Cycle of Hope:

_A Journey from Paralysis to Possibility_

By

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For those who have accompanied me along the way...
“...suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us.”

Romans 5:3-5
Part I

Suffering

“Suffering is but another name for the teaching of experience, which is the parent of instruction and the schoolmaster of life.”

—Horace
Chapter 1

It all happened so quickly. The realization. The impact. The wind knocked out of me. And then screaming from above. I couldn’t see the faces, but I could feel the tension in the air. What just happened?

I lay on the ground, flat on my back, unable to move. Nothing was there holding me down, but when I tried to get my legs to bend, my quads to tighten, or my ankles to roll—nothing happened.

Two women rushed to the scene and kneeled over me as I looked up from the ground, fear rushing through my veins. I was fighting against the pain and shock as one asked, “What is your name?”

With barely a breath, I whispered, “Trish.”

As I was focused on answering the question, the other woman bent down and began to unfasten my helmet.

“No! Don’t do that!” I said with as much force as I could muster.

The first woman went back to her line of questioning. “What day of the week is it?”

“Sunday,” I whispered.

“What is your friend’s name?”

“Matt.”

She continued, “What color is your bike?”

That sent me into a tailspin. My bike, I thought. My brand-new red and yellow bike. It was my prized possession.
Earlier that morning I had been looking forward to showing off my four-month-old Giordana racing bike. Matt, a friend from my racing circle, was visiting from out of town. Instead of spending the day touring the city’s landmarks and museums, we decided to go for a fifty-mile bike ride so he could enjoy the natural beauty of the city of Denver. The details of what happened next were slowly filtering through my mind.

It was a sunny day in autumn. The date was September 17, 2000, and instead of making preparations to ease into the cold of another winter, my life was in bloom. I had just returned from a summer of adventure and excitement, started a new job and was in the best physical condition of my life.

From my house, we rode down side streets, playing “dodge the obstacles” as we maneuvered around parked cars and pedestrians. Once we reached the bike path, we were able to ride side-by-side. We reminisced about the summer and the fun we had racing in Wisconsin and at a stage race in Pennsylvania. We talked about our plans for the new year and how we would come back stronger and more focused than ever in the coming season.

Eventually, the bike path ended and we were back on the road, heading for the suburbs. We rode in single file again, until I felt my bike becoming sluggish and bumpy. I looked behind me and saw that I was riding on a flat. “Not again!” I exclaimed. I had fixed a flat earlier that morning.

“Do you want to turn around?” Matt asked. “Maybe this isn’t your day.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll fix it. Let’s keep going.”

Since Matt wanted to see Denver, I was going to show him Denver. I wanted him to get a taste of the hills and the Colorado elevation. I thought that what he needed was a challenge and I
wasn’t going to be defeated in my attempt to impart the pain. A flat tire wasn’t going to stop our ride.

We finished riding through town until we got to Golden, and the foot of our destination—Lookout Mountain. We settled in our saddles and began our climb to 7,500 feet.

As we ascended Lookout, the city faded below. The road curved back and forth like a snake in a series of switchbacks. As we climbed, the road below, the houses, cars and all of civilization became miniature. The air got cooler as we peddled along the tree-lined ribbon of road. Even though the climb is only four miles long, it felt as though we had ridden miles out of town. Finally, we reached the top of the mountain climb and felt the satisfaction of yet another small achievement on the bike. It was one of many workouts to challenge our bodies and build our fitness. Cycling is an adrenaline rush. It’s addictive. And each workout, although at the time it may break you down, ends with a feeling of accomplishment and the reward of increased physical gain.

As I looked down over the city and across to the mountains, I felt like I was on top of the world. The only thing I could see in front of me was possibility. I felt, in that moment, invincible.

Heading down the mountain was our reward after the push and strain of riding to the top; though the journey down the winding and narrow hill isn’t for the faint of heart. It’s a roller coaster, a collection of dips and turns—and the added danger of a road open to cars. One wrong move could mean disaster. The descent requires one hundred percent attention at every moment and in every curve, but it’s a rush to exceed twenty miles an hour with the wind kissing every
part of your body and your brain fully engaged in the process of leaning, turning and keeping the bike upright.

As we reached the bottom, the air was fresh against our skin, and we basked in the glow of our ability to feed the fire inside us—to ride and be fit. I felt an exuberance I had never felt before. My bike was my freedom.

All of that changed in a brief instant. I remember the details of the accident as a slow motion movie in my head. We were returning home, riding east on 32nd Avenue in Golden almost a straight shot back into town. A car appeared on the other side of the road, heading west—toward us. The car maneuvered into its left turn lane. At that very moment, Matt and I were at the edge of an intersection with a side street—32nd and Crabapple. We were beginning to cross over Crabapple at the very same moment the car was accelerating through the turn lane and entering the same side street from 32nd. We had the right-of-way, so in that moment, we weren’t considering that there could be a car coming in our direction. I entered the intersection as Matt was approaching the middle of the road. I was just far enough behind him to see him make a big swerving motion around the car to avoid being hit.

A wave of relief washed over me. *For sure the driver realizes we’re here now,* I thought to myself about the near-miss. But then I realized that the driver had no idea that there were two cyclists on the road. I was far enough behind Matt to see what was happening, but not far enough to do anything about it. I went for the brakes, but it was too late. I crashed into the front corner of the car, soared into the air, turning, and slammed my back into the car’s windshield. Rolling off the car after the impact and lying at the edge of the road, I felt as though my body were
disconnected. My legs felt like they were floating in mid-air. It didn’t feel right. In fact, it felt horribly wrong. I couldn’t feel anything below my waist.

   The sound of sirens brought me out of my daze and back to the present. I struggled for breath. I knew it was bad. Very bad. I wondered if I could be dying. In the background, I could hear that Matt was in a panic too, screaming at the driver. He was probably in shock. I knew he didn’t see the accident, but I was sure he had heard it.

   Swiftly, yet delicately, the paramedics encircled my neck with a brace, slid a backboard beneath me, shifted me onto a gurney and loaded me into the ambulance. A rush of commotion swarmed around me. Paramedics were taking my vital signs and firing questions and demands at me.

   “What happened?”

   “Can you wiggle your toes?”

   “Can you feel me touching your leg?”

   “How long of a ride were you on?”

   “Did you see the car coming?”

   I answered the best I could, but it felt like there was a stack of books sitting on my chest and a knife digging into my back. I was short of breath and anxious about what would happen next. I couldn’t look to my left or right because of the confinement of the neck brace. All I could do was look straight up.

   In my head I made silent bargains with God.

   *Please don’t let this be something that can’t be fixed*, I pleaded. *Let me ride again.*