

Puss in boots on the ground

AS A U.S. Army machine gunner in Afghanistan, Karolyn Smith fought in more than 300 combat patrols in 2004 and 2005. She survived a roadside bomb in April 2005 that caused brain and spinal injuries and later suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"Chronic pain changes your personality," says Smith, a Costco member. "Suicide is never the answer, but the pain does push you toward those thoughts." Reaching out for help in 2014 led her to an animal shelter in her native San Diego.

That's where Smith met Sophia, a kitten with an unusual history. "She was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around her paw and had to have her leg amputated," Smith says. "The shelter warned me that she was disabled. I thought, 'Who better to raise a disabled cat than a disabled veteran?'"

Smith was determined to help her new kitten. Imagining how uncomfortable Sophia's stump must feel, Smith started putting doll shoes and tiny padded socks on her. Taking her quest to the next level,



U.S. Army veteran and inventor Karolyn Smith, with Sophia (left) and Leonidas.

KAROLYN SMITH

she found a lab that could create a prosthetic leg for Sophia, made by a 3D printer.

The leg is now in its fourth prototype, and Smith continues to push to make her furry friend's life as comfortable as possible. Self-funded, Smith has published a



OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS

Click here to see Karolyn Smith and her cats. (See page 9 for details.)

children's book, *Sophia the Bionic Cat* (Karolyn Smith, 2016; not available at Costco), to educate kids about amputation and to help raise money toward perfecting the prosthetic for Sophia and making that technology available for other amputee pets. Additionally, Animal Planet is currently airing a feature on Smith and Sophia on *My Cat from Hell* with Jackson Galaxy.

Smith now relies on Sophia and Sophia's brother, Leonidas, to manage her PTSD. "When cats are purring in your arms they release oxytocin [aka the 'love hormone,' in humans]," Smith says. "I went to the shelter to save a cat, but she really ended up saving me." —*Elisabeth Handley*