



## MINIWAKAN TIYOSPAYE NEWS

**SPIRIT LAKE CONSULTING, INC.**

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### ***A Second Chance at Life – How a car accident changed my life forever!***

An article by SLC consultant Willie Davis

This article will provide the reader with a basic understanding of my life and how a disability has affected everything that I do daily. I will explain how choices in life can result in long-lasting consequences by sharing a chronology that lead up to the accident, how I have dealt with daily issues, and what I feel are life's lessons. Finally, I would like to leave the reader with a better understanding of how we make choices each day and why we should make positive choices.

This story begins on the night of August 30, 1980, a few weeks before the night I was to start my college career and future after high school – a time when a young man becomes a man and goes on his own. Earlier that day I had made arrangements with two of my classmates (girls) to go to Canada, where the drinking age is 18. This was going to be a night to remember for me because this would be a night that would change my life, my friends, and my family's lives all in one instant.

My classmates picked me up around 6:00 p.m. and we began our trip to Canada (a 35 minute trip) to where we were going to eat and have some drinks. As we arrived I noticed there were not many people at this bar/restaurant and of course it was early. We placed our food orders and soon began drinking. One of my friends ordered a drink called a "Singapore Sling", a mixed drink with hard liquor and it was really potent. I had a few sips and liked it. We sat there for 2 hours and drank some more after our supper, consuming 3 to 4 Slings in 1\_ hours.

Soon our other friends began to arrive and soon we were all in the bar, on the dance floor, and shooting some pool. After a few more hours and some drinks later, I started to notice that I was getting a little tipsy, but I was having a good time. It didn't matter that my ex-girlfriend was also there with her friends dancing with other guys and ignoring me. I kept on mingling with my friends and even shared a couple of cigarettes with a few girls. This was not like me. I was an athlete and I was against smoking, but somehow I was trying to be a "bad boy" and be different. All along I was telling myself that I was having a "good time". But, deep inside I felt a little empty.

The night continued to somehow drag on. I kept on drinking and dancing and hitting on reservation girls, trying to get names and telephone numbers. This was part of what is called “coming of age” with your friends. You try to impress them by bragging about how popular you are with the girls. The more names and phone numbers you get, the more popular you are. This I find ironic, because with girls, the more popular you were with the guys, the more this was viewed as a negative thing.

In no time at all (around 1:30 a.m.) the bar closed and we were all informed to leave the building. As we began to leave, many of my friends were discussing a plan to continue partying at a friend’s place. So we all headed to our vehicles. The friends I was with decided to ride back with others. A friend and I then drove back together. I sat on the passenger’s side. This drive seemed to take longer than it did when we first came up. It probably had something to do with being pretty intoxicated and everything was spinning around after consuming around 8 Slings and about 6 beers, including 2 or 3 shots of who knows what. On the drive home I kept on dozing off.

We arrived back home and continued to drive around until finally we decided to head over to the party. We then drove down this gravel road that was really rough. We called it “washboard roads” because after it rained the road would look like a washboard. This is where my life changed! The last thing I remember was the car (a mid- to late 70’s Chevette 2-door) rolling over and I was thrown through the windshield. My memory is somewhat vague and I somewhat remember lying in water for a short time. I remember a year later taking a drive by the area where the accident happened to better understand where that memory came from.

The whole area is still nothing but a swamp of water with small trees and bushes. It’s a wonder a branch or twig didn’t puncture me, on top of the broken back. X-rays would later reveal that I suffered a complete break or severing of the spinal cord and two vertebrae were broken or shattered. The driver was found underneath the car and there was also another person found in the back seat (I didn’t even remember him getting in the car. We had picked him up in Rolla 10 minutes before the accident). The police were called to check on us, thanks to a man who was up looking out of his window. The driver and I were rushed to Grand Forks with severe injuries. However, the only lasting and permanent damages would be mine.

Both of the other passengers in the car walked away from this accident. But the driver would later go on to commit suicide 10 years later. Some say it was due to his personal and family matters. I often wonder how much guilt he had to live with. I personally, forgave him because anyone of us could have caused the accident if we were driving.

#### Life’s Lesson (What I Learned About Life Changes)

Sometimes life has turns and places you in a different direction than you have planned. There are also curve balls, instead of fast balls that are thrown at you. How you handle and deal with them will determine what happens to you or may have results you are not expecting. My life was full of promise at the age of 18 and a choice to give into peer pressure or go with the flow cost me severely. I am grateful that I did not die that night. Even though I experience medical and daily problems, I do not let this get me down. I know that there will always be a better tomorrow.

“I remember a year later taking a drive by the area where the accident happened to better understand where this memory came from.”

### New Beginning

My life changed that night and when I awoke on August 31, 1980, the next day, I was a different person. I was in a lot of pain and kept dozing off and each time I woke up, there were different people in my room. I was later told that I had a big family with many brothers and sisters. I found out later all of my friends were saying they were part of my family so that they could see me in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). I was also placed in something called a “Striker Frame” that allowed me to be rotated 180 degrees. The nurses came to turn me about 60 degrees every hour. This was very uncomfortable but necessary to allow circulation and blood flow throughout my body. Each time they turned me the pain was so excruciating it felt like I was going to die. I was in this frame for weeks after my surgery.

I was in this place for a few days before I started to stay awake longer. It was during this time that the doctor told me how severe my injuries were and that I was never going to walk again. He told me I was going to be a “paraplegic” confined to a wheelchair for the rest of my life. This information was more than I could take. I wept for days. Not knowing what my future would hold and whether or not I wanted to live like this, I bargained with GOD. I made pleas to make things better and asked that these injuries not be permanent. I would change and be a better person, only if he would give me “second chance”.

### Life’s Lesson (What I Learned During My New Beginning)

I learned just how important family and friends are. No matter how much we may want to be alone or get frustrated by something in life, I can always count on my family or friends to be there for me. My mother was there beside me for comfort and to let me know things would be all right. My dad and brother were also there to carry me in and out of the house or to the bathroom during those early days of my recovery. Even in my later years, some 20 years after my accident, I have maintained a close relationship with family members and now have nephews and nieces to teach. I have spent and continue to spend time teaching them the skills and knowledge I have gained. From the simple things such as playing catch with a baseball or football or sitting with them to read, I have tried to be their teacher. These skills I contribute to my Grandparents who gave me the foundation in my earlier years. I have learned that it’s not how much time you spend with someone. It is the quality of the time that you spend. Also, time is precious and should not be wasted. Don’t sweat the small things.

When it comes to having hope and dealing with changes in one’s life, I have found that it is best to have something to believe in, such as a higher power (GOD or Great Spirit). This has helped me to accept things as they affect my life each day. I pray daily and give thanks for my life and for all that is good. Without this in my life, I feel emptiness and often have feelings of depression. My faith helps me in a serene manner that compares to nothing else I have experienced.

### Second Chance

It seemed like months, but after a few days of adjusting to my physical trauma my doctor decided to operate on my back. He placed two Harrington Rods along my vertebrates to stabilize my injuries. They were stainless steel and ran from T-1 to my C level (lower part), almost down to my tailbone. When I awoke, I was in this body brace that limited my movement and caused some discomfort. I spent months in the hospital healing and recuperating. Toward the end of my stay I began some simple rehabilitation steps, lifting 2-pound weights and lifting myself in bed. After a few months it was time to transfer over to the Rehabilitation Hospital to begin my new life. This was not something I was looking forward to because I was still in a state of denial, shock, despair and anger. I was also starting my life over again – you could say just as a baby with limited or no control of my bladder or bowel systems. This was demoralizing as a young man of 18 years old in his prime. My initial feeling about the Rehab was that of frustration, because days were filled with a strict schedule starting @ 6:30 a.m. with bowel program routine and grooming (washing face, body and combing hair).

You must keep in mind that I was not very happy with this daily regiment or the physical exercising that I had to perform in each of my therapy sessions including getting dressed in bed or in my wheelchair (which is how I get dressed to this day). For instance, I was required to do Range of Motion on my lower and upper limbs and rolling exercises to help me sit up. They also had me do wheelchair exercises such as popping wheelies (in case I needed to get down a curb) or getting into my wheelchair from bed, car, the ground or floor. There were no limits or scenarios I did not work on or encounter, in preparation for my future (living in a wheelchair for the rest of my life).

“There were no limits or scenarios I did not work on or encounter.”

I attended support groups, guidance & counseling, and spiritual therapy during those days at the Rehab. Each session allowed me to understand my physical and emotional issues as well as to come to some resolution in addressing how I would deal with problems or issues that arose or will in the future. Depression was a major problem I was dealing with, and keeping busy was one way to cope. It didn't allow me to think about what was bothering me. This is something I still suffer from today, but it comes and goes. How I deal with it varies, but the easiest is to understand that there will always be better tomorrows. I had the opportunity to meet new people everyday and go out to social functions. Some came and went in my life, but others remain my friends today. It was also during this time that I got to go out with girls again. Actually, two girls who worked at the Rehab took another wheelchair friend and me out one night. Let's just say it was a night to remember and it took my mind off of being in a wheelchair and gave me a chance to have some fun again.

### Life's Lesson (What I Learned During My Second Chance)

We are not given the opportunity to live our life over again or get a second chance. But, for some reason I survived the car accident that fatal night and I have come to believe that I have a purpose in life. Some say that there is a Higher Power that has a plan for me. And others say that what I am doing today, by getting involved in my community with projects and committee's is why I didn't die that night and continue to live today. I guess I can sum it up in this way, “When it's your time to go, you will have no choice. But, I would like to think my work is not done yet”.

“How I deal with it [depression] varies, but the easiest is to understand that there will always be better tomorrows.”

### Committee's, Boards, Basketball, Pool, Hunting, etc..

I first got involved in Committee's when I moved back home to Belcourt in 1986. That is when Randy Morin and I founded the Turtle Mountain Disability Association. It was intended to assist disabled tribal members with financial, medical or equipment assistance. Little did I know that this would be the foundation for a 20-year community, state and national level civic involvement including serving on the Statewide Independent Living Council, National Council on Disabilities, State Transition Council, and other. I continue to work on disability projects including the construction of a community Group Home and Assisted Living Center here on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. I also have established a Disability Consulting Services business that has allowed me to branch out and maintain a network of contacts. That is how I discovered Spirit Lake Consulting.

This has given me an avenue to share my personal skills and abilities by writing articles or assisting with presentations. All have given me an inner confidence and gratitude to continue helping others. We all have a purpose in life and this is how I choose to carry out mine. I have found things get done through cooperation and encouragement – just as you do in your own life. It starts with one person contacting another and each sharing their feelings on how the issue/project is dear to their heart or is important. I have found that you should set priorities and work on each one, starting with the most important and working your way through them all.

It was during my time at the Rehab that I got the opportunity to play pool from a wheelchair. At first it was awkward and frustrating, but with nothing else to do some evenings, I would often wheel down to the cafeteria and would pass by the recreation room where the pool table was. So, naturally, I got curious and became hooked on playing everyday (to this day I still play pool on a league team, but with arthritis setting in, I'm not sure how much longer I can play).

Sports was in my blood. Any chance I had to play in a physical activity I was there. Growing up my friends and I would play football for hours up until the day before my accident. My interest in all types of sports came from my Grandfather and uncles who instilled in me the skills and abilities that allowed me to genially love watching or participating. So, I guess it was natural for me to find alternative activities/sports after my accident.

I had a chance one night to watch wheelchair basketball practice first hand. After seeing how the players pushed their wheelchairs up and down the court, with so much ease and quickness I wanted to do that and be able to shoot the ball and be part of the team. But, at that time I was still in a body brace that limited my movement.

When I got back to the Rehab that night all I could think about was getting stronger and taking the brace off so that I could go and play basketball. I later joined this team called the "Wallbangers" and we traveled all over the country as a team playing in National tournaments and community fundraisers. I managed to play with the team for 17 years. It too, took a toll on my bones, causing major arthritis problems. However, I would not have given up the chance and pleasure to have played organized sports be it wheelchair basketball, softball, track & field. It did not matter; just as I had planned to do in college before the accident (play college baseball) I fulfilled that goal in my life with wheelchair sports.

It was toward the end of my wheelchair basketball career that I got involved in bow hunting (using a crossbow to hunt deer). Well, actually my brother and his good friend got me interested when they asked me to go out with them. My first time gave me a lot of pleasure and confidence to want to do this more. I soon began going out almost daily during that first hunting season, but did not get a deer. But, it did not matter because I enjoyed spending time with my brother and friends each time I went out. There were different experiences, scenery and things we encountered that compared to nothing else I have ever done in life. It was addicting, kind of like being on some type of drug but, it was a natural high on life and nature. I was one with nature and it was so serene to sit there in the wild and think about life, family, and friends. It was also nice to escape reality--the hustle and bustle of life--which can be so chaotic and fast pace. Going out hunting, whether I was sitting with my brother, friend or by myself (yes, I often sat for hours in my ground blind

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It took me nearly 2 \_ years before I was able to shoot my first deer with a crossbow. But, I did it and wrote an article for the Bismarck Tribune and my local paper. I enjoyed sharing these memories that I was able to put in writing. It is unfortunate that I have not been able to continue hunting over the last few years, due to my arthritic conditions. Although I am limited in the physical activities I can enjoy, I do find time to play pool which is my only outlet and real exercise, other than wheeling around daily in my wheelchair. Some days I can wheel up to three to four miles going around my house or moving around on the job.

I do continue to play in a pool league that starts in September and ends in March. However, I must continue to practice and try to do this once or twice every week to sharpen my skills and keep my body physically fit. I also played on the National Wheelchair Poolplayers Association circuit for 3 years. We attended one to two tournaments a month in different parts of the country with a National/International tournament concluding in November. Participating and getting into this tournament required major financial support which I had during those three years through corporate and private sponsorship. But, due to my lack of traveling abilities to get to these tournaments and with the physical play of my game deteriorated, I cut back. Playing pool in a wheelchair involves a lot of bending over the table and stretching out. I still try to attend a tournament held each year in Rochester, Minnesota. I hope to play for years, as long as the Lord is willing and my body is forgiven. While I've had the opportunity to build a network of contacts, nothing compares to the camaraderie that you find in working with others, such as I have found in working at the Turtle Mountain Community College over the last 16 years, either part/full-time. The people I have had the pleasure to work with especially at the Vocational Rehabilitation Program make those days I am at work most enjoyable. They have accepted me as an equal, and have supported and encouraged me daily.

#### Life's Lesson (What I Learned From My Involvement)

Getting involved whether it is playing in sports, serving on committee's, groups or participating in an activity that challenges your mind or body can provide you with rewards that can last for a life-time. Each person must find that special thing or click (something innate/inside) that is appealing and fosters the energy to apply it. It helps to find someone who shares in that passion and together you can make the changes or journey to a positive outcome in your life. I often recite the quote "I am more concerned about the cause, than the applause".

#### Choices & Consequences

I have learned over the years that we all make choices in life (good and bad) and there are consequences for those choices. I chose to drink the alcohol that fatal night and got into the vehicle that caused my injuries. But, now I have the option to make positive choices and conclude with positive outcomes. Many of us do not get the chance to make a "second impression" in life. There have been many times that I have presented in schools about the consequences of drinking and driving. I have shared my personal story and how one bad choice to drink and drive has resulted in life-long lasting results. I share with the students how I got in the wheelchair and try to inform them that each choice they make (good or bad) will result in consequences. I incorporate life lessons and a message of understanding about being sensible and knowing their surroundings. "No matter where and what you are doing, be responsible."

#### Life's Lesson (What I Learned Through Choices and Consequences)

We all make choices each day that affect our lives and others around us. Although we may be aware of these choices, do we often think about what the major consequences are (short or long term)? One wrong decision can result in major life changes. Positive decisions can result in positive outcomes. Make the right choices!

#### Maintain A Positive Outlook In Life

The more I live my life in a wheelchair and encounter things the more frustrated I become by people's ignorance and inability to make this world a better place for everyone. However, we need to each look at our own lives and make the best out of it that we can. You have the responsibility to help your fellow neighbor and take care of yourself. The more positive you are in your attitude, the better chance you will have in maintaining

### Life's Lesson (What I Learned About Outlook in Life)

People of all walks of life are received better when they are perceived as warm, caring and happy. Maintaining a positive outlook, whether through example in performing civic duties or how you present yourself can lead to a better life. Although it may be difficult at times for the people who are suffering from some type of disability with their personal problems and frustrations that hinder positive thinking, they must reflect upon their faith and inner strength. I often think about this during these times I am having difficulties – I am grateful for what I can do, not for what I can't and thankful for what I have, not what I don't have.

### Where Am I Today and Final Message(s)!

My life is full and gives me pleasure immensely. I get out of life each day what I put into it. Some days I am unable or don't feel like doing much, so I focus on my health and getting better. Other days I continue to work and involve myself with projects, people and issues that are very important to me. Just as I believe I would have done before my car accident, I give back to my community and feel that each person doing their part can make this world a better place for everyone and keep things in balance. Just as my ancestors (The Ojibwe Tribe of the Turtle Mountains) believe, we must keep in harmony and balance. Life will provide you with lessons. The question is, "Can we learn from them!"

## ***SPIRIT LAKE CONSULTING, INC. PILOTS NEW COMPUTER-INTEGRATED TRAINING APPLICATIONS \_IN NORTH DAKOTA AND AROUND THE COUNTRY***

The Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain Reservations will be the site of testing of a new computer-based training application, developed by local business, Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. Within one month of receiving a prestigious USDA Small Business Innovation Research award to develop the Caring for Our People training application, vice-president Dr. AnnMaria De Mars was already presenting a prototype at the annual conference of the Consortium of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) in Seattle, WA. Conference attendees were able to see a demonstration of all of the components of the Caring for Our People product; course web pages, Virtual Library, Commons Area, and experience a sample of the workshops that are currently being conducted on the Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain reservations . COPT courses include on-site instruction, web-based training, emailed newsletters, and group activities in a workshop setting with others working in the field. The Virtual Library includes handouts, booklets, even entire books, that give the participants more information on the disability that they are researching. The Commons Area contains newsletter articles, advice posted by staff members, tribal members with disabilities and families and virtual field trips of interesting websites. Designed for rural communities where high-speed Internet access may be limited by affordability and geography, the COPT application provides several hundred web pages on each CD-ROM as well as thousands of pages of books, articles, and other documents.

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## *Free Workshops and Training CD – June 2006*

**To learn more about living a full life as a person with a disability ....**

The positives and negatives of family life & disability:

"I chose to focus my first article in the Family Life & Disability newsletter series on the things that make life worth living - family, work, nature, sports - rather than details of range of motion exercises, using hand controls to drive a car, and so on. We do cover those topics in the Disability Access workshops. However, I wanted to begin with what is really important, independent LIVING. After all, what good is it to have learned to drive a car with hand controls if you don't have anywhere you want to go and no one wanting there for you? - Willie Davis

"It's not so much an empty nester thing, it's more a little-crushed-body-lying-on-the-sidewalk-below-the-nest kind of thing." - Eva, mother of Rick.

If you are a person with a disability or a family member, you want to attend the **Family Life & Disability Workshops** being offered on the Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain reservations. These workshops provide solutions to common problems by people with disabilities and their family throughout the family members' life. Sample topics covered include self-care and behavior problems in children, becoming independent as an adult, substance abuse and sexuality, to give just a few examples. For more information, contact Willie Davis (701) 278-2920 at Turtle Mountain, Derrick Dauphinais at (701) 351-2667 at Spirit Lake, or email [DA@spiritlakeconsulting.com](mailto:DA@spiritlakeconsulting.com)

**For staff members serving tribal members with disabilities....**

The first section of the series, **Introduction to Disability & Culture**, is now in commercial development. Significant revisions were undertaken following field-testing to increase the ease of navigation of the website and CD-ROM as well as to strengthen the cultural content. The second training program, **Special education for tribal members with disabilities and chronic illness**, will be piloted on both the Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain Reservations in June. Staff working in programs serving people with disabilities are encouraged to contact Dr. Erich Longie at (701) 351-2175 or [COPT@spiritlakeconsulting.com](mailto:COPT@spiritlakeconsulting.com). As well as free training and a free CD-ROM, participants will receive a \$50 stipend.

**Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. is an Indian-owned business that serves residents of rural reservations, acting as a resource to American Indian and other disadvantaged communities by providing training, evaluation, data analysis, and technical assistance services. The COPT project is a computer-integrated workshop series designed for staff who work with people with disabilities and chronic illnesses living on American Indian reservations.**