

September 15, 2015

Dr. Brown,

I want to thank you for all the great work. I was initially introduced to your work by a counselor at The Council on Alcohol and Drugs Houston. As a fellow Cougar alum, I was excited to listen to your TED talk. I enjoyed it immensely and since then I have read several of your books. Recently I was reading *The Gifts of Imperfection* and came across the portion on how difficult and important it is for us to tell our stories.

This portion of your work weighed heavy on my mind. When I was 18, I broke my neck in a diving accident. I've spent the last 25 years completely paralyzed and unable to move anything below my shoulders. I went to U of H for both my undergrad and graduate degrees. I started working and a lot of what I do is represent people with disabilities. About 10 years ago, I began spending time volunteering at the rehabilitation hospital I went to, as well as, the rehabilitation hospital for the Harris County Hospital District. Rehab has changed significantly over the past 25 years. Patients spend much less time in the hospital learning how to live with a disability. I have felt like it is my responsibility to give back by going to the hospitals and sharing my story with other people with disabilities and their families. I also put the strong-arm on my friends and clients who are disabled to do the same.

One of the biggest issues that the catastrophically disabled community faces is isolation. We leave the hospital, we go home and we have a huge aversion to entering back into society. The folks at my office know if I get a call from a therapist or a doctor that a newly injured person or their family needs to talk to someone that I'm out the door. I spend time talking about the importance of getting out of the house, cultivating relationships and moving forward. I have extra wheelchair tickets to the Texans and the Astros. I go to community dining at the hospitals and I take folks out to dinner as often as I can.

It is always such a struggle to get people that are in wheelchairs, have brain injuries, or amputees to take that leap and make the effort to reintegrate into society. I was always lucky as it came easy to me. I tell everyone, when they say how great it is that I spend time volunteering, I get more out of it than anyone. I truly believe that.

I realize now after the help of your book that one of the reasons people with catastrophic injuries might have such a difficult time leaving the house is that every time we are in public, we are telling a part of our story. We can't hide it. For some people it is the most difficult part of their life story and when they leave the house, or leave the comfort of their family or friends, they automatically tell that portion of the story to anyone who sees them in their wheelchair or with their prostheses. It's not their whole story and it's not everything about them but it is the fact that they were injured and they have some type of impairment. For some of us it highlights poor decision-making, like diving into the shallow end of the swing pool, or bad relationships that ended in violence. It may be a car wreck, a genetic defect or

just pure bad luck. Either way, that portion of our story is laid bare for all the world to see. We don't have the option to keep it to ourselves, at least not all of it.

I enjoy telling my story. I find power in it. I share my whole story with people that I love and trust. I share it with people who really want to hear it and who might need it to help get them through a tough time. For others they get part of the story. They see me in my wheelchair and they are left with the mystery of what the rest of my story is. When I share my story with a jury or a client it brings us closer. It bonds us.

There is such strength in shared vulnerability. Those of us with catastrophic disabilities and our families have unique stories. I've learned by sharing it with one another we can beat back the fear. By being vulnerable with one another we can gather strength. I'm sure this is no different than the strength and hope gathered in AA meetings or grief groups.

Thank you for shedding light on this wonderful phenomenon. Thank you for naming it and helping me understand it a little better. This will definitely help me lean into it. And maybe, just maybe, it will help me get just a little closer to living a wholehearted life.

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