

*My story begins on February 8th, 2002, a date that will forever be ingrained in my mind. Most people remember such dates like this one, because they mark the culmination of a long journey i.e. graduation, marriage, or the birth of a child. This is not the case for me. Rather it marks the beginning of what I know to be my life.*



On that night, everything that I had worked so hard to achieve was nullified by an out of control skier, who hit me while I was teaching a snowboard lesson. As a result of her collision with me, I was sent flying through the air about thirty feet and landed head first on some ice. However, I did have some luck that night, for, the spot where I lay supine and motionless was near to the ski patrol building. Had it not been for that, I would

likely not be here to tell this story today. I do not remember much of that night's events, but I was told that I went convulsions and my heart stopped before the medivac could take me LVH. Again luck was with me and I was brought back but remained in coma.

When I finally awoke, I soon realized that my survival would not be the most daunting task that I would have to face in my life. The doctors said that I had received a traumatic brain injury (TBI) from the previous night's events. Much to their chagrin, I had no idea what they were talking about, where I was, or even what my name was-total amnesia. That feeling is indescribable; however, when my mom entered the room, a flood of memories came rushing back. One would think that was good news and things looked promising, but as we were talking it soon became apparent that something was not right. It turns out that all my memories were of my early childhood.

Over the next three years I would have to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to be in the position that I am today. The hardest was trying to understand who I was and trying to learn. What I had to relearn was how to do what most of take for granted everyday and how to accept that I would never remember the past. It's funny that when people reminisce about such things

## Michael Lehr: **Changing Adversity into Hope**

as high school, they always say they wish they could forget about that instance when that embarrassing moment happened and everyone laughed at them. Well, when you're in my shoes you'd love to even have that memory to hold on too.

Instead I was robbed of all those memories. Sounds like I'm a little bitter, huh? Well at that time I really wasn't bitter; I was livid and I couldn't understand how or why? I lost all my sports scholarships, my friends, and barely graduated high school. I had to relearn four years of material to get passing grades in the last semester of my senior year, in which I had already missed three months of material. Luckily, I had a 4.0 prior to that semester and was able to enroll at my default school for college.

The thought of college did not quell my anger in the least. Rather, it fueled it. I had no idea what I wanted to be or what I would do with my life. Prior to that, I just wanted to play soccer. I pushed my family farther and farther away, but my mom always stuck by me. When I could finally walk without aid, I decided to go the gym and try venting some of that hostility and channel into something constructive. I couldn't drive, so my mom took me and luckily she came in because they wouldn't let me lift without her there-something might happen. I looked pretty weird covered in bruises from head to toe. My blood had pooled in my eyes where the white of your eye normally is, so I can't blame them for wanting to be a little cautious. The first day was horrible. I spent four hours throwing up after benching 95 lbs. It seems funny now to think that I could barely do that weight, but part of that was because of the immense pressure it put on my head. Don't get me wrong, I was still weak!

At that moment outside of the gym, I promised myself that I would do everything I could to better myself and do what everyone at that time said was impossible, while giving others what they had not given me-inspiration. I spent two years in a cognitive rehab facility to work on the learning deficit that resulted from the accident prior to and during my enrollment at Widener University. I also progressed over the years physically. I matured, attained my personal trainer certification and began a job as a personal trainer at Bally Total Fitness. I am no longer with them, but I thank them for helping with my first step into the industry. The environment that their facility created sparked my interest in bodybuilding and has given me the tools to take my life as far as I want. I now have set off to begin work on my doctorate in physical therapy, while being a personal trainer. I now know that night a few years ago my life, as I knew it was not

over, but just beginning! In the future, I plan to do some fitness modeling to help get through college, graduate, and open my own gym/rehab facility.

***Epilogue:***

In the winter of my senior year of high school, I suffered a severe brain injury as a result of a skier crashing into me while I was teaching two children at a local ski area. After waking from a coma, I faced more adversity than most would in an entire lifetime. I had total amnesia and my motor functions were extremely limited. As time passed, I began to piece together who I once was with the aid of my family. After losing everything, I gained a whole new perspective on life and my purpose in it. I also developed a new resolve to help others as my therapists and doctors had helped me to overcome huge obstacles in my path to recovery. With their expertise and support, I managed to complete high school on time and begin college. I felt this experience had given me a second chance at life and my purpose felt clear; I would train and study to help others in the same way I had been helped. I am thankful for this having been given this challenge, because it built my strength and character. Instead of just observing what patients face and the role therapists play in their recovery, I had a first-hand experience in a rehab setting. Moreover, I realized the importance of developing a relationship with an individual and the effect that another person's compassion and hope can have on a person's progress. My compassion, friendliness, conviction, perseverance, and personal experiences allow me to aid others in their development and understanding of what it means to be healthy in any setting. This most unfortunate accident gave me the tools to motivate and support others as they grow.

As I struggled to heal from my accident, I often looked up a quote on the wall of the rehab center: "There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow." The therapists at the center embodied that spirit of hope and inspired me to enter the field of physical therapy and personal training, and to promote a healthy life style.

*Name: Michael J. Lehr*

*Age: 22 D.O.B. July 17, 1984*

*Where: Pennsylvania*

*Height: 5'10*

*Weight: 190 lbs, 175 lbs @ competition*

*Years Bodybuilding: four*

*Contest History:*

*All OCB or USBF sanctioned*

*5-1st place class finishes*

*2-2nd place class finish*

*2-4th place class finish*