

Broken Neck, Unbroken Spirit

Category: Bravery

written by Cassandra Brandt | March 19, 2025

The sun is as warm as I remember it. I'd never minded that hot ball of heat, even when it beat down on me during many a long summer, as I worked outside with my hands.

My hands. I look down at them now, my fingers giving the illusion they're gripping the little knobs on the handrests of my power wheelchair, but I recall the occupational therapist placing them there back in the rehabilitation facility's rec hall an hour ago.

The world out here is as busy as I remember it: the angry, anxious traffic, each motorist more convinced than the next that arrival at their own personal destination should be prioritized.

The construction workers in their shiny hardhats and bright orange reflective vests don't glance at me as we cross the street to the parking garage.

I'm not much to look at anymore.

I shake my head at the intrusive thought and almost veer off course.

I must keep my mind from going to such dark places. I must be gracious that the car accident didn't take my mind or my life. I must focus on what is within my control.

The shallow opinions of others don't make the cut. My arms and my legs and my bowels and my bladder don't make the cut either.

I can control my opinions, though. And I can control this damn chair. Practicing the operation of this power chair is part of my therapy now; I control it with taps of my head.

The weeks since I sustained a complete cervical spinal cord injury have been long, lonely, cold, and sterile. The walls around me are white, the halls loud and filled with people whose lives look over.

I will take mine back somehow—snatch it from a cruel fate with supine hands.

I'm indignant that the injury could steal so much. My desire to cultivate a positive perspective is a dire need.

I can't hate my life. I can't hate myself. I have too much pride.

I won't let this disability make me invisible. I'm going to use it as a platform. My words *will* be heard. This power chair will be my preacher's pulpit, my social justice soapbox.

As long as the sun is still in the sky and breath is still in my lungs and I

still have my voice, I'll use it.

I turn my face up to the light and smile.

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