

## Ellen Ceelen of the Netherlands National Women's Sitting Volleyball Team shares her story



**Ellen Ceelen**

My name is Ellen Ceelen and I am playing sitting volleyball for the national team of the Netherlands. I am married to Marcel and we have two boys, Levi and Joah.

When I was at age twelve, I started playing volleyball. In 2001, when I was 18 years old, I did volunteer work in a construction project in Jamaica. There I got ill because of a sepsis caused by a meningococcal bacterium. This sepsis caused clots in my blood and because of this my blood couldn't longer flow through my veins. As a result 8 fingers and my lower legs died and had to be amputated. In Jamaica they weren't able to help me, so I was transferred to a hospital in Miami. I stayed there for 10 weeks and after this also 9 weeks in a hospital in the Netherlands.

Of course this was a very difficult time for me, my family and Marcel, with whom I had a relationship since a month then. In a short period of time my whole life had changed. In the first years I was only trying to survive. I really tried to live my life as normal as possible. I was behaving very tough, busy learning how to walk with prosthesis and trying to do all things by myself. I didn't accept much help from others, not even from my boyfriend, who only tried to be gallant. I achieved a lot these first years, but mentally it was difficult. I sometimes describe it as my feelings were locked in this period. My sadness was too great.

My faith in God is very important for me since my disease. In the hospital in Miami I remember myself thinking and calling out: 'God, this is too hard for me to deal with, I need you.' I believe He has helped me to achieve a lot and to persevere in difficult moments. After six years of just keep going, He also helped me to grieve and to process everything that had happened in my life. Most important for me in my life is to know that God loves me no matter what and to believe He has a plan for my life.



After my disease I discovered sitting volleyball. I really enjoyed to play volleyball again in a setting with other people where I wasn't different. In sitting volleyball everybody has something, I wasn't the exception here. This felt as a relief at that moment. And of course I enjoyed playing again. It was the same game, but much faster and more reactive.

My best performance with the team was in 2006, when I represented my country for the first time. Playing in our homeland we became World Champion. After this I quit for a few years. I have been playing for the national team again since 2016. Since then we have had several highlights in playing at the Paralympics in Rio and winning the bronze medal at the European Championships in 2017. I really enjoy playing for the national team. I believe God has given me the talent to play and it is my desire to glorify Him with my gift.