

Before she got in the ambulance, she asked Kevin if her feet were still attached to her legs. He said yes. That planted the hope that she would keep her legs. At this point, the Corcorans thought their 18-year-old, Sydney, was somewhere safe, away from the bombs, watching the race with friends. But in fact, Sydney lay not far away from where her mother fell. She looked down to see blood gushing from a gaping wound on her thigh.

Unbeknownst to Sydney, her mother was on her way to Boston Medical Center, a mile away. There Celeste's hope that she could keep her legs was dashed by a doctor who said they'd have to be amputated.

While Celeste was in surgery, a doctor figured out that a young woman with dark hair, large brown eyes and a mangled leg was her daughter.

A piece of shrapnel from the bomb had severed a major blood vessel in her right thigh. A good Samaritan had applied steady pressure to her leg so she didn't bleed out and die on the pavement. And doctor's were able to save Sydney's leg. Mother and daughter ended up in the same recovery room.

Over the next week, Celeste had three more operations to remove shrapnel and damaged tissue from her legs so her wounds could be closed. "I knew I was going to live and I was very grateful for that," she says. "But I really was very discouraged about what my quality of life was going to be. Doctors had to amputate both of Celeste's legs because damage from the first bomb blast was so severe.

She also began to hate the way she had to depend on someone else to do everything for her. She was always the one to organize things, do things, exert her independence in a million little ways.

At that low point, a stranger walked into the Corcoran's hospital room - a U.S. Marine named Gabe Martinez. He's a veteran of Afghanistan who lost both legs from injuries very similar to Celeste's.

He came in and said, "You know, I was just like you, I felt helpless. I felt like I couldn't do anything for myself." Martinez, who works with a group of amputees called the Semper Fi Fund that counsels severely injured servicemen, was the living proof Celeste needed that double amputees don't have to be dependant invalids. He was "steady as a rock" on his prosthetic legs, she says. "And he's telling me I can be the exact same way."

Martinez and a fellow Marine, Cameron West, a single amputee, came back for more visits. They've pledged to help Celeste and Sydney through the coming weeks and months.

That was Celeste's third turning point. "After I met him, it was like this...this little spark," she says. "You know, it's *really* going to be OK. Before then, I knew I was going to live. I knew my loved ones were going to be around me.

But the independant me... after that point, I got it that the sky's the limit. Nothing was taken from me that I can't get back.

I can even be better than I was before.

And that's how Celeste Corcoran was feeling as she and Sydney prepared to leave Boston Medical Center and go to a rehab hospital for the next stage of their recovery.

A banner reading 'Corcoran Strong' hangs on the wall of Celeste and Sydney's hospital room

