

Before August 1, 2004, I was like any other 18-year-old kid. I finished my freshman year of college and was loving life. I was an athlete, good student, and all-around happy guy.

I went on our annual family vacation to Bethany Beach, like I always did during the summer. It was the first day and all I could think about was going to the beach and having some fun. I called some of my friends and convinced them to go down and ride some waves. About an hour into the experience, one wave changed my life and my family's lives forever.

While in the critical unit, my family was told that I was never going to walk again and that I never would be able to breathe on my own. The doctors always seem to give you the worst possible scenario in these situations. I guess so if anything positive happens, it's considered a miracle. All I did was lie in bed and hope for the best. There was no talk about the importance of trying to keep our bodies healthy; you are told to adapt to this lifestyle for the rest of your life. I can't and won't except these old philosophies anymore, because I know better. The bottom line is that we're in the fight of our lives and by just sitting on our butts all day, nothing is ever going to get done. The first three months of my new life all I did was lay in bed. I went from 185 pounds to 135 pounds in less than three weeks. My muscles atrophied to the point where I did not look like the same kid. I ended up getting a decubitus skin ulcer and ended up having two cases of pneumonia. My body was going down a road that would be impossible to heal from. With some luck, I was able to hit a turning point and was able to wean myself off the ventilator. Three months into my injury I began to flicker some of my right bicep muscle. My therapist used the little amount of movement I had to really motivate me. This was huge mentally and I was finally able to focus on something that made me feel like I had some control in my life. I began to realize in order to beat this injury I would first need to overcome the mental battle of the injury. I began to focus on everything I could do and did not dwell on what I could not do. Because of this I've been able to accomplish so many things that I thought would be impossible. My understanding is that the body does not control the mind, but the mind controls the body--with this, one's potential is unlimited.

Through another stroke of luck, three people came into my life which changed me mentally and physically forever. I ended up going to a conference where the keynote speakers were no other than Dana Reeve, Brooke Ellison, and Dr. John McDonald. Dana taught me about the true meaning of the word dedication. Brooke Ellison taught me the endless possibilities of the mind and Dr. John McDonald gave me hope.

Dr. McDonald started to talk to me about his advanced restorative therapy program. Movement begets movement. As he was explaining this to me I began to realize that I had fallen behind.

The bottom line is that these old philosophies need to change. We are at a crossroad where we are scripting our futures and we're not going to let the past dictate our lifestyles. We must learn from the past in order to bring us closer to the cure. We live in a time and age where our American lifestyles are defined by freedom. This freedom allows us to be creative and allows us to think outside the box.

Scientists please understand that the answer is out there and we need to piece the puzzle together. This can only be done if we explore all areas, all therapies, and all possible factors that will enable us to re-connect the spinal cord. We must communicate and understand what other scientists are doing so that we are not overlapping the same clinical trials. In order to go forward at a fast pace we must learn from one another's mistakes and figure out what is working and what is not working. Let's start focusing on developing the right combination therapies to find the cure.

My last message goes out to my SCI community. Now after being injured over a year, I can now see what needs to be done. We cannot wait around hoping that one day the cure will just be here and we will automatically be better. We must keep our bodies in the best possible shape and focus on living a productive life until the cure is found.

Lastly, I need to give a shout out to Dana and Christopher Reeve, you will always be my heroes and Christopher, I will never forget your words "it is not a matter of if, but a matter of when."

Joshua J. Basile