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click here!

SCI AWARENESS DAY 2015





NAME: KEVIN

AGE: 38

"About 15 years ago, a few months after the millennium celebrations, I suffered a broken neck playing rugby for my local team in Essex. I sustained a serious spinal cord injury, and at the age of 23, instantly, my life changed forever.

I spent many weeks on a life-support machine paralysed from the neck down. As time went by, I regained movement, and was strong enough to breathe on my own. I was then transferred to a spinal unit. After 6 months, I returned home to live with my parents, and a life that no longer seemed familiar to me. All my plans, hopes and expectations for the future had disappeared.

Prior to the injury I led a very active life. A recent graduate, I was working as a management consultant in London, looking forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead. But often the real challenges in life come out of the blue; you can't plan or anticipate them. They are usually things you think you're impervious to - something that happens to someone else.

SCI is one of these challenges. It can happen to anyone at any time, and when it does, it's devastating. The loss of independence and needing carers to help with simple tasks, like getting in and out of bed, is the hardest thing for me to deal with. The need for carers is also something that is so disruptive to your privacy, something I find difficult even after 15 years.

Although I faced many difficulties following SCI, I have been determined to have a full and active life. I returned to university completing an MSc in psychology and currently I'm coming to the end of my PhD in the same subject, after nearly four years of hard work. I also volunteer for an SCI charity.

I still enjoy many sports and regularly watch rugby matches at Twickenham and other venues around Europe. Indeed, I enjoy travel and have experienced many exciting trips all over the world - something I hope to continue in the future. After my PhD I'm looking to use my skills to help others, especially those touched by SCI, to give back some of the support I have been lucky to receive."





Aboard the exoskeleton!

NAME: MARRIANNE

AGE: 38

"Back in 2004 an accident left me paralysed at C4 level.

After seven months in the spinal unit, three of which were spent lying completely flat with weights hanging from my head, I returned home to face up to a life without the use of anything below my shoulders.

As a 27 year old woman who loved life, spent years travelling, had so many plans, now left relying on carers 24 hours a day. I couldn't even clean my own teeth.

Before my accident if I saw someone with a spinal cord injury in a wheelchair I'd presume they were unable to walk, but I had no idea about all the other horrors they were facing. Naive? Perhaps. Uninformed? Without doubt. SCI brings physical problems on a daily basis that go hand in hand with a psychological battle that most simply don't know about. Raising awareness is **essential**.

Today I have made a great deal of progress for someone with my level of injury. I have an amazing support group of friends and family around me. Dedication to my physiotherapy programme helps to keep me healthy and in shape. I'm proud to be the first C4 SCI to use the exoskeleton and to be the highest injured lady doing FES rowing. All great. But knowing that there are organisations out there like NSIF, striving for that breakthrough, really helps to reduce those **dark days** that I've had to face.

Although more challenging, travelling is something I enjoy again and staring eyes no longer bother me; although they are a frequent source of irritation to friends travelling with me. I also enjoy helping others with SCI via The Rooprai Spinal Trust, which has given me the chance to meet some amazing people and guess what?... I can now clean my own teeth! Progress is

possible for sure. Let's help NSIF progress to the ultimate goal."



NAME: SUZANNE

AGE: 27

"Just over four years ago, I had an accident that changed my life forever. Before January 2011, I had no idea about SCI and was oblivious to the reasons why people were chairbound. I was 23, having a great time teaching surfing in Morocco, simply having fun! I was standing on a roof terrace looking out to sea when the railings gave way and I fell. I don't remember much. I had no idea what was in store in the coming days, months and **years**.

Life is harder when you're completely reliant on a wheelchair to get around; widths of doorways, steps, accessible bathrooms, and kerbs are just some of the potential barriers that remove any spontaneity from my life. But as much as being paralysed is extremely difficult physically, I think for me, the hardest part has been the emotional rollercoaster that I have been on. I have struggled with accepting that although my whole life has changed and I can't alter the past, I can choose my future and make the most of the hand I have been dealt.

I have always been a very determined person, and I am adamant that my accident won't get the better of me. I just have to remember to focus on what I still have, rather than what has been taken away from me. I have my down days, but I have an amazing support team of friends and family around me who are always there. Asking for help can be hard, but I have learnt that it is so important.

I often think of a quote I saw in a rehab gym in China which I think is so true: "It's not hope that makes you persevere, rather it's through perseverance that you have hope."



NAME: LOLLY

AGE: 41

"My name is Lorraine Mack but everyone knows me as Lolly. In 2004, on a night out with friends, I was in a London nightclub when a man who was drunk and on ecstasy jumped off a balcony and landed on me. I sustained a C4/5 spinal cord injury and am now living in a wheelchair.

I was rushed to hospital where emergency surgery was undertaken to stabilise my neck and then I was sent to Stoke Mandeville hospital where I spent 10 months of rehabilitation. That's where I met Dan Nicholls too.

Before this happened to me the only thing I knew about SCI was Christopher Reeve's story. When I learnt about the complications of this injury, that's when I became horrified. Not only the devastating loss of independence but losing 50 per cent of breathing capacity, being in constant 24-hour neuropathic pain, risk of pressure sores, spasms and so on - the list is endless.

Obviously the biggest obstacle for me is having to rely on others for everything. Having to pre-plan everything you do is difficult at times. I led an extremely active life before and I miss that so much. I went to the gym regularly, cycled, rollerblading, sports, travelling. I could go on forever. My jobs pre-injury were as a make-up consultant for Chanel, modelling, promotion work, dancing and chasing my dream of being a TV presenter. Being injured hasn't changed my personality one bit and I still have a passion for all the things I did pre-injury. I'm a proud member of the CURE GIRLS. A group of women from around the world all living with a spinal cord injury. We work together daily fundraising, campaigning and getting the cure message out there. Our aim is to make chronic spinal cord injury curable and we won't stop until we make this happen.

This is a hideous injury to live with and not enough people know enough about living with a spinal cord injury. I've learnt to make the most out of every day and to help anyone in the same position along the way. It really is the simplest of things you miss and you should never take anything for granted. Every eight hours someone in the UK suffers a spinal cord injury and gets told they will never walk again. This is why we need a cure sooner rather than later! Thanks to a charity like NSIF there is hope!

I won't let anything hold me back. I will carry on campaigning, more skydiving (lol), fundraise and do everything I possibly can to regain my independence and get back on my feet again - also for everyone else living with an SCI. I am just recently engaged and blissfully happy with the man of my dreams. I have the support of my amazing friends and family, too."