## The Disability Experience II

including 'The Aftermath'

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Dedicated to the disabled, those who seek to better understand what life is for those with a disability, and all of those who have been instrumental in my journey into therapeutic writing.





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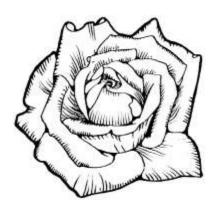
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#### Forever Beautiful

A large, black cloud drifts in from the west. Thunder is heard and lightning strikes illuminate the darkened sky. Wind gusts blow over anything not secured. Torrential rain falls along with quarter-sized hail. After the storm, flowers are bent and tree branches broken. Left is a single bloom, slightly marred, proudly standing.

a peach rose one petal missing imperfection does not diminish beauty of the disabled





#### **Forward**

Four years ago, I stumbled into therapeutic writing. I signed up for a writing class for those with disabilities, and enjoyed it immensely. When I look back at that work, I note that my writing was at a beginner's level, but even so, it served a therapeutic purpose. It is not how well you write, but rather that you explore life through the written word that makes it therapeutic.

I have had depression for twenty-five years. In 2004, I was involved in a serious accident which resulted in permanent disability. The notebook and pen have helped rebuild a meaningful life and led to joy and success I had never imagined. A powerful therapeutic tool, writing allows a look at the past, evaluation of the present, and dreams of the future.

Prior to discovering writing's therapeutic value, the last writing course I had taken was Basic Composition in college twenty-five years ago. I had not written since college, and had never studied poetry, but as I began to read that of others, I fell in love with it.

When I started writing, my friends quickly tired of me asking them to read my work. I found an online writing community where I not only learned much about writing, but have also found support and friendship with writers across the country and around the world.

I have taken a few online poetry classes and belong to a weekly writing group. In the past year, I have had several poems published in literary journals. Some of those published are about disability while others are not. Recently, I have developed a particular interest in Japanese poetic forms.

Writing is a wonderful way to explore self, and to communicate and learn from others. Writing also shows that I am still here, and my thoughts do matter. Writing, like any art, is a challenge and there is always more to learn.

My first book, 'The Disability Experience,' (2011) includes work from the first two years after I discovered therapeutic writing, and has both poetry and short non-fiction works about disability.

'The Disability Experience II' focuses on the first three years after surviving the accident, a period of time I call 'The Aftermath'. This was a time of profound change in lifestyle as I worked through the stages of grief to slowly reach some degree of acceptance. Nearly every aspect of my life was impacted by physical disability. Learning to cope was a difficult and not always graceful process.

Writing has helped me continue to work through these issues as well as others in my life. I write primarily poetry, so have also included a selection of poems I've written since my first book.

My three goals for this book are:

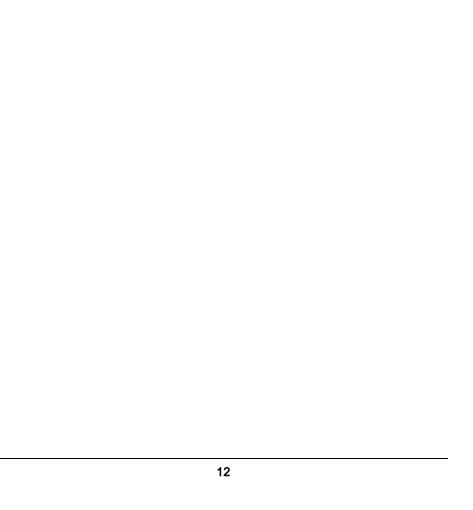
- 1) To let others with disabilities know they are not alone.
- 2) To give the non-disabled a chance to see into our world.
- 3) To show the therapeutic value of writing in dealing with illness.

I also have a webpage/blog of writings on disability at www.thedisabilityexperience.vpweb.com.

Writing has become an integral part of life for me, much like eating and sleeping. I hope you find this book both beneficial and, despite some sad moments, enjoyable to read.

The floral artwork is to emphasize the beauty of the world and our ability to adapt and grow with the challenges life offers.





# The Aftermath

A Story of Recovery





### Prologue

I am not the person I was ten years ago. Life has its ups and downs, but I have traveled a really wild roller coaster with not only steep inclines and sharp drops, but also the loops that turn the world completely upside down. March 16, 2004, I was coasting in the morning and hanging upside down by noon. Many times I thought I would fall off, and a few times I hoped I would. My world would not be right side up again for quite some time.

It was a beautiful March morning in Iowa, unusually warm for that time of year. The roads were clear when I left for work. I was driving into the sun, but wasn't having difficulty seeing. I wasn't feeling very well, but after already missing several days of work, felt I really needed to go.

I had my own business, Nutrition Connection, which provided dietary consultation to nursing homes. I lived alone and was the owner and sole employee. I

had been having some health problems, and the previous weekend had been hospitalized for low potassium. The problem was corrected with IV therapy, and the levels were normal when I was released on Monday. I wasn't under the influence of alcohol or drugs, but had a loss of consciousness driving on a two-lane rural highway swerving into the oncoming traffic, hitting a semi-truck head-on. We were both traveling at highway speed.

While hospitalized after the accident, I had every test imaginable and results were all normal. A seizure from another episode of critically low potassium was determined to be the likely cause of the unconscious episode. I do not remember the actual crash or much of the first few days afterward.

It has been a long journey from that day to where I am now. I have shared much of the journey, but haven't written much about the first two to three years. I have had a hard time doing so, as I am just coming to terms with it myself. I am writing this to help me as I work through reliving those difficult years. I also hope it will help others with disabilities realize they are not alone and help the non-disabled understand the experience of coping with a new disability.

Attempting to minimize the medical aspects, I will share the emotional side of the journey. After traveling through terrible darkness, I eventually

learned how to live a satisfying life as a person with a disability.

Despite the immense physical and emotional pain, I am a stronger and happier person today than prior to the accident. For me, therapeutic writing has been an integral part of the healing process.

Part One

Coming to Consciousness

Crashing into a semi should have been the end of me, but for some reason, it wasn't. The only part of the accident I remember (or at least think I remember) is the windshield cracking and the crack spreading like a spider web as the glass shattered.

I have no other recollection of the crash, the hour it took for them to cut me out of the wreckage using the Jaws-of-Life, the ambulance trip to the hospital, the tests I had there, the ambulance ride to a trauma center thirty miles away, having my fractured femur (upper leg bone) surgically repaired, or the three days following that.

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