

## A Journey From Trauma to Triumph

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Life keeps throwing surprises at us no matter if we are willing to receive them or not. Through these unforeseen circumstances, emerge the souls who have the will to thrive despite all the odds.

In 2008, when I was a student of 3rd year MBBS in Ayub Medical College, with an age of 21 years, life threw me my biggest curve-ball yet. On my way back from a wedding with my parents, some dacoits shot at our car. A bullet hit my neck and resulted in a complete spinal cord injury (C7-T1). It left me with quadriplegia; I was not only unable to move my legs but I was also unable to sit on my own and change my side in bed. My hands had no grip. I could only move my neck and arms. I had lost control over my bladder and bowel. But Allah showered me with His mercy, and he left my mind and spirit completely intact. This has been my strength and my weapon for fighting for my life, and beyond ever since.

After a prolonged hospitalization and surgery, I came home. Doctors told me there was no cure for my condition, and I must get used to life like this. My body was caged in a wheelchair but my mind and soul remained free. That was the time when I had to make some crucial decisions about my life. I could either let my circumstances decide my fate by sitting idle in self-pity and receiving sympathy from others, or I could accept the challenge of life to fight for myself and for my right in life. I chose the latter.

Despite being unable to hold a pen or turn the pages of my books, I resumed my studies in a wheelchair a few short months after the incident. I wasn't able to look after myself in any way as I had no grip in my hands, and so I needed a personal carer all the time. My mother, who is a house wife, made a selfless sacrifice and moved with me to Abbottabad from our home in Muzaffarabad to live with me in the hostel and help me every day. Every single day was a massive challenge but with the grace of the Almighty and with the unconditional support of my family especially parents, friends and teachers, I completed my MBBS without wasting even a single academic year. I then completed my specialization in Psychiatry and started working in CMH Muzaffarabad as a Psychiatrist. Over the years, I had made quite a comfort zone for myself with a good social support, I use to dictate my exam papers while in college but now, with the help of an adaptive device, I can manage to write with a pen. A respectable job and everything of life in place but there was this urge to grow out of my comfort zone and explore the world to see what else was out there. My quest for knowledge and my desire to thrive kept me active in the struggle and I was awarded Chevening Scholarship to go to the UK for my higher studies. The decision and then the act of moving to the UK for my higher studies while living with this level of physical dependence was an off limit- but I chose to redefine my limits. I dared to dream and my family helped me follow my dreams. While in the UK, I would commute independently between my university and

the accommodation by public buses in my electric wheelchair like any other abled bodied person would and I would put myself out there to try new things and take new risks every day. I earned a distinction and passed my Masters of Science in “War & Psychiatry” from King’s College London.

My journey doesn’t end here and I’m still looking forward to discover new horizons. I plan to get myself enrolled in a PhD programme and make the most out of my life. I am not defined by the trauma that I faced in 2008, I am known by what I have achieved and the way I have achieved it despite having valid excuses for not to carry on. My triumph is not only the academic status that I have achieved but it is the courage I have developed to look into the eyes of life and taking the challenges head on. My triumph lies in the fact that performing even a simple task like leaving the bed and going to work takes me ten times more effort, time and energy to accomplish and yet I defeat the barriers and carry on with life every day. I might take 10 minutes to reach a goal that another person can get in a couple of minutes but it’s okay as long as I am heading towards the same goal. Challenge starts the moment I open my eyes in the morning. My physical limitations are up to the extent where I need a person (my mother) to help me with simple tasks like getting a glass of water for me, turning my side in the bed, sitting up on my own without support or even dressing up. It’s like fighting the same demons all day long over and over till the time I slip into sleep and waking up the next morning to see that they are still there. I have two brothers who are now married and settled, so my parents have now completely dedicated their lives to look after me and to take care of me. My father, who is recently retired from government service, has got me installed wheelchair access in a minivan that makes it feasible for me to travel to the work. I daily go to the hospital where I perform my duties as a psychiatrist. I do the outpatient psychiatric clinic and take care of the indoor patients just like any other doctor would do. In general, my colleagues have a very encouraging and supportive attitude towards me. I am also playing my role in highlighting the issues of persons with disabilities in Pakistan and also fighting for their rights at different forums.

I sometimes get asked whether I wish I could go back to being how I was before the incident, or if I am hopeful for a miraculous medical advancement to cure me. But the reality is I'm not waiting for any treatment. I'm convinced that whatever I am doing right now is the most I could have done in case of not having been in this wheelchair. The decision that I have to make on a daily basis for the last twelve years is either to fight or to quit the fight, but I do not accept pain or hardship as an excuse to quit the fight. We can't waste our lives waiting for a miracle to happen. We are already miracles!

