

One man's challenge



What do you do when the unthinkable happens? If you're Michael Miner, you learn to adapt.

Miner, 36, will always remember July 10, 1990. That was the day he broke his neck in a boating accident on Pyramid Lake near Reno, Nev., paralyzing himself from the shoulders down.

For someone 6-foot-4-inches tall, 230 pounds, and very active in snow skiing and boating, paralysis came as a hammer blow. He spent a month in the intensive care unit, undergoing three operations. He went through crisis after crisis, once receiving 11 pints of blood after a stress ulcer in his stomach ruptured.

A chartered flight took him to Sacred Heart Hospital in Eugene, where the more difficult part of his recovery began: three months of learning how to adapt.

Now, less than a year after his accident, Miner is a true success story.

"I'm doing OK," Miner said. "I'm upset because I'm not up and walking. Realistically, I know that's a long way off, but I'm not going to quit trying."

After eight months of three-times-a-week physical therapy at Sacred Heart, Miner has made remarkable progress. He's regained the use of his arms, though his hands still haven't reached full mobility. The muscles in his back and along his torso are starting to firm up, giving Miner a measure of control above the waist.

Don Douglas, his physical therapist, said Miner is an easy patient to work with.

"A lot of people in his position can't problem-solve ways to move their bodies," Douglas said. "He can. For someone his size, he's doing well. At this point it's easy on me because he's doing most of the work."

Though grueling, Miner said he looks forward to his physical therapy sessions because "it's all going toward recovery."

"I've already accepted the position I'm in, but I don't

dwell on it," Miner said. "Recovery is frustrating when there are interruptions, like when I hurt my shoulder or get sick. There are certain things I can't do right now, but I won't be denied."

The frustrations come in many forms. On May 6, his insurance company informed him it was cutting off his attendant aide care, which pays for having an attendant in his home four hours a day, six days a week.

Miner depends on his attendant to help him out around the house, so he promptly got on the phone, and after haggling with the insurance company, got himself another 130 days of attendant care — a little more than four months worth.

But Miner doesn't let the distractions interrupt his therapy.

"(Miner) doesn't sit there and say 'I'm going to walk and not work,'" Douglas said. "It's his personality. He's always pushing himself."

"No one knows your body like yourself," Miner said. "I'll never say die."

He credits most of his recovery and his upbeat state of mind to his family. He and his wife of four years, Ruth, have two young children, Kyle and Kailey, and live 20 miles out of Eugene on five acres near Fern Ridge Reservoir.

"My family was the only thing that kept me alive," Miner said. "It's everything. Without them, I'd still work hard on my PT, but I'd have a different frame of mind. They are my strength."

Miner admits having young children and living so far out of town does present problems, but he has found ways to get around the limitations.

"I'll fight to keep my marriage," he said. "I'm not going to let my condition ruin the love I have for my family."

"I try to spend as much time as possible with my kids," Miner added. "I don't want my kids to see me give up."

As for giving advice to people who find themselves paralyzed, Miner had just a few simple words.

"Don't ever give up. Always hope because you just never know how long it will take or what it will take to get there."



(clockwise, from top far left) Miner tries to spend three afternoons at a specially adapted gym at the YMCA, "so that I'll be healthy when I walk again." (top left) Therapist Don Douglas uses a model spine to help define the rehabilitation of Miner's lower back and hip. (top) Part of the therapy process involves the development of wheelchair skills so that he can get around city streets. Douglas stands ready in case a wheelchair goes too far. (left) With a cry of "I'll race you," Miner tries to beat the children's dune buggy up the driveway as wife Ruth looks on. (far left) Miner takes as active a role as possible in domestic affairs, here tending to Kyle's cut finger while answering the telephone.

Story by
Don Peters

Photos by
André Ranieri

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