



Author Interview with Julie Papievis



1. Describe your life prior to and after the accident in May 1993. What are the differences?

My life before my accident consisted of working a lot, consistently trying to move forward and challenge myself in my employment, working out, and spending time with friends & family. Just before my injury, I had to adjust to being newly divorced and was working through the transition, emotionally and logistically.

After my injury my life has gone in stages. The first stage found me waking up from the coma in a severely disabled, paralyzed body. In the second stage I had to learn to copy and recover. Fast forward 15 years later to stage three and you'd see me working part-time, participating in my first triathlon, and writing my book *Go Back and Be Happy*. Today, I tell the story of my "miraculous" recovery and share my story with those who need to know that they, too, can be happy in a world that sometimes makes it difficult to do that. It's been the hardest work I've ever done.

2. Would you say that you are thankful for what happened to you?

I am thankful and yet sometimes sad because I have been given the chance through the grace of God to literally re-create my life in a way that I can help so many people struggling with sudden changes in their lives. Something I really, in my heart of hearts, always wanted to do. On the other hand, I do feel sad for what me and my family has had to endure & the physical struggles that will always remain, limiting the work that I can do to reach out to others.

3. What was heaven like? Would you have liked to stay?

Heaven was "perfect peace". Light, still, peace. No concerns, no worries. It felt like "home". A place I wanted to be, and certainly a place I wanted to stay. I felt like I "belonged" there, not only because I was able to see and speak to my deceased grandmothers, but because I knew that the message that they gave to me that "my body would heal" and "to go back and be happy" was from our Lord, sent to me, through them.

4. How long did it take you to fully recover after you woke from your coma? What was that journey like?

My body will never "fully" recover. There will always be disabilities that I will have to accommodate and work with. The rebuilding of my physical body was—and is—the hardest work I've ever done. Emotionally, I feel that because I have had such a solid structure of family, friends and my continued work with my spiritual counselor, I've learned to accept my situation. Acceptance of where you are and what has happened will always be the absolute key to getting "beyond" this injury, as is with any life changing situation.

5. Describe the spiritual changes that happened during your recovery.

I truly "feel" that I have a closer relationship with God. A more personal relationship, as with anyone whom you spend time with. I know that I was in the presence of our Lord when I was told that "my body will heal." I know that He is



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watching and that He really loves and cares for us. It is such a reassuring feeling during difficult times to know that you are not alone.

6. If there was one message you felt you needed to convey from your story, what would it be?

The one message that I feel that I would convey to people is to LIVE, really LIVE your life to be happy. That doesn't mean that everything you do will make you happy, but everyone can/should make that choice to have happiness in their life. Because in every situation, there is hope.

7. Tell us what it was like to finally participate in a triathlon and finish it.

To be able to participate in the triathlon was only because I have been an athlete my entire life, and that I had a great group of women and a coach who really cared about and took the time to accommodate my disabilities into our training. It was a commitment of time and effort to be able to participate at that level—for each of us. The timing of that, as with everything surrounding my injury, seemed to have divinely put together to make it happen. As I was running the last lap of the run, which is the finish of the race, I said to my grandmothers in heaven, "My body has healed!" Thank you Lord.

8. Tell us about the outreach that you're doing to raise awareness about brain injury and safe driving habits.

I continue to work with many brain injury and spinal cord injury associations on awareness programs that get the word out about brain injury, which is the #1 killer of people age 44 and under. I volunteer at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago in their Peer Support Program where I meet with families and survivors to offer assistance and hope. I participate in staff in-service trainings there, as well speak at many medical schools & colleges to bring awareness and understanding to those who treat people with brain and spinal cord injury or go through any rehabilitation. I also do that same work at the law office of Romanucci & Blandin for their many clients who need assistance going through the difficult process of litigation that most times accompanies these injuries. I speak as a VIP (Voice of Injury Prevention) speaker through the International program ThinkFirst to middle school and high school students about injury prevention and safe driving. It is a program that was started by and works with the College of Neurosurgeons and is also working with the Federal government to continue to bring awareness to students at a crucial time in their lives. It feels really good to be able to "give back" and share my story of hope with people after so much has been given to me throughout this experience of my injury.



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