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## Board Member Rethinks Possibilities



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Most people would call it a tragedy, but United Church Homes board member Bob Molsberry says that the accident that left him a paraplegic actually gave him a great gift: the gift of rethinking possibilities.

It was 1997, and for Molsberry, senior pastor of United Church of Christ-Congregational in Grinnell, Iowa, life was good. After years of working in Nicaragua on community development, Molsberry, his wife and two young children were back in his hometown, where he served as pastor of the church where he had grown up. Always active, Molsberry was a runner and triathlete.

One day while biking in preparation for a race, a drunk driver crashed into Molsberry from behind.

"Witnesses say I just flew through the air," Molsberry says. He doesn't remember the impact, or the six weeks he spent in a coma. But when he regained consciousness, the vibrant 42-year-old learned that irreparable spinal cord injuries had paralyzed him from the waist down.

"I was in the hospital for four months for rehab," Molsberry recalls. He had to figure out what he could do and what he couldn't do, and how to rethink life at work and home.

With his congregation's support and necessary accommodations, Molsberry was able to return to his position. But sports had always been an integral part of his life. What now?

Molsberry began to think about his options. He knew that the same training mentality and discipline that had prepared him for competition also helped him progress through rehabilitation, and he wondered what else it could help him do.

He realized he could still swim and compete in races using a wheelchair or a hand cycle in place of a bicycle. He began to train again and eventually entered the Ironman triathlon. Recently, Molsberry won two swimming events at the Paralympics trials, but did not qualify to go to London for this year's Paralympic Games, where he would have been the oldest Paralympian to compete on record. Still, he's not defeated, he says.

His mind-set, both professionally and personally, has changed. Before the accident, he may have been satisfied with the status quo. "Since the accident, I always wondered what I could do and what my limits are," he says.

Molsberry says that being a paraplegic is a cross-cultural excursion — a trip to a different culture where he has to learn to adjust and adapt. "It's not so much an impairment," he explains. "I get things done differently."

He was inspired to share his journey with others and wrote his first book, "Blindsided by Grace: Entering the World of Disability." He followed it up with a second book, "Tour de Faith: A Cyclist's Lessons for Living" a few years later.

In the years after his accident, Molsberry began to think of the possibilities that awaited him if he could make an even broader impact. He left his hometown and eventually became conference minister for the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ. Professionally and personally, Molsberry continues to strive to reach his potential.

When Molsberry awoke from a coma 15 years ago, he realized he could either look backward on what he had lost or forward on what he still had to gain. He chose to look forward and since then has found that life offers many challenges, but also provides more rewards than he could have ever imagined.



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