

# VENTILATOR-ASSISTED LIVING

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## “My Goal Now Is to Live ...”

David LaCour, Lawrence, Kansas

I was 42 years old, separated from my wife and children. At 178 pounds, I was in good health. I worked for a construction company as a steel worker. I was comfortable working with heights. My two daughters lived with their mother in Washington. I planned to go see them for the Thanksgiving holiday, but on November 22, 2009, my life changed.



David LaCour and his wife, Laurie

We had been working on a building for a dog food plant in Sabetha, Kansas. I must have stepped in the wrong place on the roof. I fell through, and my leg caught on a piece of conduit turning me head first going down. I fell 22 feet, landing on my head and left shoulder, breaking my spine at the C-2 level. I was told a woman acting rapidly used a defibrillator on me saving my life.

I regained consciousness one time and was told I had been in an accident, and we should arrive at the hospital in Topeka, Kansas, about 75 miles away, and that we should be there in about 12 minutes.

My ex-wife told me while I was there she was talking to me and noticed that I was not breathing. She told a caregiver, but was not believed. She told a second worker who checked for breathing. I was coded right in front of my ex-wife and two daughters. They all feared I would die right then and there.

The next time I remember I was in Lincoln, Nebraska, at the Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. I was heavily medicated and was unsure if I was dead or asleep for the following six months. My ex-wife explained to me that I was paralyzed from the neck down, but I did not believe her right away.

When it began to sink in that she was telling the truth, I was certain of my goal. I would get well enough to go home as soon as possible. I would kill myself when I got home. I did not believe I could live my life in this condition. It wasn't long before the realization set in that it was not possible for me to do this unthinkable thing without help.

The support I received from my ex-wife and my daughters changed the way I thought about things. I decided to live because of them. This started a long rehabilitation process that was filled with unbearable pain. My ex-wife told me about times I was in so much pain, I pleaded with God to “take me now. I cannot take it. It hurts too bad.”

There were so many disciplines for my rehabilitation: speech therapy, wheelchair therapy, physical and occupational therapy. I had to learn to talk again, how to eat again, differently than I used to. This was extremely difficult for me. The persistence and caring of the staff at Madonna Hospital made it bearable. I was there a total of four months before transferring to Kindred Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. I continued therapy while there over the next three

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months, before transferring to Grandview Healthcare Center in Oelwine, Iowa.

I spent the next 18 months at Grandview, but while there, I temporarily was flown to New Jersey, under the care of Dr. Matthew Kaufman at the Institute for Advanced Reconstruction in Shrewsbury. Dr. Kaufman performed a bilateral phrenic nerve stimulating implant. This allows an outside device to contract my diaphragm and with practice will allow me to breathe without a ventilator for periods of time. I spent about six weeks at the Christopher Reeve Rehab Center in New Jersey before flying back to Grandview.

I was discharged home on September 14, 2011. I live in Lawrence, Kansas, now. I have a nurse 24/7 to help with care and monitor equipment. I use the vent 24/7, but hope to increase time on the breathing pacer (Phrenic Nerve Stimulator). I currently use the pacer three hours daily and can stop using the vent a few minutes at a time. There are examples of those using the breathing pacer who have been able to not need the vent except overnight.

They told me my life expectancy is nine years. My goal now is to live beyond that prediction. I've had many different types of caregivers and been neglected and even abused at times. There are caregivers whose passion for what they do that can only be compared to that of a saint. Those are the caregivers who give me hope for a future.

My biggest obstacle is the bureaucracy of the workers compensation insurance.



David LaCour (first row, far left) with teammates at Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas, in 1986.

I will reach my goal and beyond to make sure that the system does not get off too easy for this treatment.

My only option for transportation has been ambulance service, United Transportation in Lawrence, and a friend and neighbor with a vehicle modified for wheelchairs. I am making arrangements to purchase a vehicle that can be modified for my use.

I would like to connect with others in similar circumstances, to give and receive support and to exchange information about other resources. Email me at [catfishhead67@gmail.com](mailto:catfishhead67@gmail.com). ■



Laurie LaCour with daughters Loni and Lucinda LaCour.