



To: Mr. John Kowzan

From: Joe Sylvester

Thank you for sharing your story.

Linebacker, 157-pound wrestler, and track athlete. Not to mention his exceptional academic record. John Kowzan seemed to be perfectly equipped for success at the young age of 19. John grew up in a large family consisting of his parents and eight other siblings. He grew up in a small town in Northern New Jersey and attended Morris Hills High School, where he was a prominent figure. John was smooth sailing until he hit a hurricane that altered his life forever.

One evening, John and two friends were returning home after a fun night out on the town, when terror struck. At an astonishing speed, the driver, and John's best friend, drifted into the other lane into oncoming traffic and collided with another vehicle. As a result, the driver and his girlfriend, the other passenger, tragically passed in the accident. As for John, nobody gave him a chance to survive and while they were prepared to pronounce him dead, they thought enough to send him to the hospital down the street for the official word. Vigorously holding on, John pulled through the immediate danger of the crash, but endured in a coma. In the midst, John had a dislocated shoulder

but was amazingly capable of communicating this message to the doctors that were able to reset it.

While in the hospital, John received word that he had been drafted into the army. Due to his strong academic profile, he was assigned to Army Intelligence, which could have been a possible career path. In fact, the Army was so interested in John that they chose to investigate his “injuries” because they were used to ploys from draftees trying to avoid the war. Inevitably, the local army representative discovered that John was indeed injured and they deemed him no longer fit to serve. While he was not fighting a war in Vietnam, John was engaged in a Two-Front War at home-- The Emotional and Physical rehab from the accident.

In the face of a life threatening event, the trauma is often the hardest part to overcome. John was used to an active and athletic lifestyle, so the weeks in the hospital felt like years. The one saving grace for the hospital stint was that he always had an angel by his side, his mother.

A woman that was used to working hard to help support her family quit her job to be with son during this challenging time.

John often speaks of a mother's relentless love, "Every one of her kids was as important as the last, and at that time, she needed to be there with me" he said. She was with him every waking moment, and even past visitors hours, the nurses knew enough to give her a blanket and pillow in order to save a fight they would inevitably lose. "She would only go home to eat and shower, well that's just a mothers love" John once told me. John's wonderful mother started his emotional rehab quickly and on the right foot. Although the only way he could completely rehab was if he dedicated himself to it.

John has never been one to feel bad for himself, so he figured that he will play the hand he was dealt as best he could. This optimistic attitude carried throughout his twenties as he was consumed by clubs, friends, and rock 'n' roll. John has only fond memories of this period, but his lifestyle was pushed aside to make room for a more important role in his life, being an Uncle.

"Uncle Johnny" John would say with pride filling his face. In every big family there is one person that is the glue that holds everything together, John was that person. He selflessly assumed

the role of uncle, chauffeur, and football coach, even if it was contrary to his siblings' wishes. At that point in his life, the most important thing to John was the happiness of his nieces and nephews and this brought him bliss as well. He was very successful at his role, which is evident as he was specially thanked in a speech during one of his pride and joy's wedding as well as the Birthday cards that decorate his room from his grandnieces. John's optimism and family always kept him moving forward and cherishing the next stage in his life even through the brief rough spot.

John also faced physical obstacles that required a strong commitment from someone close to him as well as himself. Since John's mother would do anything she could to help, she hired the best doctor they could find, Dr Kuhn, despite the expensive price. Even for the best of doctors, John's case would not be a simple one. During the accident, he suffered brain trauma on his motor cortex that handicapped his left side. Imagine having to relearn even the most natural tasks, like walking. Through extreme dedication and discipline John worked on a dumbbell and walking

program that gradually rebuilt strength. Astonishingly, John was able to overcome both his physical and emotional hardships.

While John describes himself, “I ain’t bothering nobody”, the truth is that his statement is an extreme understatement. In fact, he is an inspiration and a person I am very lucky to call a friend. I want to thank him so much for sharing his story with me, so I can tell a true tale of courage, resilience and family.