

One man's journey after paralysis

● A new memoir details how he found a mind-body connection through yoga.

By PAM SCHMID
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Matthew Sanford's life changed forever on a dreary, overcast day in 1978, when his family's car hit a patch of ice and tumbled down an embankment near the Iowa-Missouri border. The crash killed Sanford's father and sister and left him, at age 13, paralyzed from the chest down.

Twenty-eight years later, Sanford has written "Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence" (Rodale: \$23.95), an unflinching account of how that pivotal day started a series of events culminating in his decision to learn and teach yoga.

Sanford eventually founded Mind Body Solutions, a Minnetonka nonprofit group dedicated to his conviction that minds and bodies work better together. That idea was hard-won: Sanford had to learn to reconnect his mind with a body he had written off as useless and problematic after years of harrowing surgeries.

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"WAKING: A MEMOIR OF TRAUMA AND TRANSCENDENCE"

Author: Matthew Sanford

Publisher: Rodale, \$23.95.

Readings: The Loft Literary Center, Minneapolis (612-215-2575), 7 p.m. Thu.; The Marsh, Minnetonka (952-935-2202), 7 p.m. July 13.

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Q Your book seems to suggest an entire paradigm shift as far as how paralysis is viewed. Could you talk about that?

A When I was first injured, there was so much worry that I wouldn't accept what happened. My core injury has a physical cost. But the actual injury is a mind-body injury. That means it's harder for my mind to be present in my body. The rehab process has to find as many ways as possible for me to get reconnected with my body. I



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might not be able to walk again, but there's a lot more to healing than that.

Q You talk a lot about silence in your book. It almost sounds as if silence for you was a double-edged sword — that you used it at times to pull away from your body and at others to listen to it.

A That's the paradox in all of us. Yeah, I have an extreme case of trauma, but we all have traumas. I think there's an edge of our consciousness that we all share. When you appreciate the beauty of a sunset or you daydream — it's that aching feeling of fullness and emptiness at the same time. Your stress lands between your mind and body. It can make you see beauty and love, or it can make you disconnected and despondent.

Q How did you wind up doing yoga?

A All I did was listen to what I actually experienced rather than listening to what I was told I was hearing. It's not as dramatic as other sensations. But ... it's a deeper level of integration into my body. My paralysis presents that silence that I now know to be very alive.

Q If you had not undergone the trauma of your accident and paralysis, would you still have eventually come to yoga?

A Maybe, but not like I do now. People from the outside, when they wonder what I do, they say, 'Oh, he overcame his disability. He succeeded in spite of it.' I'm like, 'No. I'm here exactly because I'm disabled.' You can't overcome your mind-body relationship. That's one of the myths of aging, why the elderly feel like aging is a loss. It's because of what happened to me that I have a unique perspec-

tive on mind and body and consciousness.

Q It sounds like a number of key events pushed you in that direction. If you hadn't majored in philosophy, if you hadn't met someone who specialized in body work ...

A ... Like a river gaining current? That's right. I hope from this book that people look at their own lives and try to see patterns and acknowledge what they've been through. I had a bunch of fortuitous events. The first yoga teacher I encountered was Jo [Zukovich]. If I had met anyone else that first time, it wouldn't have worked.

Q You were going into it blind. You didn't know what was going to work for you, what postures you could actually do. How did you discover what was possible?

A It was like a wonderful adventure/experiment. Quickly, things started happening; I started being able to feel things. I did hands-in-prayer, and I felt the connection in my legs. In some

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ways, because I'd lived on such slim rations of body experience I was so ripe for *anything*. It was that first green sprig of plant that comes out of the ground. You go: Wow!

Q What do you think when people say you have such an inspiring story to tell, the way you've overcome your injury?

A I have a hard time with that. If my story is inspiring exactly because I didn't overcome my disability or because despite all that's happened, I love being here, great. It's an honor and a gift to be alive. But it's not inspiring because I overcame the obstacles of my life. ... You don't want to overcome your body, your life. The process of mind-body integration is not a competition.

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