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Mind & Body Integration

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Photos provided by Matthew Sanford

On the morning of Sun. Nov. 26, 1978, Matthew Sanford and his family were on their way back to Duluth after spending Thanksgiving with relatives. The drive was peaceful. So peaceful, in fact

, that 13-year-old Sanford fell asleep in the backseat. Perhaps this was the universe's way of protecting him from what was about to happen.

While crossing an overpass, the family's car skidded on a patch of ice and plunged into a ravine. Sanford lost his father, his sister and his ability to walk.

Three days after the accident, Sanford awoke from a coma. His mother and his brother were at his side. Sanford had broken his neck, his back and both of his wrists. His lungs were filled with fluid and an injury to his pancreas had shut down his digestive system.

Lying in intensive care, drifting in and out of reality, Sanford willed himself to live. Though he didn't know it at the time, this was the beginning of his journey with mind and body integration.

Today, Sanford is a teacher, a public speaker and an author. He is also a Nationally recognized yoga instructor, as well as, the founder and President of Mind Body Solutions. Sanford wrote a memoir about his life: "Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence," which won the Minnesota Book Award.

"As I write this book, I am a yoga teacher, and I still get around in a wheelchair. I teach bodies that can stand when I cannot, that can feel things where I do not," Sanford said. "Although I still cannot move my legs — and have no goal to do so — I feel a heightened level of presence throughout my entire consciousness, including my paralyzed body."

On Feb. 9, at 12 p.m. Sanford will be visiting The University of Minnesota Duluth to speak about the healing practice of yoga.

"Once I started practicing yoga, literally, the shape of what I thought was possible, the shape of the world, changed."

Sanford, whose doctors had originally taught him to overcome his body, realized in graduate school while studying the mind/body relationship in philosophy class, that he truly missed his body.

"Dragging my paralyzed body through life was no way to be happy," Sanford said.

He decided to try something new.

"During my first yoga lesson, I got onto the floor. This was already a big deal," Sanford said. "But then, with assistance, I positioned my legs in a V. Immediately, tears began to fall. I realized that I had not spread my legs in twelve years."

"I could feel a level of subtle sensation," Sanford continued. "The same sensation that doctors had told me were phantom feelings years ago. When I put my legs out in front of me, I could feel these sensations even more."

As Sanford's relationship with yoga evolved, he discovered his calling.

"Deepening the connection between mind and body is more than a personal health strategy. It is a practical shift in consciousness that can transform the world," Sanford said. "In fact, I believe that our long term survival depends upon this shift becoming reality. My life is dedicated to helping it happen."

A few years after getting married, Sanford and his then wife, Jennifer had twins, William and Paul. Sadly, William didn't survive. Paul, however, is now 16 years -years-old.

“We are living, loving creatures traveling through both life and death. Our drive for light permeates even the dark. In this moment, I have never been so in love with life... and so unafraid of dying. Life and death are not opposites. They are partners in the same belly.”

Sanford teaches weekly yoga classes at Mind Body Solutions in Minnetonka, Minnesota. The classes are funded by a charitable organization called Mind Body Solutions, which Sanford founded in 2001.

“Our mission is to transform trauma, loss and disability into hope and potential by awakening the connection between mind and body,” Sanford said.

Sanford works with people that have eating disorders, disabilities, PTSD and so on.

“To be more grounded in the body is one of the most important things that you can do for you mind. Your mind needs grounding and your body is the best home your mind will ever have,” Sanford said.

Today, Sanford is working on his second book. He hopes that it will reinforce his message of *waking* through mind and body integration. After all, this practice is a gift worth giving.