

Fight with flesh-eating disease inspires alumnus, author

by Alyssa Kadansky - Wednesday, April 09, 2014

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/32924/fight-with-flesh-eating-disease-inspires-alumnus-author/>

The Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci is a symbol of human proportion and an analogy of the workings of the universe, representing man's place in the cosmos.

For University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus and author Scott Martin '84, of Las Vegas, the Vitruvian Man takes on a more personal meaning. Da Vinci's famous drawing graces the cover of Martin's memoir, *Moving Forward In Reverse*, but with one major difference; the Vitruvian Man's limbs are amputated.

Moving Forward In Reverse, released on Amazon.com this week, is Martin's story of his battle with necrotizing fasciitis and his journey to rebuild himself in order to move forward with his life.

Martin grew up in Beloit and attended UWO, where he pursued degrees in physical education and social studies. Martin's passion for sports and fitness landed him a position on the men's soccer team for four years.

"It was my time for really growing up and proving to myself, and the University had a role in that," Martin said.

Martin's plan after graduation was to go directly into teaching, but he discovered a passion for coaching soccer and found himself in West Bend able to fulfill both dreams.

Martin honed his coaching skills and had the opportunity to advance to the collegiate level of coaching at the UW-Eau Claire, where he coached the women's soccer team for four years. Martin was working his way up the coaching ladder until he fell ill in 1993.

"I was invited by Nike to speak in Chicago and that's when I first became ill," Martin said. "I ended up in the emergency room in Janesville. They released me and the next day I fell into a coma for the next month."

Martin had contracted a streptococcus bacterium that is most well-known for causing strep throat. In rare cases, however, this strain of strep can become life-threatening. The bacteria that Martin had contracted caused necrotizing fasciitis, better known as the "flesh-eating disease."

Martin woke up a month later to find out that he had not only contracted this rare disease, but that both of his hands had been amputated in addition to the fronts of both of his feet in order to save his life.

"I was unable to move and didn't know what was going on or what day it was," Martin said. "I should have already been in Europe coaching, because we were bringing a team of college students over there. A doctor came in and stood by my side and told me what was going on."

Shock set in immediately. Martin said that he mentally shut down. "I had no concept of, 'Oh, you've been asleep for a month and your hands and feet have been amputated.'"

Martin immersed himself in his work as a coach with the goal of bringing his Eau Claire team to the national tournament.

"I didn't want to be reminded of the handicap and that's what I ended up doing as a defense mechanism," Martin said. "I just worked, worked, worked and that was it."

While he was in the hospital for five months, Martin wrote a coaching manual and coached from his wheel chair. He worked so hard that Martin said he hit a wall emotionally and fell into a depression.

"After five years, it hit me that I needed to break myself down in order to build myself back up," Martin said.

Martin sold everything that wouldn't fit in his car, packed up and moved to Olympia, Wash., where he started over in an effort to rebuild himself. While seeing a professional regarding his depression, Martin met his wife and after five months of dating they were married.

"I had an offer to coach at Gonzaga, which is Division I, and I was at Gonzaga for a year and left because we were six hours apart," Martin said. "So, I left coaching, we built a house and all of a sudden we got the idea to start adopting."

Martin and his wife adopted five children; two from Romania and three from Ethiopia.

"I got past the need for work and was able to focus on the family," Martin said. "I became a full-time father."

When their youngest child was in third grade, Martin began the journey of writing his memoir. Martin teamed up with University of California San Diego graduate and co-author Coryanne Hicks. The two of them worked for two and a half years, asking the hard questions and uncovering Martin's struggles to compile the memoir, completely via email.

"It would allow me to absorb the question more and get into it," Martin said. "As we got to know each other more, she prodded me more... It was a cleansing process that was very helpful."

The book, Martin said, is for his children and his wife so that they can understand what he went through.

Martin used the writing process as a form of therapy to rebuild what his illness took away. He feels that he is prepared to get back into teaching and coaching and to use the skills that he took away from his time at UWO.

"Once I got into teaching and coaching, everything moved forward from there," Martin said. "It was all about having pride in my work."

UW Oshkosh celebrates, recognizes Disabilities Awareness Week

During Disability Awareness Week on campus this week, UW Oshkosh faculty, staff and students are learning about the life stories of others who have overcome odds to move forward.

Today, the film *Miss You Can Do It* will be shown at 6 p.m. in Sage Hall, Room 1214. The film highlights the extraordinary work of Abbey Curran who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at age 2 and has never accepted her physical limitations. On Thursday, comedian Drew Lynch will perform “Stand Up With a St-St-Stutter,” in Reeve Memorial Union’s Titan Underground at 7 p.m.

Read more:

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