

A Father's Love: The Roman Reed Story

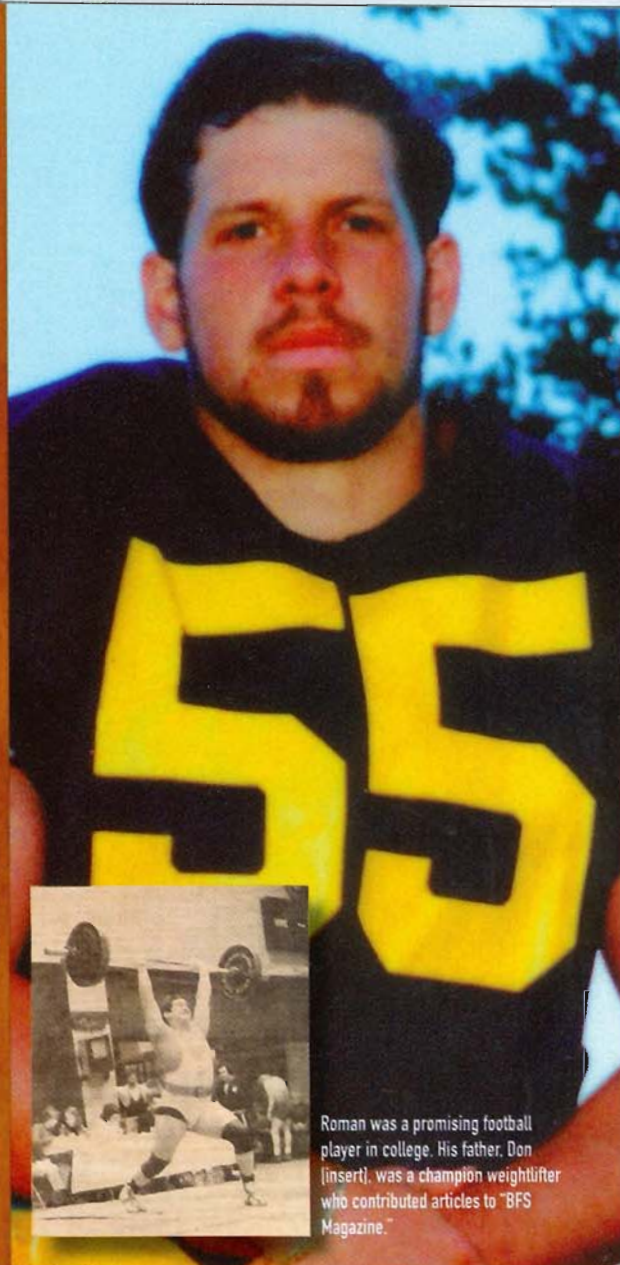
**The inspirational story of a father's
fight to see his son walk again**

by Kim Goss

Sometimes there's such a sense of apathy in this country that people think all they have to do is let the government take care of everything. Whether it's fighting crime, improving the environment or educating our children — Uncle Sam has a plan! Just pay your taxes and all is good. But if you're Don Reed and your son is paralyzed with a spinal cord injury, you're not going to sit back and let the government take its sweet time finding a cure. You're going to take matters into your own hands.

Now a retired school teacher in Northern California, Don always admired strength, and at one time he could clean and jerk 345 pounds. As a member of the world famous York barbell club, which produced many Olympic champions, Don had dreams that his son Roman would excel to the level of athletic success that he saw his teammates achieve. And thanks to great coaching from his father, it appeared that Roman was well on his way to fulfilling his goals of becoming a professional football player.

A natural athlete, Roman Reed was a 19-year-old physical phenomenon. At 6' 4", he weighed 225 pounds and displayed sinewy muscle at only eight percent bodyfat. He could run the 40 in 4.52, power clean 375 pounds, and could do reps in the squat with 625 and the bench with 425. But on September 10, 1994, Roman's dream of playing on Sundays ended. He broke his neck.



Roman was a promising football player in college. His father, Don (insert), was a champion weightlifter who contributed articles to "BFS Magazine."

Photos courtesy Don Reed

The doctor's prognosis was bleak; and while lying in his hospital bed, Roman was told to accept the following facts:

- 1) He would never walk again
- 2) He would never use his arms again
- 3) He would never father a child

Roman Reed's response? "Never tell me never!" And with that reaction, Roman and his father Don set out to beat the odds. To find a cure. To walk again.

A New Beginning

Roman describes his initial rehabilitation as "grueling, empowering, frustrating and rewarding." One person who helped with his struggle was his sister Desiree, now a sports attorney in Northern California.

She used her skills to conduct tireless research to discover an experimental drug called Sygen. Sygen enabled Roman to regain the use of his triceps, and use of this relatively small muscle group would play a vital role in helping him achieve a higher level of independence. "It meant that I did not have to depend on others to feed me, transfer me from my wheelchair to other surfaces or even brush my teeth." And the story gets better.

In addition to proving the doctors wrong about regaining the use of his arms, Roman went on to not only get married but also father two children, Roman Jr. and Jason. Roman now attends the University of California at Berkeley, where he studies history, and he coaches his oldest son's baseball and soccer teams. The story gets better still.

After the accident, Don Reed worked tirelessly to create and help pass Assembly Bill 750, The Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act. This bill provides money for research at a facility named after Roman, the Roman Reed Core Laboratory, located in the Reeve-Irvine Research Center at UC Irvine. Since it was passed in September of 2000, the bill so far has raised \$4.5 million from taxpayers for research that has amazed the scientific community. "One experiment with paralyzed lab rats has resulted in 180 animals regaining use of their legs, and next year the research will extend into human trials," says Reed. The research is so good, in fact, that it has attracted an additional \$20 million in matching grants from all across the country!

Reed points out that every single dollar that is donated to the organizations he is involved with goes to research, period. "We have no fundraising or advertising campaigns whatsoever. This is state money, and the matching grants come in from national groups."

Of the late Christopher Reeve, Reed says he not only helped raise millions for spinal cord research but also was an inspiration to those who suffered from spinal cord diseases and to their families. "Our champion has fallen, and we miss him so much. But the flame of his faith still lights our way — we will go on, and we will prevail."

The Search for a Cure

According to Reed, the typical spinal cord victim is 19 years old and typically male. "The

One Bad Decision Changed His Life

Adam hit the brakes too hard, causing the car to swerve out of control and turn over on that lone, quiet stretch of Gainesville highway. Mike was thrown from the backseat, landing 60 feet behind the vehicle.

Like millions of other teens, Mike Dayton, 19, had to deal with the pressures and difficulties of a teenage family. From his California hometown, Mike traveled with his mother and sister to Florida where he was just six years old. The father and son, who were separated from him by a continent, is a former Mr. America and world-class athlete. The latest chapter in Mike's story began the summer he was 16. He had just finished the summer job for a tile he had provided the summer before for a young man who informed his dad's wife that he was going to attempt the summit of Mount Everest.

After high school Mike moved to a new town in Florida to attend a private school. He was a member of the Gainesville Braves College, a baseball team that played at the University of Florida. Mike was a member of the Gainesville Braves College, a baseball team that played at the University of Florida. Mike was a member of the Gainesville Braves College, a baseball team that played at the University of Florida.

It was November 2000, when at 19 years old Mike made the decision to go out and party with his friends. Although the car belonged to another boy, Adam, Mike was the designated driver. The situation heated throughout the night as several kids got into the car.

Before Adam, who was driving, he had a drink. Mike and the other kids in the car were all drinking. Mike and the other kids in the car were all drinking. Mike and the other kids in the car were all drinking.

Adam's driving became increasingly erratic. The more the three boys talked to him, the more Mike felt that he was losing control. Mike felt that he was losing control. Mike felt that he was losing control.



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Mike Dayton, Jr., a paralysis victim who was featured in our Spring 2002 issue, died this year from complications related to his spinal cord injury.

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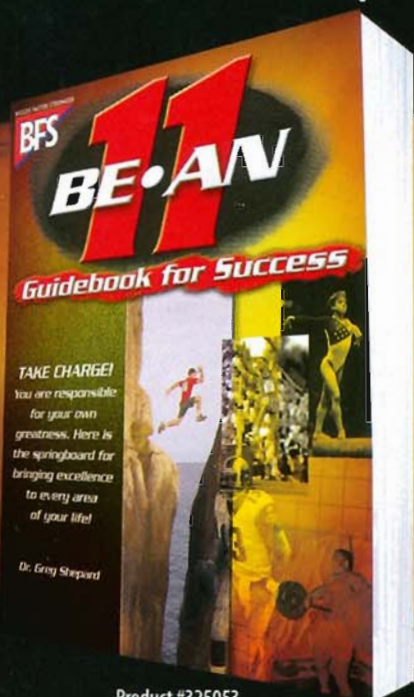
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simplest way to understand this condition is the next time you feel like turning over in bed or on a couch, just imagine that you could not do that without someone coming and turning you. That will give you a small idea of what it's like to have a spinal cord injury."

One of the best things you can do, says Reed, to help spinal cord victims in addition to becoming involved with fundraising projects is just to talk to them. "Say hello, talk to them, be friendly and curious – their minds are perfectly healthy. It's not an insult to a paralyzed person when someone notices that they are paralyzed. If you just walk up and say, 'Hi, can I help you with anything?' that's just a nice thing. But most importantly, realize that they are human beings and that their humanity is not diminished."

The theme of paralysis has been featured in many Hollywood movies, but Reed says he refuses to watch them. "I spend 8 to 12 hours a day trying to help my son walk again, and the idea of seeing a movie on this subject for entertainment – no, I just can't do that." Reed reports that a recent movie seen by some of his associates who care for paralysis victims has been particularly upsetting: *Million Dollar Baby*. "I have no patience for movies that suggest there's no hope for spinal cord victims such as my son and that the only solution is to kill that person."

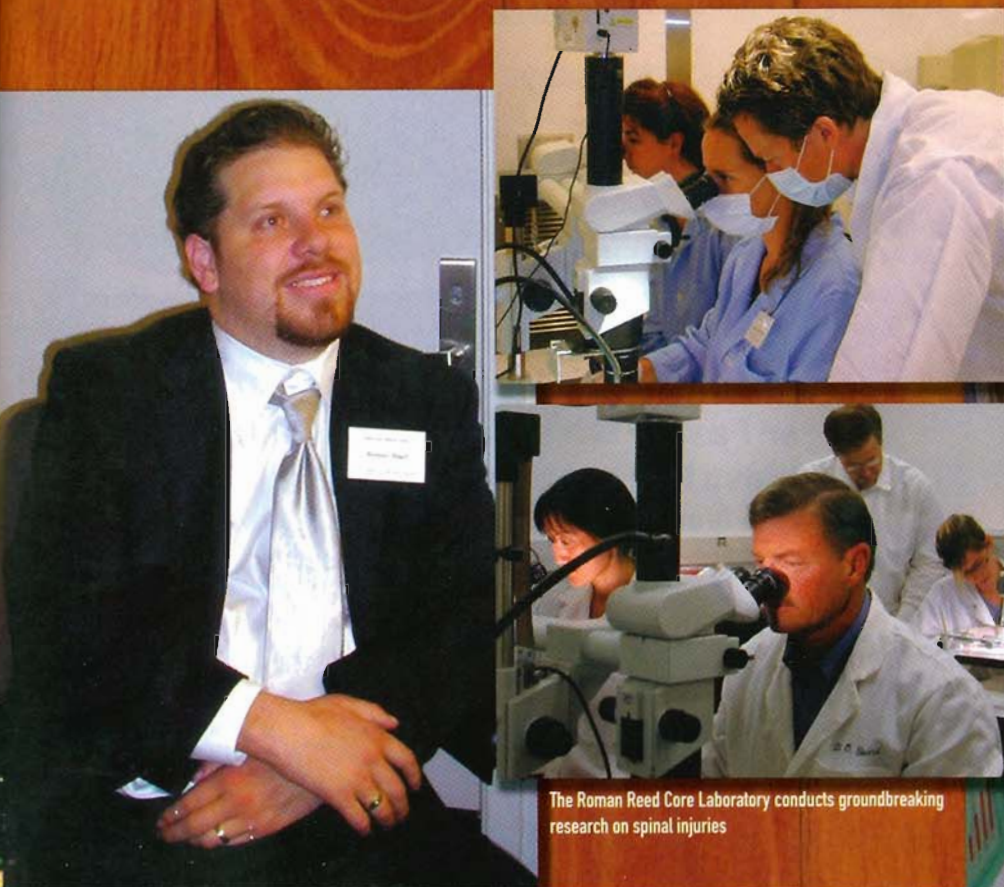
"How awful – was it Clint Eastwood's idea that the only hope for a paralyzed person is to be killed?! Yes, it's one of the greatest tragedies that paralyzed people are sometimes abandoned by their loved ones and often consider suicide even though many are incapable of committing it. So,

no – I don't want to watch a movie that shows there's no hope for spinal cord victims such as my son and that the only solution is to kill that person."

One of the biggest struggles facing spinal cord victims today is political opposition to promising new research, but Don says that the majority of polls say that the debate is over and that most Americans want this research to go to the next level. One of the reasons for the opposition to certain types of spinal cord research is a misunderstanding about treatments such as somatic cell nuclear transfer. Contrary to general perception, says Reed, this particular procedure does not involve fertilized cells; moreover it holds the most promise for enabling spinal cord victims to walk again and for curing many formerly incurable diseases.

Prior to his death, Christopher Reeve heard about Don and Roman's struggles and sent the Reed family a personal letter. He thanked Don for his work; and in words worthy of the Superman that he was in film and in his personal life, Reeve wrote, "Roman and I will stand up from our wheelchairs, and walk away from them forever."

(For those seeking more information, Don Reed suggests the website of CAMR (Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research), at www.camradvocacy.org, and www.californiansforcures, which tells how you can get in touch with Roman or Don Reed. Don also recommends Christopher Reeve's book, Still Me, and Quest for Cure by Sam Maddox.)



The Roman Reed Core Laboratory conducts groundbreaking research on spinal injuries



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