

PROLOGUE

I sat at the St. Michael's Hospital Trauma Awareness News Conference waiting to tell the people of Toronto the story of my motorcycle accident. Looking back on my life since the accident, I can see how the pieces were interconnected. I now believe that everything in our universe is interconnected and that there are no accidents. In our journey up the ladder of life, there are only obstacles to meet and decisions to make, and these can help us grow.

We all experience short circuits in our lives. Things inevitably go wrong, making it necessary for us to regain control of ourselves, find a positive direction in our lives, and adapt to the changed social environment. This is what I, as a brain-injured person, have had to do. The difficulties I surmounted gave me the strength to handle whatever the future has in store for me.

Accidents, try to change them – it's impossible. The accident reveals man.

~ Pablo Picasso 1881-1973

I was involved in an extremely serious motorcycle accident and sustained life-threatening internal injuries and a traumatic brain injury. I was in a coma for two weeks. I also underwent a number of surgeries because of the extensive internal injuries. The message I wanted to deliver was that hope can carry us through despair.

SecondLife, SecondChance!

Can there be a return to life after these kinds of injuries? My family and the doctors at St. Michael's Hospital would ask that question in the days and months following the accident. Neurosurgery, open heart surgery, lung surgery, general surgery, orthopedic surgery and plastic surgery would keep the Aquan-Assee family embracing hope in order to hold back the fear of death. The aftershocks of injury would radiate far, and be felt by many.

But I survived to tell my story. I was the third speaker at this news conference so I had to wait and listen to the others. I pondered where my future would lead me. What paths will I travel and what other challenges will I face? I was once told that the best predictor of the future is the past. The past lays the groundwork for the present, which in turn lays the groundwork for the future. Where would my past lead me, I wondered.

Then it was time for me to tell the story of my struggle, a story filled with pain, sadness and tears, achievement and euphoria, and a voracious appetite for growth. I have discovered many solutions to my daily problems since that fateful day, September 23, 1997, when I saw the light. It was as if I were hovering above it all, watching my motorcycle collide with the car, seeing my battered body lying on the ground,

some distance from the point of the collision. A new journey was beginning, a second life and a second chance, where I would find myself challenging many of my previously held beliefs.

Nearly dying forced me to embark on a journey of selfdiscovery and spiritual growth that involved finding a way out of the daily torment of brain damage. The accident left me in pieces, physically, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually.

Anthony Aquan-Assee

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Sadness, fear, despair, anger and pain throbbed through me every minute.

A brain injury, which is what I live with daily, is an invisible disability, one that the rest of society cannot see. A brain injury causes drastic emotional, intellectual and physical changes within a person. It has caused me massive pain and taken me on a journey down a very lonely path.

A man paints with his brains and not with his hands.

~ Michelangelo 1474 – 1564

But, I have seen the light at the end of the tunnel, and I now continue to walk towards that light. I want to share with you my painful journey as a brain-injured person.

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