

The Disability Experience II

including 'The Aftermath'

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June 2014

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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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](http://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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