foot. Being a faithful person, she remained positive.

"I said, 'I lost my son. This foot is no big deal,'" she said. "The worst thing that could happen to me had already happened, so this accident was no big deal. If this is what comes out of it and if I can help this many people, that's why God allowed it to happen. Even with all this, there's always someone worse off than me. There's always something to be thankful for. That's the bottom line."

Now, Dickerson's story will take somewhat of a national stage on the Christian news program "The 700 Club."

"They do segments on people who've overcome cancer and things like that, just stories to uplift people and show faith and show miracles and things like that," she said. "I had contacted them a year and a half ago. I just called their story line and kind of gave them a brief summary. A lady called me and asked to do an extensive phone interview. We did that, and she did an extensive interview with my husband."

Having moved to Mustang last year, Dickerson notified the show's producers of the move, and this meant family in Oklahoma City and Odessa, Texas, where another of Dickerson's sons now lives and a doctor in Amarillo.

"Everyone of those people needed to be involved in order to tell this story correctly," she said. "My son was 22 at the time, and when he got to the hospital, they realized he was actually my next of kin."

Initially, due to having everyone needed to tell the story in several locations, Dickerson said the "700 Club" producers were somewhat reluctant to do the story.

“They said ‘We just can’t get it coordinated,’” she said. “They tried to get three stories in one place, in one kind of area just to keep their costs down. Just out of the blue yesterday, they called me and said, ‘We have two more stories in your area, and we’re flying in on Oct. 23. Could you spend the day of the 24th with us?’ They said, ‘Yours is one of the biggest stories we’ve ever done.’ They said, ‘We could be in your home up to six hours doing these interviews.’ They’re bringing their film crew and two producers. They’re going to do that here, and then they’ll leave here and go to Amarillo. They’ll do some recreation at the hospital. They said, ‘This is such a profound story that we want to film the actual hospital and interview the doctor that saved you and the hospital that took care of you.’”

Dickerson said she knew she needed to share her story, and “The 700 Club” was a great way to do so.

“This way, they can do all the work and make this production,” she said. “If I can get rights to the story, and if I wanted to speak to a big church here in the city or something, I could play that and use that as a basis to speak to people.”

Dickerson said other more familiar miracle stories pale in comparison to hers – at least in her opinion.

“‘Heaven Is For Real’ and all those shows don’t have anything on me,” she said. “We’re hoping someday maybe we can get a book done and maybe even more.”

While filming is scheduled for next month, Dickerson said producers are unsure of when the episode will run, but they are hopeful during the holiday season.

“She said, ‘If we can get this all done, we’d like to run it on our Christmas miracles at Christmas time,’” she said. “With mine happening Dec. 23 and it is such a big miracle, we’re kind of guessing maybe that’s what they’re shooting for.”