

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Will Your Way Back

“This is a great book. It’s extremely readable, carries you forward with no slow parts, and is amazingly full of important insights.”

—Mrs. Joseph Carlton Petrone, widow of Colonel and
Ambassador Joseph Carlton Petrone

“For anyone with a challenge, whether health-wise or professional or marital, this book has brilliant advice and equally brilliant inspiration. You owe it to yourself to read it.”

—Mrs. Frank Perdue (Mitzi), author of *Tough Man*, *Tender Chicken*
and *I Didn’t Bargain For This*

“In his book *Will Your Way Back*, James Osborne teaches a master class in humanity and grace. If you’re feeling great, read this book and learn compassion. If you’re enduring more than you think you can bear, this book will give you hope.”

—Joan Broughton, author and *Resist Ageism* blogger

“This is a great story of hope, determination, persistence, and a positive mental attitude. I highly recommend this book to anyone for a superb example of courage and bravery.”

—Carl G. Schneider, Major General, USAF (retired)

“After a tragic accident that could have left him paralyzed for life, Jamie unabashedly shares, in great detail, his discouragements, determination, love, and sheer will that helped him cross an unbridgeable chasm to overcome great odds.”

—John J. Nicholas, Author, former US Navy Officer

“Jamie’s book is one of the most exquisitely observed, genuine, and inspiring memoirs I’ve had the pleasure of reading. He reveals with heartfelt rawness, the painful moments and beautiful blessings he has navigated along his unexpected journey. Jamie’s book is completely captivating, drawing you in as if you’re sitting in Jamie’s home listening to him tell his story directly to you. It is beautifully written and truly inspiring.”

—Stephanie Percy, owner, Omni Creative

“With tireless determination, unstoppable will, and the ability to tell a story of triumph from the heart, *Will Your Way Back* shows the reader that nothing is impossible and, against all odds, life can be beautiful even after the darkest of days.”

—Adriana Brown, personal trainer, Seattle Athletic Club

“Jamie’s story is an emotional rollercoaster where he masterfully shows that the difference between the light and the dark, where happy and sad are blurred when something traumatic happens. In his raw approach to his post injury world, he illustrates that the darkest places of our being, can in fact help us in finding the most wonderful experiences due to the hidden and the unseen powers that drive us as humans.”

—Barry Long, owner, Talk and Roll Enterprises

“Inspirational. Relatable. Raw. Visual. Educational. Hopeful. Exemplary read! *Will Your Way Back* is almost impossible to stop reading—it is so good! You can see, feel, and relate to Jamie’s story as though you were there with him, through the entire ride to current day, willing your way back with him, every step of the way.”

—Ivy Meadors, CEO, speaker, author, High Tech High Touch Solutions, Inc.

“From the first page, Jamie’s story pulled me in with raw emotion, detailed facts, and inspiration. First, I felt sadness and sympathy. But that quickly turned to amazement and admiration. What followed were feelings of hope, self-reflection, and a rush of motivation to never give up no matter what cards you are dealt!! Do yourself a favor and read *Will Your Way Back*.”

—Dereck Soo, technology manager, Copacino + Fujikado

“The story of Jamie’s injury and his remarkable recovery is something for the ages. But beyond the story of personal challenge and his will to live are life lessons that any of us can learn from as we cope with personal or business speed bumps that seem in the light of day to pale against Jamie’s struggle. This is not just a primer for those that are facing the new challenges of spinal cord injury, but a must read for anyone on how to cope with the ups and downs of life.”

—Conrad M Bessemer, president, Novatec Inc.; executive chairman,
Prophecy Sensorlytics, LLC

“Whether fighting back from an injury or simply dealing with age-related limitations, you will benefit from Jamie’s personal story as he describes his journey back from a near fatal bicycle accident. *Will Your Way Back* is a very personal story of physical and emotional recovery driven by the authors courage, tenacity, and hope.”

—Dennis Madsen, community nonprofit leader and former retail executive

“Our school’s motto is *Aspirando et Perseverando*. In ‘defining his terms, taking a stand, and choosing to win’ in the face of an ultimate form of adversity, Jamie has captured the essence of this motto in *Will Your Way Back* better than any individual I have ever known. His inspiring journey provides a powerful example—indeed a road map—for all of us of how to confront, navigate through, and overcome the most daunting challenges in our lives.”

—Peter Evans, dean, Avon Old Farms School, Avon, Connecticut

“To anyone who has suffered a devastating physical injury, *Will Your Way Back* is the inspirational and heart-wrenching true story of the commitment, desire, and courage to never give up and to never give in. You will close the book believing there is no problem you cannot solve, no mountain you cannot climb, no obstacle you cannot overcome to lead the life you desire to live.”

—Robert Dugoni, *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*
best-selling author of *My Sister’s Grave*

“James Osborne’s personal story is nothing short of amazing. He is completely candid about the struggles he faces, both physical and psychological, throughout his journey forward from his tragic accident. His is a lesson of personal focus, growth, determination, and the sequence of thousands of minuscule successes required to achieve such goals. His is also a message in humility, as he quietly chooses to continue each and every day.”

—Dave Stockwell, technology leader and entrepreneur

“*Will Your Way Back* is about Jamie Osborne’s tenacious recovery from a severe spinal cord injury incurred in an unimaginable cycling accident. This superbly written book is intended to empower others who are adjusting to life with a disability. In telling his story, Jamie vividly describes the impact of his injury and recovery on his identity, spirituality, and relationships. Jamie openly unveils his doubts, fears, losses, and setbacks and joyfully celebrates his remarkable victories.”

—Eric N. Newberg, professor of theological and historical studies,
Oral Roberts University

“The true devastation of spinal cord injury and paralysis on patients and their families remains truly underappreciated by the general public and—outside of the affected specialties—most of the medical establishment. *Will Your Way Back* by James Osborne vividly describes the amazing power of the human mind to bounce back from an overwhelming injury. It also shows medical professionals how much more there is to learn and do to overcome paralysis, from which over three million US citizens suffer.”

—Jens R. Chapman, MD, Swedish Neuroscience Institute, Seattle, Washington

JAMES H. OSBORNE

WILL YOUR WAY BACK

How One Man Overcame Tragedy
with a WINNING MINDSET



This book is intended as a reference volume only. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher and author are not engaged in rendering any professional services. The information given here is designed to help you make informed decisions. If you suspect that you have a problem that might require professional treatment or advice, you should seek competent help.

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First Edition

To Diane, my wife of thirty-six years.

After my accident and permanent impairments, you had every reason to say “This is not the life I signed up for” and leave. Many spouses, in this situation, do. You did not. You have been by my side—attentive, caring, and loving—even in the most difficult times. To you, my dear, I make this dedication. Your love has brought me back.

THE PRICE I PAY

It may not seem obvious
When I do things each way
Stand, walk, step, or sit
There is always a price to pay.

Resistance is formidable
Strong headwinds on display
Given the choice, I'd rather not
There is always a price to pay.

It comes in many forms
Fear of tripping and falling away
Chronic pain all over my body
It's part of the price I pay.

I fight it with mindfulness
Tuned carefully as I look each way
It always helps protect me
from the price I pay.

I fight with medications
Six in total, three times a day;
It helps calm the muscle seizing
That's part of the price I pay.

Love is a great analgesic
Like a hug from Alana Ray
It helps to calm my system
From the price I pay.

Exercise produces endorphins
When I'm at the gym to play
It provides me sanctuary
From the price I pay.

It takes enormous will
To get my body to obey
Every action and movement
It's part of the price I pay.

It's been hard to trust myself
When my faculties betray
Watching my extremities spasm
It's part of the price I pay.

I don't look forward to bedtime
It's not the time I go hurray
Getting up eight times a night
It's part of the price I pay.

So what does get me through it?
What is there to take away
From the challenges I face?
That's part of the price I pay.

Define my terms and take a stand
It's the place I start and say
Choosing to win and getting better
Overcomes the price I pay.

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Preface

Sports have always been my sanctuary. They have been a safe place I could go to feel alive, excited, and good about myself. My introduction to sports—aerobic, heart-pumping sports—began in college, late freshman year, when a friend introduced me to crew; after that, I went full speed ahead in running, skiing, tennis, squash, golf, and cycling. Playing sports became a refuge where I could manage emotional pain. It allowed me to work out the things I struggled with and gain new perspectives. I could accomplish goals. I could excel. I could be confident. I could be part of a community.

In June 2007, my sanctuary was taken away from me. I never saw it coming. In a flash I was different. One moment my heart was pumping at its anaerobic maximum, the next I was fighting for my life. I am now impaired. I am living a new life, one filled with countless adjustments. There are things I can no longer do. There are places I can no longer go. There are people who have dropped out of my life. I have feelings I have never felt before. There is work I am unable to do. My injury has touched every aspect of my life—personal, emotional, marital, familial, professional, and recreational. Next to a brain injury, this is as difficult an injury to recover from as there can be. It is cruel and relentless.

We all have our story. All of us are dealing with some kind of struggle, challenge, adversity, setback, or life-changing event, or we know someone who is. Perhaps it is a physical infirmity, disease, addiction, broken relationship, professional setback, or despondence. You are not alone. My life was turned upside down as a consequence of my spinal cord injury—in the words of my doctor, an “unimaginable injury.” I

wrote *Will Your Way Back* to share the “what” and the “how”—what I’ve faced in all aspects of my life and how I approached it through an unwavering commitment to aspire, persevere, and prevail.

I am not a victim. I don’t feel sorry for myself. I have hope. While I endured much loss, and I don’t intend to downplay it, there is much for which I am grateful. Come take a journey with me through a process of recovery that has been filled with ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, and losses and victories. I’ll share stories, reflections, and insights. I’ll reveal the wanton cruelty of this injury. I’ll talk about gaining new perspectives. I’ll tell you about personal change. You’ll see all of me. Nothing is filtered. Some of this is deeply personal and leaves me vulnerable. It is authentic and real. Perhaps you’ll see a little of yourself. Maybe my writing will cause you to pause, reflect, or even change in some small way. It is my story, my gift to you, and I thank you for the opportunity to share it.

In 2008, after presenting at a meeting for patients dealing with or having dealt with a myriad of afflictions, I wrote the following passage. It encapsulates my mantra for life post injury.

. . .

Any parent with children will tell you that the hardest part of parenting is watching their child suffer. They would do anything to take that suffering away and assume it themselves. It’s a strange juxtaposition in my family to find that situation reversed. My children often lament how much they dislike seeing their dad suffer and would do anything to take it away.

All of us, especially those who have experienced or are dealing with disease, illness, or a major injury, suffer. People suffer for any number of reasons: addiction, marital challenges, or loss of a loved one. Even those indirectly associated with the person who is suffering will also suffer in some way. I am afflicted with a serious injury following a road cycling accident and know about suffering. I experience it every day. Often it is chronic pain, loss of control, or feeling trapped. My ever-present struggle

is trying to rediscover my identity and what will bring fulfillment and joy into my life.

How do I combat suffering? Call it stubborn, dogged determination, but I decided early on to take a stand. One thing I didn't lose was my mind and ability to make choices. I chose to win. For me, winning doesn't mean that I'll necessarily be whole again, without pain, or free of residual deficits. Winning is not succumbing to the daily suffering, discomfort, and limited movements. Winning is getting up every day and choosing to make the most of what I can do.

Yes, I got dealt a crummy hand. That doesn't mean there aren't many more good hands to play. There are. At night, it's going to bed and thanking myself for doing the day.

Define your terms. Take a stand. Choose to win.

We all have challenges—physical, emotional, relational, professional, or situational. Defining your terms means being guided by your instincts, goals, dreams, and aspirations. Often we find ourselves living out the advice or guidance of others. Instead, follow the vector or beacon that stirs within you. Taking a stand is committing to your terms. You will move forward and live your life, sturdy and resolute in the decision. You will not waver, bend, or fall off course. Your direction is clear.

You will encounter road bumps, but know that you can push through and persevere. Keep your eyes on the prize and stay focused. Choosing to win is about making a choice to prevail, regardless of the headwinds, and it will overcome any obstacle. Winning doesn't necessarily mean you cross the finish line first (although you may!). It's not about winning in the absolute sense or that doing so means there is someone who doesn't. It is winning on your terms. You choose. Make the choice to accomplish your goals, realize your dreams, and win!

Acknowledgments

There are many people who have encouraged me to tell my story—frank, real, unabashed, and without filter. Tell it like it was and is. My family—Diane, Kevin, and Alana—have been nudging me down this road for years. Write it, read it, and tell it. John, a longtime Seattle friend, has been encouraging me in this direction since the days he spent in the hospital with me.

My mental health therapist, Dr. Diane, has been gently encouraging me to write for several years. We've talked about rethinking an approach to my next life's work. She has helped me down a path of careful reflection, introspection, confidence, and building self-esteem after I was injured and, subsequently, separated from my last job.

My very good Seattle friends Rick, Peter, and Doug have been by my side since day one of the accident, have observed all the trials and tribulations of my injury, and also felt that my story was one of hope and inspiration from which others might find benefit. Whenever I am with them, I'm always laughing—something I need to do more often.

My friend Karen has been gently nudging me to tune into the energy of the universe and pay attention to its message. I would often try to strong-arm my way through each day just trying to survive without listening and understanding what the universe was telling me. Karen helped me grasp the importance of doing this.

My business colleague and personal friend, Ivy, and I have had numerous discussions about public speaking and book writing. Ivy has been a mentor to me, and even to members of my family. She is an entrepreneur, self-made millionaire, owner of her own successful business,

and world-renowned public speaker. I respect Ivy as an extraordinarily gifted person who has unselfishly shared her expertise and knowledge with so many.

I have known Bob for over thirty-five years, ever since my wife and I moved to Seattle. Bob and I have talked about this subject for years as well, and he has urged me to share my story and touch the lives of others. Bob, too, has been by my side throughout this entire journey, from the time he came to my hospital bed and I could see the emotion in his face, and it touched me.

My relatives, throughout the generations, especially on my mother's side of the family, have authored books, so in a sense I have a genetic predisposition to undertake something so daunting. This includes my grandfather Ernest, aunts Mitzi and Augusta, and uncles Ernest and Barclay. My mother, Victoria, is an author and gifted writer in her own right. On my father's side of the family, his father, Thomas Mott Osborne I, wrote about prison reform. He wrote books because he had ideas that could help others in their journey through life.

My siblings Molly, Tom, Rob, and Allyson have been there every step of the way to lift me up when I was down, loving me unconditionally. It is very special to grow up in a family whose connections are as strong today, living all over the country, as they were when we were all together in our suburban Boston home.

I have known Bob, Jason, Don, and John for over forty years, since our days together at Avon Old Farms School 1971–1975. They have been there to support and love me through this difficult time in my life. We live in different parts of the country (except Don who is less than two miles away) but have always stayed in contact. We enjoy annual reunions together when I am able to travel to Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, in October for the start of scalloping season. These bonds are forever.

Orthopedic physician Dr. Jens Chapman and physiatrist Dr. Barry Goldstein were my primary practitioners specializing in spinal cord injury. After participating together in a medical conference in 2008, both doctors indicated that I had a way with words and encouraged me to

share my experience with others. Many other friends and family members have asked me to do the same thing, feeling that my story deserved to be told and could positively impact the lives of others.

I wish to thank all the members, trainers, and employees of the Seattle Athletic Club (SAC) in downtown Seattle, both those I know and those I don't. You all inspire me.

I wish to thank the entire team at Greenleaf Book Group and River Grove Books. You have all been professional and responsive in guiding me through the entire process of bringing this book to life. I would like to especially recognize my developmental editor, Tess Mallory, who worked patiently with me through every detail of this book. Tess asked a lot of great questions, helped me expound in areas I might not otherwise have gone, rearranged content to improve flow, and offered suggestions in the overall book construction. She provided a safe place to work, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with her.

I actually had done a lot of writing since 2007, thinking a book might be possible, writing at different times with varying levels of interest and motivation. I kept journals as soon as I was discharged from the hospital, only for purposes of finger dexterity and trying to teach myself how to write and keyboard again. Holding and moving a pen seems trivial, except when your nerve impulses are impeded and need to be retrained.

After my last job of eighteen years abruptly concluded in December 2012, I was faced with the difficult decision of what to do as my next life's work. I had been meandering for several years, lost, drifting, and discouraged, until I met Tim, one of Peter's friends. In November 2014, while I was living in Arizona, Tim, Peter, and I met for dinner. Tim, a veteran, was inspired by my story and thought I should meet with Carl, one of his friends in the Phoenix area who was also a two-star general and aviator in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Carl is well connected and very active in numerous veteran support activities in the greater Phoenix area.

Carl, Tim, and I did meet, and that's also when I met John, a friend of Carl's. John is a former US Navy officer, author/publisher, and very active—like Tim and Carl—in supporting our veterans returning home

from service. John was intrigued by my story and extended a hand in helping to bring form to my diffused and scattered content and make it into a book. He thought my story had a strong message for people—especially our veterans—dealing with serious afflictions, trauma, catastrophic injury, PTSD, and other life setbacks. Although I am not a military person and have never served, I can still feel connected.

After John produced an initial draft, I left Arizona and moved back to Washington in May 2015. Work on *Will Your Way Back* languished until October 2015 when I met Stephanie, a local publicist. It was a chance meeting at the SAC where we both worked out, and I quickly learned that Stephanie could help restart my interest in sharing this story through public-speaking events. She found my story inspiring and felt very strongly that it needed to be shared in a book. I told her I had been fence-sitting on this effort for many years. There were so many messages the universe had been sending to prod me along. Write it, read it, and tell it. I'm not especially spiritual, but I believe meeting Stephanie was the final nudge to get it completed.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to tell my story. I am most grateful for the people acknowledged here and so many others that have encouraged me to “come out” with my story and, in the process, hopefully touch the lives of others in a meaningful way.

Introduction

It's not lost on me that I've made a remarkable recovery. It's not lost on me that this injury could have been much worse. It's not lost on me that this road cycling accident would not have happened had the product been properly made. The product failed; I was seriously injured and am permanently paralyzed because of it.

I've struggled for nine years, trying to find a meaningful way forward. I have made an enormous commitment to physical and mental recovery. At a minimum, it has been equivalent to a part-time job, committing to at least twenty hours a week and often more. It has been incredibly hard work, filled with setbacks and victories, milestones and trials.

The good news, despite the roller-coaster ride, is that my overall recovery trajectory continues upward. The continuing rehab improvements I am making are gratifying and motivate me to keep pushing forward with hard work. People I have met, who have commented on my work ethic, progress, and how I have inspired them, have in turn inspired me. I continue to set new recovery goals and give everything I have to achieving them.

In spite of this, I still feel restless inside, as though there is something bigger I should be doing. While I continue to work on my recovery, and have spent a considerable amount of time dealing with family and other personal matters, my gut still churns with uncertainty. There is a part of me that still feels a deep void inside, along with a sense of being purposeless, even useless. I don't want to just exist. Sometimes I feel lost, trapped in circular thinking, orbiting around familiar feelings of inadequacy, but not doing anything about it.

I'm approaching my sixtieth birthday. Perhaps that reality is heightening my sense of urgency to do something even more impactful and far reaching; to find a new, more meaningful path than the one I am on now. I want to contribute, be useful, make a difference, and matter. To do that means harnessing more of my capabilities, taking some risk, getting out of my comfort zone, and stepping through fear.

In the past, my sense of value came from my job. I was a dedicated professional, worked hard, accomplished some very cool things, and by all accounts was good at what I did. It gave me back something—a sense of belonging, value, importance, respect, and confidence. In December 2012, I was abruptly separated from my company. I submitted approximately three hundred applications over the next couple of years and, until just recently, came up completely empty-handed.

During this time, I struggled with feelings of worthlessness, unimportance, and feeling unwanted, which touched on some long-ago feelings I'd had as a child. It was discouraging, even a bit humiliating, given my work history, experience, and history of accomplishments and recognitions. After almost three years, I began to wonder if the traditional work world had passed me by.

As I continued that process—applying, writing cover letters, filling out online job applications, trying to put my best foot forward with positivity and enthusiasm—it was hard not to feel defeated; I could understand why so many millions had stopped looking for work during this national economic recovery. I had to fight those feelings, but they were a substantial headwind against finding new purpose and filling that empty restlessness inside of me.

Thankfully, in late January 2016, I was offered and accepted a position at Bellevue College in Bellevue, Washington as an IT manager. This is a more junior position compared to posts I have held in the past, but I decided to accept it for a couple of reasons.

The most important reason is the college's commitment to diversity and inclusion, which matters a lot to me. The second reason is that both my children attended the college when it was still a two-year community

college (it now offers four-year degrees). Both Kevin and Alana benefited from their experience at the college, each receiving an associate's degree before going on to receive a four-year degree. Third, it is a form of giving back to the community and the college that did so much for my children. It's a mission and culture I believe in.

But strangely, there is an oppositional force at work in my life right now. As much as I want to fill that void and do something more meaningful with my life, there is a part of me that wants to retreat, step back, and just settle in for the long term with my exercise routine and remain home for the rest of the time. This would be the path of least resistance. It would be easier.

It would probably involve less suffering and discomfort. I wouldn't have to move around as much and could return to spending my days largely as I did before, exercising, writing, reading, napping, spending social time with friends, calling friends, chasing down desk chores at home, managing our budget, and ensuring all our home office activities (bills, finances, estate plans, directives, family issues, taxes, filing, planning) are up to date. This alternate path would be reclusive, which in some ways has an appeal to it. I'd only have to deal with myself for the most part.

What do I want more? To make an impact on people's lives, or to live a life of peaceful seclusion? As much as I'd like to take the easy road and sit back, the calling that keeps churning in my head is to get out there and do it. I think people need to hear my story. My inner voice is imploring, "Write it. Read it. Tell it."

The universe has been nudging me in this direction for nine years, and I have been struggling with this decision the whole time. At times, I've tried to ignore it, but the pings from the universe keep coming. Countless people keep telling me the same thing: "Jamie, you need to tell your story. People need to hear what you've been through, how you have dealt with it, what you've learned." "Jamie, how many people who know your story have come up to you and said how inspired they are by you?" "People who are feeling hopeless will draw hope and possibility from your

story.” “Jamie, your story is unique and compelling.” These are incredibly kind words to hear. They lift me up and encourage me.

I have pondered writing a book for years, in part, out of my own interest and also as a consequence of encouragement from others. The book idea has been through fits and starts. I’ve struggled with how to make the book unique, personable, real, revealing, and meaningful.

At times I’ve wondered how my story is going to be any different from the plethora of other amazing, inspirational stories out there. I don’t want my story to be just another recovery story about a devastating injury or disease. My fervent wish is that it will touch people in ways other stories haven’t and be differentiated in some unique way.

When sharing my thoughts about this with my publicist, Stephanie, whom I met at the SAC, she had some very helpful advice. “Jamie, don’t worry about everyone else,” she said. “You have an important and compelling story to tell, and people need to hear it. Just be you. It’s your story, no one else’s, and the rest will take care of itself.”

This quote from H. Stanley Judd captures the essence of my internal deliberation. It reads, “In the end, we do battle only with ourselves. Once we understand this, and focus our energy on what we can do to control our lives, we begin to gain important insights into how life works.”¹

There are about a quarter of a million spinal cord injury patients in the United States. Approximately ten to twelve thousand spinal cord injuries occur every year. There are many resources out there to assist people in dealing with this injury—associations, community groups, social media, video vignettes, and websites. In addition to writing this book and giving talks, I have a vision to build out a website, which will be named www.JamesHOsborne.com. In addition, I plan to leverage other social media venues to reach people. Organizing a foundation to raise money for spinal cord injury (SCI) research is another goal. It will be the James H. Osborne Foundation and will have a governance structure in place to

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1 H. Stanley Judd, Alvin I. Haimson, and Frederick D. Smith, *Think Rich* (Delacorte Press, 1978), 167.

manage appropriations. The vision I have is to provide resources—informative, inspirational, and financial—to the SCI community and more broadly to any people facing significant life adversity.

There is no doubt that as the effort progresses, this vision will evolve to best meet the needs of our SCI community and to reach communities of others who are dealing with infirmities of one kind or another.

Mahatma Gandhi said it best: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”²

My decision is made. I’ve chosen to move forward with writing and telling my story. *Will Your Way Back* is the result of that decision. There is no turning back. I realize this calling is not accidental; it is what I am supposed to do. I have a story to tell, and lives are waiting to be reached.

.....

- 2 Attributed to Gandhi in Joshua David Stone, *The Full Spectrum Synthesis Bible* (iUniverse, 2001).

PART
ONE
THE
INJURY



Just Keep Breathing

My life was shattered in an instant.

The day was clear and sunny, with deep blue skies behind Mount Rainier, visible in all its glory. The sun was right overhead, casting a small shadow in front of me. I had just descended a steep hill on my road bicycle and rounded the corner to start heading north on Frager Road, adjacent to the Green River. I was utterly spent, exhausted from the preceding ten miles of up and down climbs at race pace, most of the time breathless, gasping for air, and fighting for oxygen.

My lungs were screaming. My legs were on fire from the exertion. All the rapid breaths I was taking did little to quell the intense suffering I felt. The fast descent provided little respite for recovery, and when I turned the corner, I could see a small cadre of my cycling comrades trying to pull away from me. Every fiber in my body said, “Accelerate, Jamie, close that gap and catch up to them!” The gap was about one hundred yards. We were racing, and I was determined not to get “dropped.”

I implored the engine room in my gut to give me the energy I needed to pedal faster. At the same time, I had to make my breathing more rhythmic. I gripped the handlebars a little tighter and moved my hands down into the “drops,” the lowest level of the handlebars that mostly flattens your back parallel to the ground to reduce air friction and helps the rider go a little faster.

As I rode, my mind flashed back to six hours earlier, when I had

commuted twenty-five miles to work on my bicycle. It was a gorgeous ride, most of it along the southern portion of Lake Washington, and the remainder through the Kent Valley. I remember seeing Mount Rainier being illuminated by a rising sun, the sky painted in hues of blue and pink, and I cheered out loud at that moment, wishing I could freeze myself in time, feeling incredibly happy and thankful. The crisp spring air had caressed my face with the aromas of the surrounding landscape, trees in bloom, and flowers of different colors accented against the morning mist.

My brief mental diversion was short-lived, and I was back in the moment, having closed the gap by half. I was making progress but could sense there was very little gas left in my physical tank. I glanced at the Garmin 305 GPS device attached to my handlebars. It displayed several data points, including time and speed. It showed a time of about 12:30 p.m. and a speed of twenty-five miles per hour.

The thought crossed my mind that perhaps I shouldn't have commuted into work that morning on my bike and tried to follow up that excursion with a competitive lunch ride. Perhaps I wasn't in the top physical condition I thought I was, or maybe I hadn't eaten enough breakfast earlier to refuel my system. I displaced those thoughts by igniting the last few matches I had inside—and finally closed the gap.

I got on the wheel of the last cyclist in the pace line group, my front tire just a few inches directly behind his back tire, allowing me to draft, which is a common road cycling tactic. The cyclist in front has to work harder because he is facing directly into the wind, unobstructed, which creates resistance and consequently requires more effort to go the same speed as those following right behind. The people following the lead cyclist in a group or pace line don't have to work as hard, about thirty percent less than the person in front, to go the same speed. The lead rider is "pulling"—essentially towing the riders immediately behind him.

Now that I had gotten on the wheel of the rider in front of me, I was able to ride in this small, trailing air pocket of less resistance. This enabled me to recover faster and get my breathing and leg pain under

control so I could surge again as we finished the final eight miles of our road cycling race.

Before I could entertain another thought, I heard the sound of cracking, crunching, and metal on metal. I felt for a moment like I was falling, being dropped straight down as if there were nothing underneath to support me. It was like the proverbial rug being pulled out from under me, except in this case I was lying facedown on it, four feet off the ground, moving forward at twenty-five miles per hour.

BOOM! The right side of my head slammed into the pavement. Thank *God* I had my helmet on. My neck snapped back to my shoulder, and my forward speed caused my body to roll forward, contorting my neck toward my back in the process. At some level I was aware of what was happening, but I don't have a visual memory of it. It happened so quickly, in the space of nanoseconds.

And then all at once, everything was very still.

Where was I? I couldn't see anything. It was pitch black. Or maybe I had just closed my eyes? I don't know. What I did know was that I was in pain, unimaginable pain.

I was aware of being in this tangled mess, feeling something wirelike lying across my face. It was a nightmare. This couldn't be real. I would open my eyes in a moment and find myself in my bed, waking up and looking forward to cycling into work. But the pain said otherwise.

I was incapacitated, shocked, stunned, dazed—with pain spiking through my upper body like lightning bolts repeatedly striking me. Strangely enough, I couldn't feel anything in any other part of my body. It was as if part of my body was asleep. I felt like I was having an out-of-body experience, like I was separated from myself; floating above, and looking down at this terrifying scene.

Someone had crashed. Who? It was all so surreal. I could feel these sensations but was in a state of disbelief. Suddenly I was aware of someone cradling my head between his hands. I could hear a man's calm voice telling someone not to move me.

Fuck, I thought, it's me. I'm the one who's down.