

Hi there, I was a friend of Paul's. Can you send me the story you used to have posted on your website in Sept. 2009 about him? I attached a great 2001 article that he wrote about his day-to-day after his accident. He typed this himself with his mouth stick and it took almost a month because it was such a huge endeavor. Thanks, Kate

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This month, the Marketing and Sales R.A.V.E. diversity action team, invited those Cast Members working with a disability to share a "Day in the Life" essay in order to increase awareness of the unique situations and challenges faced everyday. These essays will be published in the Marketing Mailbag throughout the month of October. The following is an essay by Paul Wallace, Associate Brand Manager in Domestic Marketing.

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At about 6:15 in the morning, I am awakened by the soft voice of my night nurse, asking me "what would you like for breakfast?" I've just spent the last 4 hours asleep, positioned on my right side. My night nurse has repositioned me onto my back and performed thirty minutes of exercises on my arms, hands, legs and feet to keep my joints and limbs flexible.... I usually reply, "oh, just cereal with fruit". Most mornings, I am reminded that although I am paralyzed, my chest, shoulders and back have awakened with severe pain.

You see, in February of 1988 while skiing in Vail, Colorado, I took a serious fall trying to jump a mogul. I broke my neck at the c2-c3 cervical spine vertebrae resulting in immediate loss of mobility below my shoulders and loss of the ability to breathe on my own. I spent nearly a month in the intensive care unit at St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, CO, where the damaged vertebrae in my neck were fused together, to keep my head from falling off. A tube was permanently inserted into my throat to give access to a ventilator that automatically pumps 1250cc of air, twelve times each minute, 24 hours a day into my lungs. I was told I may need to use the ventilator for the rest of my life.

Following ICU, I spent six months in the Spinal Cord Injury Rehab Center at Craig Hospital, in Denver, CO. I received extensive training in every aspect of my required care. Because I have no movement in my hands, I learned how to operate a power wheelchair by using a breath actuated computer system. I was taught how to be transferred from the bed to a wheelchair and back again. The only means available to me then for writing and typing, was by using a specially designed mouth stick. The most magnificent learning was in the respiratory area. Doctors and therapists discovered that a very small part of my diaphragm was actually working, and that I was able to raise and lower my shoulders. Both of these discoveries gave hope that I could wean off the ventilator. It was a slow process starting with a minute off the ventilator three times a day and building up to one hour three times a day. Today, on a good day, I can be free of the ventilator 4-5 hours at one time, and breathe almost like you.

After breakfast, around 7am, my day nurse arrives to start my morning care, a process that can take 3-4 hours. This daily routine includes bathing, breathing treatments, nursing stuff, fitting of an abdominal corset (to help me breathe, maintain my blood pressure, and help to keep me upright in the chair). Except for my shirt, I am completely dressed in the

bed. I am over six feet tall and weigh around 170 lbs. yet one person can slide me horizontally from my bed into the wheelchair. Once in the wheelchair, I bring myself into a sitting position where I will spend the next twelve hours, my day.

Every action you may take for granted, I require assistance to accomplish. There are medications to be taken, mid-morning snack, shaving, shampooing, having my teeth brushed and putting my shirt and nametag on. Interruptions are frequent, as I'm sure you're aware. Because I am immobile in the chair, It is imperative to change my position in order to prevent skin breakdown. I do this by tilting my chair back at least 45 degrees every hour during the day for at least six minutes.

It's now time for lunch, which my nurse prepares and feeds to me. Good nutrition is imperative to maintain my health, especially since my body is already compromised. Any weight gain or loss would have far-reaching effects.

Most people can clear their throats easily by coughing up whatever is down there. I, on the other hand, must rely on mechanical suctioning of any liquid that builds up in my throat and lungs. This is not an uncomfortable task, but not doing it can be life threatening if the liquid is allowed to accumulate. During a normal day, I am suctioned 7-8 times. I bring this up now, because this is the last thing we do before loading me up with my ever-present back pack, sweater, hat (keeps my body warm, as I have no way of regulating my temperature) and loading me into my van. (Ask me someday about the truly miraculous efforts that produced my first van!)

My van is equipped with a hydraulic lift that raises me from ground level to interior level. Once in the van, I am strapped in and buckled down for the journey to 220 Celebration Place. A voyage that brings me great joy, because, I am going to work! My hospitalization and rehab the encouragement and support of many, and the morning's preparations have brought me to this point, a point that gives me great satisfaction and pride.

Once I get to Celebration, I am unloaded from the van and we make our way into the building and up to my office. Along the way I am greeted and welcomed by countless caring cast members and lots of Joe's wonderful people. What a great way to start my day. These are moments I cherish all day long.

The centerpiece of my office (aside from the beautiful view) is a huge L-shaped computer desk that stands about 14 inches above an average desk. I position my wheelchair beneath the desk. My keyboard and telephone are angled 35 degrees enabling me to reach the keys using a mouth stick. The numeric keypad has been adapted to let me control the movement and functions of the mouse.

At this time, the portable ventilator that has been my life-support all morning, is turned off. One of my greatest blessings is the ability to breathe without using the ventilator while I am working.

My job responsibilities include insuring the correct use of Disney trademark and copyrighted materials; and the accuracy of brand information. I provide guidelines, suggested copy points and images. I work directly with third parties to help them develop their marketing and sales collateral. My clients include hotels, groups, conventions and miscellaneous requests. We pack a lot of work into our day, and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to do so.

As we drive home, I am reminded of all the blessings of the day, the expert care of my nurses, the wheelchair and van that give me the freedom of mobility, my job that allows me to be productive and to contribute, the support and encouragement of my leadership, and the many kindnesses readily extended to me by fellow cast members.

Once we get home, my night nurse begins my evening care, which is much like the morning care in reverse, and takes just as long! As my eyes begin to close, my night nurse softly reads meditations and verses from the Bible. I am filled with gratitude. My faith is enriched. I fall asleep quickly.

To all those who have touched my life along the way and those who continue to help and encourage me to go on, I am eternally grateful.