



Chapter 2

Surviving

When facing our challenges for the first time sometimes surviving is enough. Most of the challenges we face are triggered by a certain event or a chain of events in which we have little or no control over. I like to think of this as the moment our shackles are slipped on and we're left at the base of the mountain in the cold. Although we often don't have control over events that create our adversities, we do have a say in how we respond. Every life changing event presents us with a decision. Are we going to be

paralyzed by our current situation or are we going to fight to survive?

My family and I were faced with this decision very early in my life. In fact, we encountered the event that altered our lives the morning I was born. Early one February morning my parents entered the hospital to bring life into the world. Little did they know what would transpire in the following hours and weeks to come.

The process of pregnancy is always a sensitive and miraculous time in one's life, my mom had carried twins a week past full term without any complications. A week prior to giving birth, my mom had an ultrasound to check if my sister and I were in the correct positions. At that time we were but the doctor said that if anything changed they would have to perform a C-section.

However, as the birthing process began it was apparent that something was wrong. My sister had been born without complications and was being attended to by the nurses. Now it was my turn! Sometime between the last ultrasound and the beginning of labor, I had flipped causing me

to enter the canal breech. Breech presentation is a term describing an infant who is either born legs first, or in my case, leading with the buttocks. That's right, I started my life by mooning the doctor! Due to my position, it took over to 20 minutes for me to enter the world, many of which I was deprived of oxygen. As a result of this, I was presented blue and lifeless. As the doctors began CPR, my parents sat there in shock, praying that I would cry.

Once I was stable, I was transported to another hospital that had a neonatal ICU. Although I had survived the traumatic experience at birth, my future was still very unclear. Due to my brain injury, I proceeded to have multiple seizures throughout the first 24 hours. As the doctors updated my parents on the condition of their baby boy, they outlined several outcomes, including severe physical and mental disabilities or death. Because of this news and the trauma that she experienced, my mom was hesitant about seeing me for the first time. After talking with nurses, she decided to come see me and from then on I was rarely left alone! Over the course of my 3-week hospital stay, I had a

constant stream of visitors between my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. They even taped a picture of my twin sister to my incubator, which seemed to soothe me.

My family was finally able to welcome me home on a snowy March day, and my parents were thrilled to have both of their babies at home for the first time. Over the next several months, my parents learned the joys and challenges associated with caring for two newborns. Right from the start, my parents built a community around my sister and I, enlisting the help of friends and family. My mom and grandma Shelley would marvel at the rate that I seemed to be developing compared to my sister. I was the first to roll over and when they stood me on their knees, I could push myself up. However, they would soon find out that my ability to push with my legs was not a sign of strength, rather spasticity.

Because of the time I spent in the hospital, the doctors wanted to monitor my development and ordered testing once I reached 5 months. These tests lead to a diagnosis of Extrapramidal

Cerebral Palsy and chronic drooling. This would set my family on the course of multiple doctors' appointments and several therapy sessions per week at the Shriners Children's Hospital in Portland.

As they struggled with the weight of having a disabled child and being unsure of my abilities and future, my parents had to decide how they were going to raise my sister and I. Although, they realized that I would require more assistance and attention as I grew and being unsure of what my abilities would be, they chose to raise me with the same standard as my sister. Instead of giving up and enabling me, they were determined to help me reach my full potential, regardless of how difficult it was to see me struggle or how much time they had to spend transporting me to different appointments. Due to my parent's determination, I learned to never give up. In our house, the words "no" and "I can't" were not acceptable answers to the unique challenges I faced. At an early age I learned that as long as I tried and gave it my best effort, there would always be help available.

Throughout my life I have revisited my first couple of years through self-reflection. Using the 6 links of turning bondage into tools of freedom, I've reflected on what lessons I learned in those early years and who were the people who saw me through. Who helped me carry my chains? The most powerful lesson I learned during this time was that everybody has different types of challenges so just because your challenges look much different, don't let it stop you. Don't take no for an answer!

I also learned that I can't be completely independent. In all actuality, none of us are completely independent! We all need others to encourage us and lend a hand after we give it our best shot. Throughout my childhood my family served as the starting point for what would become a powerful support system.

Reflection

At the end of each remaining chapters, I want to give you an opportunity to reflect on the lessons I have outlined in the chapter. I highly

encourage you to keep a journal! Prior to writing this book, I wasn't keen on the idea of keeping a journal, due to the sheer fact of how long it takes me to type. However, I have recently found journaling to be freeing and insightful. If writing isn't a strong suit, try talking to a digital recorder. Get it out of your head! Meditate on your discoveries and revelations.

- Sometimes you need to fight to survive! What were the events in my life that spawned the challenges that I've faced or are currently facing?
- Has this event paralyzed me? Did I choose to fight? Am I still stuck? How so?
- Change can only occur when someone decides to take action! What lessons did I learn from enduring this event or challenge? How can I apply this to my life TODAY?
- Who is encouraging me? If I need help, who can I call?