

DEFINING DISABILITY

Abbey Goodyear, Class of 2020

The first time I spent one-on-one with my (at that time) future stepfather was when he took me to my first Father-Daughter dance. Although a quadriplegic who was injured in a car accident when he was 17, he twirled me around all night as if there was nothing holding him back. As a 6-year-old girl who did not know her biological father, this meant the world to me. I will never forget him coming to pick me up in his van, the door for which opened up automatically, allowing a ramp to unfold magically, as if it were a red carpet being placed down for me.

I grew up with him as if he were my primary father, and have always been inspired by his positivity. Although he requires full time care for basic daily living—someone to lift him in and out of bed, change his urinary drainage bag, bathe him, etc., he doesn't see the things that hold him back; he only sees possibilities. I have never heard him complain a single day in my life. He is the kind of person who wakes up in the morning full of energy for the day, zooming around in his motorized wheelchair with no time to waste. Being the positive person he is, he turned his disability into an opportunity to help others who are in the same position, and opened up a modified van rental business, supplying transportation to persons who otherwise might avoid the activities many of us take for granted, such as going on vacation, because they are unable to get around.

As I entered medical school, he opened up more about the medically related challenges he faces with his injury, and his thoughts on treatment. Because of him, I naturally took a fervent interest in all the current neuroregenerative research. Excitedly, I've engaged in discussions with him regarding the incredible progress we've made towards post injury neuroregenerative repair, and the idea that one day these clinical trials may actually lead to a cure. It struck me that one night, in response to my excitement, he said, "You know, Abbey, even if they came up with a cure for my injury, something that would allow me to be completely able bodied, I'm not sure I would want it." I was so excited about the advancements in research that I forgot to think about the implications it would have for him as a person. He has been injured for so long that he does not see his disability as a disability, just a difference in capabilities that he has grown accustomed to. In my eyes, this adaptation is more elegant

than any kind of cure, as though the challenges he faced earned him angel wings, or super powers of some sort—the kind of super powers that allow him to be an inspiration to others, and to me.

In medicine, we are taught to heal people, and sometimes we get lost in the idea of fixing a problem, rather than healing the person. People like my stepdad remind me that medicine is much more than solving a problem. Medicine can remove illness. However, the art of healing requires a gift of tailoring treatment to each patient's individualized needs, so they can live life to their fullest, happiest potential, as they imagine it. The life that makes them get out of bed in the morning, and run (or zoom) in the direction of their dreams. ■



PRETTY WILD

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