



# Falling Up: My Wild Ride from Victim to Kick-Ass Victory

*Dana Liesegang*

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When I opened my eyes, I couldn't move. I couldn't talk. I couldn't breathe on my own . . . I stared at the cracked paint on the ceiling and thought, How did I get here? What happened?

I didn't remember a thing.

I didn't know that the night before . . . I'd plummeted 75 feet off a cliff to the sand and rocks below. When my parents first saw me in the hospital with tubes stuck all over my swollen body and oxygen being pumped into my throat and lungs, they didn't recognize me.

In those first 18 hours I had been heavily sedated, drugged and unconscious. But in my mind, I'd been lost in a fuzzy, limbo space between reality and imagination. I remember hearing nurses moving around the room clattering objects and talking about me, saying things like, "Those are strangulation marks on her neck . . ."

I had broken my neck and critically injured my spinal cord, had lacerations to my liver and spleen, and suffered severe traumatic brain injury. "She'll be lucky to live through the night," one specialist told my mother. "If she does survive, she'll mostly likely be paralyzed from the neck down and never breathe on her own and could possibly be brain damaged. She'll be a vegetable."

My mother gave the doctors her own prognosis—the correct one, according to her: "I was told by a higher source that she's going to be fine. . . . You don't know the spirit inside that little girl," she told the doctors. "I do. That girl can do the impossible. . . ."

Mom had it from a higher source that I was going to be fine, and the more I thought about it, the more I believed her. I knew that higher source was me. I wanted to walk and swim and climb and fly free on my bike again.

I will not spend the rest of my life in this prison.

The doctors didn't have faith in much recovery for me, and the Navy wanted to sweep my "accident" under the rug and pretend what really happened didn't. But as Mom had tried to tell everybody—myself included—they had no idea whom they were dealing with.

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