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AN Olympic Journey BEYOND SCI

By Mark Ideson
and Sari Shatil, PT, MSc

“Rehabilitation is a series of small victories.”

Life can change in an instant, and this became our reality in 2007. I was an active young man, proud husband, father and friend. I loved swimming and hiking the rocky shores of Georgian Bay with my daughter Brooklyn and my beautiful wife Lara. When I wasn't working or with my family, I was golfing, another passion. We had just moved to Whitby and I was thrilled to be starting a new job flying traffic reporters in Toronto. This fulfilled my dream to fly and Lara's dream to be able to parent Brooklyn, then 16 months, without worrying about making ends meet. Abruptly, our dreams came tumbling out of the sky one cold February night when the helicopter I was piloting crashed into a farmer's field during a test flight after routinely scheduled maintenance.

Lara recalls feeling as if she had been transported into an episode of Grey's Anatomy as she found herself begging me to fight for my life. I had been placed in an induced coma as the doctors repaired my broken body – like putting Humpty Dumpty together again. My major injuries included a fractured left leg, right femur, pelvis and sternum, as well as fractures of C1 and C5/6, which resulted in incomplete quadriplegia. After two weeks and nine surgeries, I could breathe without a ventilator. Awakened from the coma, I started on the road to recovery.

On the trauma floor at Hamilton General Hospital, the physiotherapist would cajole me to get out of bed, which, after lying down for weeks, was painful, uncomfortable and challenging. A trauma chair allowed me to sit up for short bursts, starting at a maximum thirty-degree angle, and stretching became frequent to keep range of motion in my upper limbs and hands. The physiotherapist also became our teacher as it was important for Lara to continue the stretching program after hours.

Soon I was moved to Parkwood Hospital for Rehabilitation in London, Ontario, where I spent the next five months as an inpatient. After the skin graft suction bandage was removed, we concentrated on long sitting, rolling over and sitting balance on the edge of the plinth. I was still very weak and needed therapists and nurses to transfer me. As my strength increased, sit-

ting balance got better and we experimented with slide board transfers and the tilt table to bear weight on my legs. The first day I stood at the side of the plinth after months of using the tilt table was May 31, 2007, Lara's birthday, and it took a team of three physiotherapists and two assistants to make it happen. Rehabilitation is a series of small victories.

I was discharged from Parkwood in July of 2007 still completely dependent on Lara and personal support workers to perform most of my activities of daily living. Because I had my accident at work, I was covered for outpatient therapy and travel expenses getting to the hospital. I was showing amazing progress and WSIB was keen on having me start as soon as possible. The next week I was back at Parkwood in the outpatient rehab department, concentrating on strength training, sitting, standing, transferring and ultimately walking with a platform walker. I spent months wheeling around on level surfaces in a manual chair until confident that I would be able to use it in the community. With increasing strength, transferring became easier and many doors were opened, including driving and returning to sport – wheelchair rugby and curling.

During the last six months as an outpatient at Parkwood, I spent every second week at Physio-Logic, a clinic in Toronto that specialized in the Bobath approach and offered use of a body weight support treadmill. It was at Physio-Logic where I made the most gains during my rehab. The therapy was aggressive and treadmill time increased strength in my legs and trunk and had a positive

effect on bowel and bladder function. I moved from the platform walker to the Kaye walker, forearm crutches and even trekking poles for short stints.

To complement the Bobath physiotherapy, I left Parkwood and started at Neuphysio in London in May 2010. There we concentrated on core strength, over-ground walking, and stairs.

Therapeutic golf and a community gym program were incorporated, and I became very involved with wheelchair curling, all of which were satisfying for both mind and body.

Five years post-2007, I am still an active young man. I hope to represent Canada at the

2014 Paralympic Games and sport-specific therapy at Neuphysio is a key factor in the team selection process. I am a proud husband, friend and, as Lara calls me, quadfather. I love spending time with my daughter (Brooklyn, 6) and son (Myles, 3) and my beautiful wife Lara. Nothing has really changed except I just happen to be sitting down while living a fulfilling life. ■

“ Nothing has really changed except I just happen to be sitting down while living a fulfilling life. ”

Mark Ideson is part of the pool of players for the 2012-13 national wheelchair curling team, and hopes to represent Canada at the 2014 Paralympic Games in Russia. Sari Shatil, PT MSc, is a physiotherapist and the owner of Neuphysio Rehabilitation. She is one of the physiotherapists involved with Mark's remarkable recovery.