

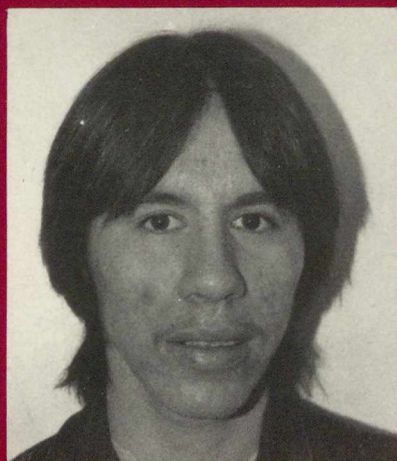
# FRANCIS McKAY

The Pas, Manitoba

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**“You can’t imagine unless you’ve had an experience like this the kind of fear that goes through your mind.”**

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I’m twenty three right now, and about a year ago, I went to sleep one night and woke up a week-and-a-half later in a hospital, totally paralyzed. I don’t know what happened to me, and no one else, not even the doctors who worked on me know why I have become paralyzed. I was in a traffic accident several months earlier and one doctor thinks that the paralysis might be the result of a delayed reaction to the accident. Another doctor thinks that I have some kind of virus in my spinal chord, but he’s not sure. Nobody knows what the problem is.

When I woke up, I thought I had actually died and gone to heaven, or rather, hell, because it was a terrible experience. I was totally paralyzed except for my right thumb. You can’t imagine unless you’ve had an experience like this the kind of fear

that goes through your mind. There is just nothing you can do, and you don’t know what’s happened to you, or what is going to happen later on.

I thought about suicide several times, because it just didn’t seem worth it to keep going on in this condition. And it would have been easy, suicide. It was so hard to breathe that all I needed to do was hold my breath for a couple of minutes. In the first couple of months, when I started going to therapy I would come back to my bed really depressed and ask myself why I was going on like this. I had to fight hard against the urge to commit suicide at that time.

There was this little kid in the therapy unit who really had an impact on me. He was paralyzed in this little wheelchair, and he would go up and down the aisle with a big grin on his face. I thought about myself and figured that if he could be happy, then I could too. That was an important turning point, looking back.

The other big factor in getting better was my sister, who really stuck with me during the four months that I was in the hospital. She came to see me every day and kept my spirits up by telling crummy jokes. Anything to keep my mind off the problem. I think that her support is a big reason why I’m so much better off now.

One day, we were talking and she suggested that I go on a marathon when I got out of the hospital. It was a crazy idea, but there was something about it that I liked. Anyway, it was something to think about besides my problem. It was a challenge that she was talking about, and I had a lot of energy even when I was paralyzed. So it didn’t seem out of the question. When she explained it to my family, they all thought I was crazy. My family really had a hard time at first in dealing with my disability. With the exception of my sister, there was a four month period during which there was almost no communication about my problem.

**“I never had a real relationship with my father up until this time, and now there’s a lot of warmth and communication.”**

That’s all changed now, however. Over the past six months, the attitude in the family has completely reversed itself, and the idea of the marathon has had a lot to do with it. It has opened up communication in the family, not only with me about my problem, but about a lot of other things. The illness has been a kind of trigger and the marathon became a positive topic that everybody could