

I suck at titles, but since I'm told I should make suggestions... "Chad Francour: a Story of Courage" "Chad's Story"

"Don't take anything for granted."

That's the advice Chad Francour gives to other young men and women. On January 28, 2004, Chad, a high school sophomore, was hit by a truck while attempting to cross Highway 41 on a snowmobile outside his hometown of Marinette, Wisconsin. He spent six weeks in a coma, three to four months in the hospital struggling to overcome the trauma to his body and brain. When he was released, the formerly popular athlete experienced firsthand the stigma of his peers and the limitations of his new disability. After extensive therapy and with great determination, Chad regained much of his physical strength, but his coordination was permanently impaired; he was forced to walk with a cane. His struggle attracted the attention of the Mayo Clinic, which invited him to participate in a daily program of physical and cognitive therapies. Encouraged by his family, in September of 2006 Chad moved to Rochester, taking up residence with a foster family.

As a part of his treatment, Chad's doctors at Mayo encouraged him to take a developmental reading class at RCTC, which he began in January. "I played it like a normal student," he says. "I mean, I'm nothing out of the ordinary, it's just that the process is a little slower. I got extra time for testing; besides that, I did everything that was asked of me."

Though he did gain some benefit from the Mayo brain injury program, Chad was also skeptical of its rigidity. "My injury is more physical than anything, so why would you want me messing around with cognitive stuff?"

Despite his reservations, Chad spent a great deal of time in therapy sessions for his brain damage. "When I was in the day program full time [from September to January] it was from 8:00 am to noon, so I'd have to wake up at 5:00, that's about the crack of dawn. I spent an hour in orientation group, hour in cognitive group, hour in social awareness group, and then another hour in communication. It was just a lot of unneeded energy that I spent when I could be doing more the physical part."

In early April, Chad moved back in with his family in Marinette. "Coming here to Rochester, I hoped that maybe I would meet a couple of new friends... and I did not find that at all. ... I mean, nothing is wrong up in my head; I am perfectly fine there. It is just because of the stigma of someone with a cane, thinking that, 'Oh, they are screwed up.'"

Still, Chad likes to think of the good times. "I go up to the Twin Cities [with my sister]. She has a house up there and her husband who is cool. Yep. Make sure you write that," he says with a grin.

There is still a long road ahead for Chad Francour, but he finds comfort along the way in the company of friends and family. For the people who reject him because of his handicap, Chad has a frank retort. "Really, I've come to the frame of mind that if you're not willing to accept me for who I am, then screw you."

Through his brush with death, Chad has come to realize how essential it is to make the most of the time he has. He has a favorite quote from the movie *Little Miss Sunshine*: "You do what you love, and screw the rest."