

Tim played in a summer league against the area's top football players and threw the ball spectacularly, according to DeMatha coach Bill McGregor. After the league ended, Tim left for Bethany Beach.

Tim Strachan Had a Near Perfect Life—He Was Young, Strong, and Smart, and Joe Paterno Wanted Him to Be His Penn State Quarterback. Then on a Beautiful Summer Day, He Dove Into a Wave at Bethany Beach and Began Learning What's Really Important.

By John Pekkanen

Photograph courtesy of Strachan family

Photograph for The Washingtonian by Simon Brum

**A**s he guided his wheelchair toward the center of the National Rehabilitation Hospital atrium, Tim Strachan's linebacker-sized shoulders were reminders of the football player he had once been. His brown hair

had been trimmed, and he wore a blue sweater over a white shirt that nearly hid the scar running up the back of his neck.

He knew the hospital—he'd spent three months there a decade ago. Now 28, he returned in December to speak at the hospital's holiday party for people with spinal-cord

injuries. Bouquets of poinsettias and white lilies brightened the atrium.

Tim raised his seat higher so the 80 or so people, many young and in wheelchairs, could see him. He told his audience he had graduated from the University of Maryland in 1999, is the sideline radio reporter for Maryland football games, is in his final year at Georgetown University Law Center, is engaged to be married, and in 1993 broke his neck.

He spoke of how from the time he was five years old he'd had one dream: to play college football. In the summer of 1993, about to begin his senior year at DeMatha Catholic High School in Hyattsville, standing a shade over six-foot-three, weighing 225 pounds, with a throwing arm as pow-


erful as his passion for the game, Tim had been named one of the nation's five best high-school quarterbacks. Also in that group were current NFL stars Peyton Manning and Donovan McNabb.

Tim recounted a trip he and his parents had made early that summer of 1993 to visit colleges. They stopped at Penn State and met legendary coach Joe Paterno. Tim and his parents expected little more than a get-acquainted meeting.

"There I was, sitting in his office with Joe Paterno and my parents, and Joe Paterno looked me right in the eye and said, 'Tim, we're offering you a full-ride scholarship to come and play football here at Penn State Uni-

# “Everything I Ever Dreamed Of”

BERNARD P. McDONOUGH HALL

A man in a light blue button-down shirt and white trousers is sitting in a black motorized wheelchair on a concrete step. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The wheelchair has a black bag on the back and a water bottle. The background is a dark, arched doorway of a building with stone columns. The scene is lit from the side, creating a dramatic effect.

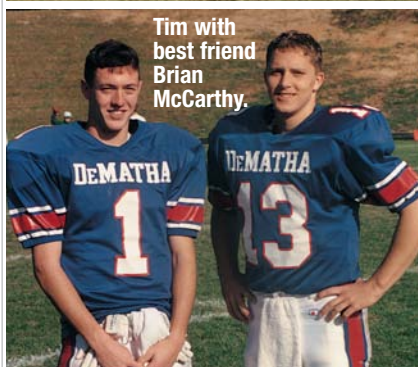
Tim Strachan will graduate this month from Georgetown law school and plans to work on Capitol Hill.



Strachan liked to play head games with the opposition—like barking out something to his right tackle to get the defense leaning that way and then running a play left.



The Strachans, a year before the accident; clockwise are Bret, Beau, Tim, and Steve.



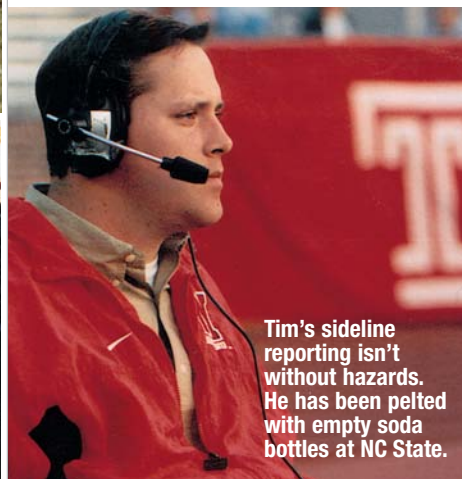
Tim with best friend Brian McCarthy.



Tim and Brian at DeMatha's graduation.



In 2001, Tim was chosen to carry the Olympic torch.



Tim's sideline reporting isn't without hazards. He has been pelted with empty soda bottles at NC State.

versity. You're the only quarterback that we're offering.'

"Everything I ever wanted," Tim told his audience, "everything I ever dreamed of for as long as I could remember was unfolding right before my eyes."

Thursday, August 5, 1993, broke sunny and hot at Bethany Beach. The Strachan family often had vacationed at Bethany the first week of August, renting a roomy cottage near the beachfront. Tim had set his alarm for his morning run. With football practices about to start, Tim wanted to report in top shape. He had unfinished business. Despite being named the area's All-Met quarterback as a junior, leading DeMatha to the Metro Conference championship and the number-one ranking in the Washington area, Tim wanted to better last year's 11-1 record. He wanted an undefeated season.

After a two-mile run, he stopped at a bakery to buy a dozen doughnuts, something he did every morning at the beach. Tim's parents, Mary and Rich, his three brothers and their girlfriends, as well as his girlfriend, Katie Ellis, were all staying at the cottage. Tim's aunts, uncles, and cousins also were vacationing there.

Mary looked up from cooking breakfast as Tim walked in with the doughnuts. When she and Rich began their family, they agreed Mary should be an at-home mom. For 25 years the Strachans lived in

the same rambler on Crestwood Road in Kensington with one bathroom and a basement converted into bedrooms for their four boys.

Rich and Mary had met in 1961 through Rich's Naval Academy roommate. Their attraction was immediate, and Rich realized Mary, whose family had lived in Kensington for six generations, would not be happy as a Navy wife. After his sophomore year, he left the academy with an honorable discharge and finished his civil-engineering degree at the University of Maryland. They were married in August 1965, Rich's senior year at Maryland. Both were 22.

Their first son, Beau, was born in November 1966, and Bret came along 13 months later. Steve, nicknamed "Pooh Bear," was born 2½ years later, and Tim arrived five years after that, on September 3, 1975. After Tim, Mary gave up trying to have a girl. Instead, she painted the inside of their home pink.

Mary has an infectious laugh, and Rich has a gift for making people smile that he passed on to his four sons. Every night the family gathered for dinner where they'd tell stories about their day or poke good-natured fun at one another. Mary sometimes would shout, "Stop laughing when you're eating! You're going to choke on your food."

One night at dinner, Rich and all four sons began to laugh, made gagging sounds, clutched their throats, and slumped over.

Mary finally laughed, too.

Rich and Mary raised the boys with a blend of common sense, humor, and patience. Mary is a strong Catholic, so the boys attended Mass every Sunday at Holy Redeemer Church of Kensington. Whenever Rich announced the night's curfew, he'd ask, "So now that you know, what time will you be calling to tell us you can't make curfew?" When they were teenagers and returned home at night, the boys knew they had to poke their head into their parents' bedroom to say good-night, no matter how late.

Tim's older brothers were his role models in the art of "pushing the envelope"—seeing how much they could get away with. But whatever discipline Rich meted out was leavened with a sense of humor and understanding of what made boys tick.

When their parents made one of their rare trips away, they had a standing order—no parties. One time before Rich and Mary had walked out the door, Tim's oldest brother, Beau, had organized a keg and poker party. Tim clamored to join in, so Beau allowed his little brother—a fifth-grader—to play cards and drink beer with the big boys.

Tim bragged about his adventure at school the next day, and in the retelling his one beer became a dozen. His fifth-grade girlfriend got wind of it and called Tim to tell him she was dropping him. "No one in the fifth grade should drink,"

Photographs courtesy of Strachan family



The Strachan family and friends gathered for this happy picture four hours before Tim's accident. Tim is in the lower left wearing a white baseball cap. To his right is Katie Ellis.

she told him.

Tim's athletic bloodlines began with his father, an outstanding high-school athlete in his hometown of Hollywood, Florida, and for the two years at the Naval Academy the backup quarterback to Heisman Trophy winner Roger Staubach. Tim's mother was a good athlete, setting the high-jump record at Kensington Junior High. Tim's uncle on his mother's side, Tom Fisher, had played quarterback for St. John's High School in DC and had been such a good baseball pitcher that he'd been scouted by the Washington Senators until he came down with arm problems.

Mary and Rich never pushed their sons to play sports. But they drove the boys to their practices and helped at team functions. And despite the long hours he worked as a partner in Fisher & Strachan, the construction business he ran with Mary's brother, Tom, Rich attended every one of his sons' games with Mary—including a record 12 in one weekend.

The desire to compete came from the boys themselves—all became outstanding athletes. Beau had the least interest in sports but played football at St. John's High School and at Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. Bret played quarterback for St. John's and won a football scholarship to the University of North Carolina, and Pooh Bear played point guard for the St. John's basketball team and later for St. Francis College in Pennsylvania.

Tim's brothers taught him to take punishment. They played "knee football"—his brothers competed on their knees to be closer to Tim's height. Tim idolized running back Herschel Walker and would try to leap over his brothers. They'd snatch him in midair and slam him to the floor. If Tim began to cry, his brothers got all over him: "There's no crying in football! Herschel Walker wouldn't cry!" Then they'd tell him to get up and try again, and he did.

The boys competed endlessly on the basketball court Rich built in the backyard. Tim could dribble between his legs by the age of three, and his mother rebounded for him while he practiced shooting. During the summers, Tim and his brothers swam for Cedarbrook, the neighborhood swim team. Tim caddied at Columbia Country Club and took his turn mowing the lawn.

Tim's football career began at the age of five when he asked to join the Maplewood Boys Club team that played tackle football. His parents opposed it because Tim was too young but relented when the Maplewood coaches assured them that Tim wouldn't be allowed to play in the games.

Although little more than a team mascot, Tim had found his athletic calling. On game days, his parents would find him sitting on the living-room sofa dressed in his uniform and pads, wearing his helmet and chewing on his mouthpiece long before they were scheduled to leave.

Tim's parents worried what people might

think for their allowing him to join a tackle-football team. In the sixth grade Tim proudly announced to his father that this would be his sixth year on the Maplewood football team.

"Don't tell anyone that," Rich said.

"Why not?" Tim asked.

"Because they'll think your parents are crazy."

At the age of 13, Tim stood six feet tall and looked older than his age. Andrew O'Connell, a friend two years older than Tim, invited him to coed parties at his home where he passed himself off as a sophomore. One morning after a party, Andrew broke the news to a sophomore girl that the guy she'd been so enamored of the night before was an eighth-grader.

Tim phoned the girl. She told him not to call again "until you've grown up."

Tim kept in close touch with friends from his childhood as he gathered new ones. They were an eclectic group, some athletes and some not. They were drawn to Tim, nicknamed T, because he was happy and ready to share a good time. A good mimic, he did impersonations of Kermit the Frog and Bill Clinton. They attended rock concerts, played video games, listened to music—Tim's favorite rock band was Barenaked Ladies—and went to as many parties as they could.

Tim pursued his dream of playing quarterback. He spent hours at a nearby park

Photograph courtesy of Strachan family



**Tim's parents prepare him for rehabilitation in his brother Pooh Bear's garage. Tim is hoisted by a device his father and brother helped design and build to put him into position to use a treadmill. Tim has gone through the routine three times a week since 2002.**

throwing the football while his father and Bret helped him develop proper mechanics. Tim tried to learn Dan Marino's quick release by putting his back to a wall so he couldn't take his arm all the way back and fired quick passes from that position. He took number 13 to honor the number his father had worn in high school and at the Naval Academy.

By his junior year at DeMatha, Tim could do just about anything he wanted on the football field—launch long, accurate passes, drop short fades over defenders, zip the ball through heavy traffic, run if he had to. His greatest strengths were in what coaches call the intangibles—leadership, poise, mental toughness. Tim pushed himself to run laps faster than his teammates and lifted weights with the linemen.

The night before a game, Tim would visualize what would happen the next day. He'd see his opponent's defenses and the plays he would make and write a letter to himself predicting what he'd do in game situations. The day of the game, Tim wore the same clothes he'd worn the day of previous games, ate the same McDonald's meal, drove the same route to school, and stopped by the classroom where the same priest, Father Claude, blessed his right arm.

In the huddle he'd holler if he had to. In a big game he'd sometimes crack a joke to ease the tension. His coach, Bill McGregor, who has sent 14 DeMatha quarterbacks to Division I football programs, calls Tim "the best I ever coached."

College letters flooded into the DeMatha athletic office. As his junior season progressed, Tim hauled home bags of them.

Tim had developed into a good enough basketball player to start some games for one of coach Morgan Wooten's stellar teams. Wooten thought Tim had not only talent but a feel for the game and could have

earned a Division I scholarship if he'd concentrated on basketball.

Tim maintained a 3.2 grade point average and was a member of DeMatha's Honor Society. He unfailingly gave credit to his teammates. He was very popular at DeMatha yet made it a point to welcome new students and offer to help them in any way he could.

"Tim was one of those rare people who walked into a room and the sun came out," Wooten says.

Tim's mother was about to serve breakfast when Tim came into the kitchen and set down the doughnuts. Mary felt an abiding pride in her sons, and it bubbled up when she looked at Tim—tall and strong, his muscles glistening with sweat.

But for some time Mary had been troubled by a fear that everything seemed to be going too perfectly for her family, that they might be tempting fate. The night before, she'd been awakened by a nightmare involving one of her sons.

By midafternoon, after hours of playing beach volleyball, Tim and girlfriend Katie walked along the shore to where Mary relaxed on a blanket. Tim dropped his wallet and baseball hat on the blanket and said, "We're going for a swim to cool off."

"Race you in," Tim yelled to Katie as they went toward the water.

Tim splashed into the surf with high, chopping steps. He saw a wave rolling toward him and, as he had hundreds of times before, dove into it. His head struck something, probably the ocean bottom.

Stunned but conscious, Tim floated face down, staring into the water and feeling nothing—no odd sensations, no tingling, no pain. A hand rose up and repeatedly struck him in the face. He didn't know where it came from. Then he realized it

was his own.

For a few moments, Katie watched Tim lying still in the water and thought he was kidding around. She rolled him over, but he slipped under water. She brought him to the surface, and he said, "Katie, there's something wrong. I'm hurt. Get the lifeguard." For a second Katie thought he was joking until she saw blood coming from his mouth. She screamed for lifeguards, who came to help. Then she ran toward Mary's blanket and yelled, "Mrs. Strachan, you have to come! Tim's hurt!"

Mary ran toward the water. She saw lifeguards and bystanders, including her son Beau, pulling Tim to shore by his arms. She noticed blood on Tim's lip and a dazed expression on his face. She went to her knees, unable to move.

"This is bad," Mary repeated over and over. She buried her face in her hands and could not look—it would somehow make real all that was happening.

"Can you move?" someone asked Tim. He couldn't move his legs or arms but managed some movement of his shoulders.

Rich was at the cottage when told of the accident. By the time he got to the beach a crew from an emergency rescue truck had strapped Tim onto a wooden body board. Rich knelt next to his son, and Tim looked up and said, "I really did it this time, Pop."

"It's going to be okay, T," his father said.

Tim remembered they planned to go to dinner that night on his aunt Mary Jane's birthday. He said he was sorry for ruining the celebration.

The ambulance crew called in a rescue helicopter. More than 30 minutes after Tim's accident, Mary remained kneeling in the sand and heard the thwacking sound of the helicopter. A crew loaded Tim on board, and the helicopter lifted off, heading for Beebe Hospital in nearby Lewes, Delaware.



**Tim is lowered onto the treadmill where Lindy and his father help move his feet. It's an unorthodox approach to rehabilitation, and it is working. "If I could just stand and turn around and get into bed on my own, it would change my life completely," Tim says.**

During the half-hour ride to the hospital, Rich kept hoping he was having a terrible dream and would soon wake up.

X-rays at the Lewes hospital confirmed that Tim had broken his neck. The fifth vertebra of his spine was fractured and displaced, injuring his spinal cord. One of the most vulnerable parts of the human anatomy, the spinal cord is about an inch in diameter and travels from the base of the brain down the middle of the back, transmitting signals from the brain to the rest of the body. It is protected by a series of vertebrae that form a hard, bony column, called the vertebral canal.

Most paralyzing spinal-cord injuries are caused not by severed cords but by cords bruised by an impact often no greater than the snap of a finger. When Tim's neck broke, pieces of his shattered vertebral bone struck his spinal cord, rupturing small blood vessels that caused hemorrhaging and swelling that shut off nerve transmissions past that point. With no room for his swollen cord to expand, oxygen and vital nutrients were cut off, killing millions of nerve cells. This triggered the release of toxic chemicals that continued to inflict damage, leading to more loss of sensation and motor function. This biochemical process began instantaneously and paralyzed Tim from the neck down.

Doctors at the Lewes hospital treated Tim with methylprednisone, a synthetic steroid, to reduce inflammation. The doctors urged that Tim be airlifted to the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, the regional spinal-cord treatment center. It was nearly dark by the time they placed Tim back into the helicopter for the one-hour flight.

Rich and Mary arrived in Philadelphia late that night and were told by the hospital staff they couldn't see Tim. They found a hotel,

where they fell into bed exhausted but unable to sleep. The next morning Rich asked one of Tim's doctors for a prognosis.

"I can't tell you that your son will walk again," the doctor said, "and I can't say that he won't."

Tim had not lost consciousness when he was injured, but the hours after his injury had been a blur to him. Groggy from sedation and shock, he became confused. Lying in his neurological intensive-care unit bed with a metal "halo" screwed into his skull to stabilize his neck, he asked a nurse, "When am I going to get this thing off?"

"In about three months," she answered. "That can't happen," he protested. "The football season will be over by then."

"I don't think you're going to be playing football this year," she told him.

"Get my father, please," Tim asked. "I need to talk to him."

Rich came to his son's bedside and explained to Tim that he had broken his neck. He said that they were all hoping to see some signs of improvement but that Tim wouldn't be playing football because right now he was paralyzed.

"Paralyzed?" Tim said, startled to hear the word.

"Dad," he said, "I'll never be T again."

"The one thing you have to know," Rich said, "is that you're still the same person you always were. You're still T."

**B**eau and his brothers arrived in Philadelphia the day after Tim's injury, and that evening Beau sat with his parents in a waiting area. Like his brothers, Beau loved and admired his parents beyond measure and knew in the most trying situations that his father remained calm and in control.

Now in the quiet of the waiting area, Beau gazed into his parents' faces and realized

they were physically and emotionally exhausted. He saw in his father's eyes something he'd never seen before—that Rich had no answer. It startled Beau.

Rich had grown up poor in South Florida, raised in a house so small that he'd slept on a folding cot on the porch. He'd never been close to his Scottish-born father, and his mother had died of cancer when he was 17. Necessity had taught him self-reliance at an early age. He had a hard time asking for help. Now he turned to his oldest son. "I need you here right now," Rich said. "I need you to help us, to make sure that I'm hearing from the doctors what I think I'm hearing."

Beau stayed awake for the next 48 hours and remained in Philadelphia for a month.

**D**octors diagnosed Tim's quadriplegia as an "incomplete injury," a term that meant he experienced some sensation in his body. He continued to have limited control over his shoulders, but the paralysis of his limbs remained, and each passing hour made the permanence more certain.

Tim lay in his hospital bed, his head locked into place, living in a body that seemed almost detached from him. He stared at his legs, willing them to move.

Tim's injury made the local news in Washington, and the Strachans' network of friends called and sent cards, and many descended on Philadelphia. Joe Paterno said Tim's scholarship offer remained in place. DeMatha coach Bill McGregor had been vacationing in Nags Head, North Carolina, when he learned of Tim's injury. He drove to Philadelphia on Sunday and was shocked to see how bruised and swollen Tim's face was. McGregor struggled to hold in his emotions.

"I'm sorry, coach," Tim said. "I let you

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## “EVERYTHING I EVER DREAMED OF”

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and the team down.”

McGregor told him he should think only about getting well.

“I’ll be back,” Tim told him. “I promise.”

Once out of Tim’s sight, McGregor broke down. He returned to Philadelphia every weekend, as did assistant football coaches and Morgan Wootten. Mary’s brother, Tom, and his wife, Mary Jane, came to Philadelphia every weekend, and many other friends and family members made regular trips. Tim’s girlfriend, Katie, remained at Tim’s side in Philadelphia.

Rich and Mary had found an apartment hotel near the hospital. When they’d checked in, they discovered the room bill had been paid for as long as they needed it. They have never been able to learn the name of their benefactor.

Tim’s parents attended Mass every morning and spent their days at the hospital. At night from their hotel room they could look across into Tim’s hospital room. Mary often stared out the window, watching nurses enter her son’s room, remembering Tim running up the front steps of their house and calling out, “I’m home.”

She read herself to sleep at night. When she dreamed, she dreamt only in black.

Andrew O’Connell sat on the stairs and cried when his mother told him of the accident. As kids, Andrew and Tim had played on sports teams and rode around on bikes, sometimes venturing off to the railroad tracks to lay pennies for the trains to flatten.

Before he left home to begin his freshman year at Providence College, Andrew visited Tim. He entered Tim’s hospital room with trepidation and found Tim lying on his side, looking ashen amid a tangle of tubes and monitors. Doctors had put Tim on a ventilator because he had developed double pneumonia.

Andrew kept reminding himself to act normally, but he couldn’t hide what he felt. At Tim’s bedside, Andrew noticed a piece of loosened tape from one of Tim’s chest tubes. He gently taped it back into place. Suddenly, Tim’s shoulders began to shake, and the respirator’s alarm sounded, and its warning lights flashed.

Andrew froze. Katie, sitting next to Tim, looked down at him and said, “Tim, you’re terrible.” Andrew watched as a smile formed around the respirator tube.

Tim and Katie had first begun dating in junior high school, then stopped for a couple of years, only to begin dating again during Tim’s junior year. Katie remained at

Tim’s side, always encouraging him and serving as a constant reminder that he still had a life to live. He confided in her in ways that he couldn’t confide in anyone else.

Katie was a year ahead of Tim in school. She had graduated from St. Andrew’s Episcopal and had planned to attend Loyola College in Baltimore. Tim and his parents urged her not to remain in Philadelphia. Tim told her that she needed to go to college and get on with her life. Reluctantly, she left for college but returned to Philadelphia every weekend.

The DeMatha football season began. In what had promised to be a spectacular year, they lost their second game, with their toughest opponents yet to come. To honor their leader, the DeMatha players wore a number 13 sticker on their helmets. So did Tim’s friends who played for Gonzaga, St. John’s, and other rivals.

Students in Daniel McMahon’s British Literature class, a course Tim had been scheduled to take, also wanted to remember Tim. Every morning at roll call, McMahon would ask, “Is Tim here?” And every morning a student answered, “He’s not here today.”

At the end of September, Tim left Thomas Jefferson University Hospital to go to DC’s National Rehabilitation Hospital. His two-month stay in Philadelphia had included 19 hours of surgery for two spinal-fusion operations and pancreatitis that required him to be nourished by a feeding tube for six weeks. Pale and gaunt, he’d lost nearly 50 pounds. An ambulance took him to Washington.

Rich and Mary had remained with him the two months, leaving just once to visit the NRH and to see the house that Mary’s brother, Tom, had found for them. They needed to move because their old house, with its narrow hallways and steeply banked front yard, would not accommodate a wheelchair. They bought the house, on Washington Street in Kensington, close to where Mary had grown up.

They’d considered a rehabilitation facility in Philadelphia, but during a tour a nurse turned to Mary and said of Tim, “He’s a quad, right?” A sobbing Mary told Rich when they walked to their hotel room that Tim would never go there.

They decided on the NRH so Tim could be close to family and friends. Rich had taken leave from his business, and a return to Washington would allow him get back to work.

Tim’s days at NRH were filled with sweat and struggle—on many days he seemed to accomplish nothing. He worked for hours on mats stretching, doing rotations and weight shifts, all exercises that reminded

him what he’d lost and what it would take to get even a little of it back.

Every morning he looked up at a Bible verse, Romans 8:18, that had been taped to a beam over his bed: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.”

Brian McCarthy, an All-Met receiver for DeMatha, visited several times a week, sometimes leaving school early to be with Tim during his rehab sessions. Katie brought one of her nieces to visit Tim. The little girl brought along a ball, and Tim tried to play catch with her. She was only three feet away, and it frustrated Tim that he couldn’t get the ball to her.

On one of his frequent visits to NRH, Tim’s friend Kevin Ricca asked one of the doctors what Tim experienced when he tried to move his limbs.

The doctor told Kevin to curl up his fingers and lay his knuckles flat on a table, leaving only his ring finger extended.

“Now try to raise your ring finger up off the table,” the doctor said.

As hard as he tried, Kevin couldn’t lift it. Then he understood.

Tim’s stream of visitors included Jamie Lee Curtis, in town filming the movie *True Lies*. She’d learned about Tim through Beau, who worked as a grip on the movie set. Without fanfare, she came to the NRH several times, and she and Tim struck up a friendship that continues to this day. Arnold Schwarzenegger also came by.

On many evenings, Tim’s friends, parents, teachers, coaches, and well-wishers gathered in his room, creating a partylike atmosphere of storytelling and laughter. Sometimes they’d watch movies. Pooh Bear and his future wife, Michele, and friends stopped by every Thursday evening with Tim’s favorite McDonald’s meal—a Big Mac with fries and a Coke.

Many nights after his visitors had gone and the laughter had faded, Tim lay awake in his darkened room. He never lost his capacity to hope, but in the solitude of those nights he often thought back on all that had happened, all that would never happen, and tears fell that no one would see.

One night he began to ask God why this fate had befallen him, but he couldn’t bring himself to utter the words “Why me?”

He asked himself: Why should I now be asking God “why me” when things are bad? Why didn’t I ask God before my accident why I was so gifted at athletics? Why I had such a loving family? Why I had so many friends? Why my life had been so good?

As he asked these questions, he arrived at a pivotal moment. He realized that to ask “why me” could drown him in regret and bitterness. It would mean he’d let his

injury define him and what he could be, something that would be as paralyzing to his spirit as his broken neck was paralyzing to his body.

Tim believed what his faith had taught him—that everything happens for a reason. He might never know why he’d been paralyzed, but he knew he had to live in the present and embrace the future. He willed himself not to dwell on what he had lost. He never did ask, “Why me?”

On a bitterly cold day in early November, wearing his number 13 jersey, Tim rolled his wheelchair onto the football field of Archbishop Carroll High School as fans stood to applaud him. His halo removed days earlier, Tim kept his promise to his teammates—to return for DeMatha’s last regular-season game.

He felt exhilarated to be out with his family and Katie, to be reunited with his teammates, to be close to the game he loved.

DeMatha had struggled. They were 5–3 and ranked 20th in the metro area. Coach McGregor didn’t see a way his Stags could beat Carroll, a powerhouse that had won the regular-season title and had several players good enough to play later for Division I college football programs.

Brian McCarthy held Tim’s left hand while another player, E.J. King, held the other. Cordell Smith, the running back who came to see Tim every Friday to talk and hug him, held Brian’s other hand and together they moved to the center of the field for the coin flip. Tim, his team’s honorary captain, called tails and won the toss.

With Tim shouting from the sideline, the DeMatha players seemed to run faster, tackle harder, and play with a determination that left McGregor in awe of his team. They defeated Carroll 28–14, and the team gave Tim the game ball.

They played Carroll again the following week in the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference playoffs, and Tim returned to cheer his team, despite hypothermia from the first game. Because his paralysis had disrupted his internal thermostat, his body temperature had dipped below 97, and he had to be wrapped in blankets when he got back to NRH.

McGregor knew this time Carroll would be ready. DeMatha got off quickly by running back the opening kickoff for a touchdown, and the team played with a controlled fury. Cordell Smith rushed for 100 yards and scored a touchdown that gave DeMatha a 28–6 halftime lead. They ended up winning 34–12.

The following week they played archrival Gonzaga for the Catholic Athletic Conference championship before 8,000 fans at University of Maryland’s Byrd Stadium.

Gonzaga had beaten DeMatha earlier in the season 28–14. Going deep into the second half, DeMatha clung to a 3–0 lead. As Tim cheered, Brian McCarthy caught a short pass, shook off two tackles, and ran 50 yards for a touchdown. DeMatha’s defense beat back Gonzaga, and the Stags scored one more time to seal the victory, 17–0. The team circled Tim and gave him the championship trophy.

“Tim didn’t take one snap in those three games,” McGregor would say, “but there’s no doubt in my mind that we won those games because of him.”

On Monday, November 22, the day after the championship game, Tim returned to DeMatha for the first time since his accident to attend the annual end-of-season assembly. When he entered the assembly hall, the 900-member student body, resplendent in their maroon blazers, gave him a standing ovation and chanted his name. Principal John Moylan called Tim “the heart and soul of our football team.” He said with all the great athletes that played for DeMatha—many became college All-Americans and outstanding professionals—no number had ever been retired.

“But this is different,” Moylan said. “Timmy represents the fight against adversity. His jersey will serve as an inspiration for all of those who have difficult things to overcome.”

DeMatha retired Tim’s number 13.

Tim approached the microphone, and the audience fell silent.

“If I pick up the new hand God has dealt me with a good attitude and I play the hand,” Tim said, “I can then be proud to walk away from the game of life and say I played that game the best possible way.”

Tim’s blue-and-white number 13 jersey hangs in a glassed frame in the school’s main corridor along with a plaque inscribed with the words he said that day.

DeMatha established the “T13” award given annually to the football player who exhibits the most courage.

Tim left NRH two days before Christmas. He had regained limited use of his arms and hands. He could brush his teeth and navigate a wheelchair.

Every doctor at Thomas Jefferson and the NRH told Tim’s parents to accept the hard truth that Tim would never walk or have significant control of his arms and hands. They said the most Tim could expect would be some improvement for a year or so. Then the healing of his nervous system would end.

Tim’s parents refused to accept that. They drove to the biofeedback center at the Greater Pittsburgh Rehabilitation Hospital on the recommendation of a specialist.

Tim had not done any biofeedback at NRH, and one doctor had told Tim’s parents biofeedback would be useless.

At Pittsburgh, doctors had Tim sitting up as they punctured pinholes into his legs and attached small electrodes that measured electrical activity in his nerves.

“Try to move your leg,” one of the doctors told him. Tim strained. His lower leg moved a fraction of an inch as a blip moved across the biofeedback monitor, evidence that an electric impulse had traveled along his nerves. Tim was encouraged, his parents were ecstatic. “His leg moved!” Mary shouted.

Tim’s parents never stopped looking for something to help him. They brought Tim to “healing” Masses. Mary put magnets in Tim’s clothes and in his bed.

They brought him to Dr. Bernard Brucker, a professor at the University of Miami and director of the Biofeedback Laboratory. Brucker’s lab is state of the art in the use of biofeedback to measure nervous-system function following spinal-cord and brain injuries.

Brucker holds a medically controversial opinion about the nervous system’s healing process after injury. He agrees that killed nerve cells never recover, but he contends many cells are only damaged and can recover over a period of several years, not just one or two as is commonly accepted in medicine. A little more than a year after his accident, Tim went to Miami, where Brucker established a baseline for Tim’s neurological status. Tim would return to Miami every year to have his progress measured.

Tim had tutoring in the hospital and returned to DeMatha in January. They got up early so Rich could stretch and massage Tim’s arms and legs. His father helped Tim shower and dress and strapped him into his wheelchair. The routine took two hours. Tim’s friend Brian picked him up every morning and drove him to school in the Strachans’ van. DeMatha arranged for all of Tim’s classes to be on the first floor.

Tim and Katie continued to go out, and on some weekend nights Tim’s friends would load him and his wheelchair into the Strachans’ van and drive him to wherever fun could be found.

After Tim graduated from DeMatha in June 1994, he wanted to join his friends for the beach-week trip to Rehoboth. His parents worried because it would be his first extended time away from them. He needed help going to the bathroom, and leaving him in the sun could be dangerous because of his inability to adapt to temperature changes. Tim’s friends took the time to learn how to care for him and promised

they would be careful. The group had a wonderful time at the beach, and Tim returned home a week later without incident.

Tim’s parents held their breath again when Tim and three friends drove cross-country in a rented van. They visited Grand Canyon and Las Vegas and ended up in Los Angeles. They drove along Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, calling out to pretty girls, trying to look cool. Then they noticed their reflection in passing store windows. The plastic covering that hid Tim’s portable toilet seat atop the van had torn away, giving them a Beverly Hillbilies look. Tim returned home with blisters on his feet and a urinary tract infection—a hazard for people with spinal-cord injuries. He considered that a small price to pay for the fun he’d had.

Tim’s hospital and medical bills were staggering—more than half a million dollars and counting. The family’s health insurance covered most of it. During the spring of 1994, friends organized benefits to defray some of the costs. A black-tie fundraiser cochaired by Morgan Wootten raised more than \$60,000, and a benefit at the Indian Spring Country Club attended by more than 800 people raised thousands more. The Strachans were overwhelmed by the generosity people showed them.

On a sunny afternoon in August 1994, a year after Tim’s accident, Mary sat with Tim on the front porch of their home. Many of Tim’s friends were off to college, including his best friend, Brian, who was headed to the University of Virginia to play football.

“I guess you know I’ve been on a downer this weekend,” she told Tim.

“Yeah,” he answered.

“It just isn’t right,” she said as her eyes filled with tears. “You should be going off to college right now and playing football.”

“Mom, I’m not crying, and you’ve got to stop crying,” Tim said. “You’ve got to get over this. It just wasn’t meant to be.”

“Mary, I don’t ask you for much, but I’m asking you to do this”—the voice on the phone came from Mary’s friend Chris McCarthy, and she had an unusual request. She asked Mary to bring Tim to her home because her housekeeper, Lindy Marin, thought she could help him.

Lindy had grown up on her father’s coffee plantation in El Salvador. At age 20, she had gone to Venezuela for five years of medical training only to find her country in the midst of a civil war when she returned. She learned that the rebels kidnapped medical people—fearful she’d be a target, she fled to Mexico in 1980 and entered the United States illegally. She headed for the Washington area, where her brother and sister had

settled. She began working for Chris in 1984 and got her green card in 1988.

Lindy had met Tim many times when he had visited Brian. Her medical training had focused on neurology, and after Tim’s accident, she told Chris she thought she could help him.

“I want you to make a fist,” Lindy told Tim. He had not been able to make a fist since his injury. Lindy stood over him and moved her hands over his forearms and hand to “read” and manipulate his nerves. Slowly, Tim closed his fingers into a fist. He and his father looked at each other in amazement.

“Somebody told T he would never walk again,” Lindy said, “but he can walk. The energy is there. He just has to work on it.”

Rich and Mary asked Lindy to join them regularly for Tim’s physical therapy. Within weeks of their first meeting, she insisted Tim could stand. No doctor had ever said this, but they trusted Lindy. Together they all lifted Tim and placed his arms over a frame-like device Lindy had asked her cousin to build. Tim was able to remain upright. It was an exciting sensation for him.

Lindy infused her own unwavering belief into Tim and his parents, who came to believe he was capable of far greater recovery than any of his doctors had considered possible. Tim’s mindset changed dramatically. After Lindy, he no longer thought of himself as just a paralyzed kid in a wheelchair. He could do things. He had always set goals for himself, and the belief that he would someday walk would continue to drive him.

Over time, Lindy and Tim developed a close rapport. Lindy seemed to have a sixth sense about Tim, sometimes reading his thoughts or intuiting why he was having a bad day. Lindy knew her insistence that Tim would walk one day was medical heresy, and she laughingly called herself “crazy Lindy.”

Tim’s mother called her “a gift from God.”

Because his story had become well known, schools, churches, sports organizations, and civic groups invited Tim to speak. In the spring of 1995, he enrolled in Montgomery College. He took courses in public speaking and rhetoric and gained confidence in his public-speaking ability.

Because Tim had to rely on friends or family to drive him, he’d sometimes be housebound. That changed when the family got a new van—at a cost of \$80,000—with hand controls and an access ramp for his wheelchair. It filled him with a feeling of freedom and independence that he hadn’t experienced since the accident. One day as he was driving with his friend Brian McCarthy, Tim grew annoyed at aggres-

sive drivers cutting him off. He called a few of them names, and Brian warned him to be careful.

“There are a lot of crazy people driving cars,” Brian said. “What are you going to do if some guy hears you yelling at him and gets out of his car to come over?”

Tim answered, “I’ll just look him right in the eye and say, ‘Dude, could you please wait while I extend my ramp?’”

In spring 1996, Mark Duffner, then the University of Maryland football coach, called to ask if he could come to the Strachans’ home because, he said, “I always visit my prize recruits.”

Duffner offered Tim an athletic scholarship to Maryland, the same scholarship he would have offered Tim had he not been injured. To earn the scholarship, Duffner asked Tim to work as an assistant coach by breaking down game films and helping the team’s quarterbacks. Duffner’s offer, including the opportunity to take part in the game he loved, was all Tim could have hoped for.

Tim began at Maryland in fall 1996. He gravitated to communication courses when Leah Waks, one of his professors at Montgomery College who also taught at Maryland, encouraged him in that direction.

Johnny Holliday, the radio play-by-play announcer for Maryland football and basketball, had known the Strachans through church. Holliday had an idea that Tim could help him with his game-day broadcasts and approached coach Duffner, who gave it his blessing.

Outfitted with a headset and microphone, Tim began patrolling the Maryland sidelines in his wheelchair. At first he mostly gave injury reports, but soon Holliday had him doing game analysis, and Tim’s airtime increased. He was clear, concise, sometimes funny, and never caught off-guard. Holliday came to regard Tim as the best sideline reporter in the ACC.

Much in Tim’s life was going well at Maryland, but things with Katie were not. Other than members of his family, Katie had been Tim’s most constant comforter, and when he thought back to his time in the hospital he wondered if he would have made it through without her. But after nearly four years together, their relationship could no longer bear the weight of their history and the changed circumstances of their lives. So despite the pain of it, they it broke off.

Tim’s friend Andrew O’Connell liked and admired Katie, as did all of Tim’s friends and family. When Tim told him of the breakup, Andrew tried to offer consolation by telling Tim he’d be happier now.

“Look, I don’t mean to offend you,” Tim said, “but Katie and I went through a lot together, and I’d appreciate it if you

wouldn't say anything like that.”

Few things had stirred Tim as much as a trip to Lourdes with his parents and brother Beau. They went to France at the behest of the Knights of Malta, a Catholic order that makes pilgrimages to that city where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a young girl in 1858.

On a warm afternoon in the spring of 1996, as Beau pushed his wheelchair toward the main Basilica at Lourdes, Tim found himself surrounded by thousands of people in wheelchairs. They were among the millions of sick people—the “malades”—who travel to Lourdes every year seeking miracles.

As he moved closer to the Basilica to be anointed, Tim grew uneasy. He saw in that sea of suffering many people unable to hold their heads upright, others in the final stages of terminal illness, still others so incapacitated they could hardly function as human beings.

“Beau, you’ve got to get me out of here,” Tim said. “This isn’t right. I don’t deserve to be here.”

Beau wheeled his brother away to a quiet restaurant where the two sipped beer and talked.

“I’m not a malade,” Tim insisted. “I’m paralyzed. The people here would give anything to be as well off as I am.”

Lourdes made Tim realize just how good his life had once been and how good it still was. He would never have wished for his accident, but he now realized all that it opened up for him to see.

At Maryland, Tim began delivering food to the homeless as part of a social-service course. Every Monday morning, he drove down Connecticut Avenue to the Mother Teresa Infant Home on Western Avenue near Chevy Chase Circle. The sisters usually prepared a hot stew, breads, salads, and desserts that volunteers loaded into Tim’s van. He then drove to McPherson Square park with the volunteers who distributed the food to the hungry.

What had started out as a semester’s academic requirement evolved into a mission for Tim after the course ended. Tim also volunteered to coach a CYO basketball team for youngsters and became involved with the Christopher Reeve Foundation. People sought him out to ask if he could visit a family member or friend who had suffered a spinal-cord injury. He went to them in the hope that he could encourage others to overcome their disability.

After a story about Tim appeared on HBO’s *Real Sports With Bryant Gumbel*, he got a phone call from a young man named Jimmy Hood, who said he had Duchenne’s muscular dystro-

phy—a genetic neuromuscular disease. Most children die from the disorder by adolescence, but Jimmy had survived with it for more than 25 years. The two said goodbye with a promise to get back in touch.

A few weeks later, Tim received a phone call from Jimmy’s mother, who told him Jimmy was seriously ill with an infection. He’d been put on a ventilator, and for the first time in his life he told her he wanted out. He had asked her to turn off the ventilator.

“Jimmy talked a lot about you,” his mother said. “Do you think you could come and talk to him?”

Tim found Jimmy’s home in a trailer park in Odenton. Tim made his way down the hallway to Jimmy’s small bedroom that had Superman dolls on a shelf and martial arts posters on the walls.

Although Jimmy was nearly 30 at the time, his muscles had never developed and his body, covered with a blanket, was small and shrunken. Mouthing the words, he said to Tim, “I’m going to beat this thing.”

Jimmy recovered, and Tim kept returning to see him as the two developed a bond. Bedridden and living in a small trailer with his mother, married sister, and young nephew, needing a permanent tracheotomy to pump in oxygen to compensate for his failing lungs, knowing he was going to die young, Jimmy sparkled with wit and energy. He wrote poetry, stories, and songs.

“You can still do stuff and get through things,” Jimmy said to him. “It doesn’t matter what’s happened to you.”

Tim brought Jimmy a Maryland sweatshirt or some other gift until Jimmy asked him to stop.

“You don’t need to bring me things,” he said after one of Tim’s visits. “Coming to see me is your gift.”

“For me too,” Tim said.

Tim tells his audiences it is his belief that 10 percent of life is made up of what happens to you and 90 percent is how you deal with it. He said Jimmy offered a shining example of this.

Tim needed no reminders about his vulnerability. He’d learned that Dion Johnson, a young man he’d become close to at NRH, had died.

Dion had suffered a spinal-cord injury while playing football for Frederick Douglass High School in Upper Marlboro. Dion and Tim were at NRH together and had hit it off, sometimes racing their wheelchairs up and down hospital corridors.

Dion also had chosen to make something of his life. He had graduated from Bowie State University and had worked as an intern for WJLA-TV. Like Tim, Dion needed time

alone for reflection and in August 1999 he had gone to an isolated section of a park to relax and think. While there, his wheelchair apparently became stuck. Dion’s internal thermostat, like Tim’s, did not function, and he died of heatstroke.

In December 1999, Tim graduated from Maryland with a 3.6 grade point average and was the commencement speaker. He realized he needed to put himself in a position to earn a good income because his medical care ran to tens of thousands of dollars a year. Bob Muse, a local lawyer, suggested law school, and Tim agreed.

Muse hadn’t known Tim or his family but knew of his accident because he attended the same church as the Strachan family. He had written to Tim a couple of years earlier, and after Tim responded the two struck up a friendship through their letters. After nearly two years of letter writing, they met, and their friendship blossomed.

Muse helped prepare Tim to apply for law school. He suggested areas where Tim needed to improve academically and how best to do it. To accompany Tim’s law-school applications, Muse gathered supporting letters, including one from Jamie Lee Curtis, who called Tim “the finest man I’ve ever met. Bar none.”

Like other people who have come to know Tim, Muse felt Tim had exceptional qualities and would not only be successful but would make important contributions to society.

“I have three sons,” Muse wrote. “When I discuss with them such matters as character, courage, perseverance, and honor, I can do no better than talk about Tim.”

“As a Georgetown graduate,” Muse concluded, “I wish to give something to the school. If I can aid Tim’s admission to Georgetown, then I would have done so.”

Tim was accepted at every law school to which he applied. He began Georgetown in fall 2001, intimidated but driven to succeed. He spent most of his waking hours studying. He refused to join study groups because he wanted to accomplish his goal on his own. He told friends law school was the hardest thing he’d ever dealt with, including his injury.

In the spring of his sophomore year, Tim was in his bedroom working on his computer when he let out a yell. His father rushed to his room.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Tim’s grades were posted on the screen: four B’s and an A.

On the Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving last year, Tim picked up Leslie Neale, a young woman he’d been dating for the past two years. He

told her he wanted to take a drive over to Holy Cross Elementary School on Strathmore Avenue in Garrett Park. It was dark by the time they arrived.

“Where do you think it was that I asked you to go with me?” Tim asked.

“Over there,” Leslie answered, pointing to an area in front of the school.

Twenty years earlier to the day, when Tim and Leslie were second-graders at Holy Cross, he approached her when school was letting out for the Thanksgiving holiday. As they walked toward awaiting cars and buses, Tim asked, “Would you go with me?”

“Where?” she asked back.

Stuck for an answer, Tim ran away.

Leslie’s identical-twin sister, Laura, took off after Tim shouting, “She said yes!”

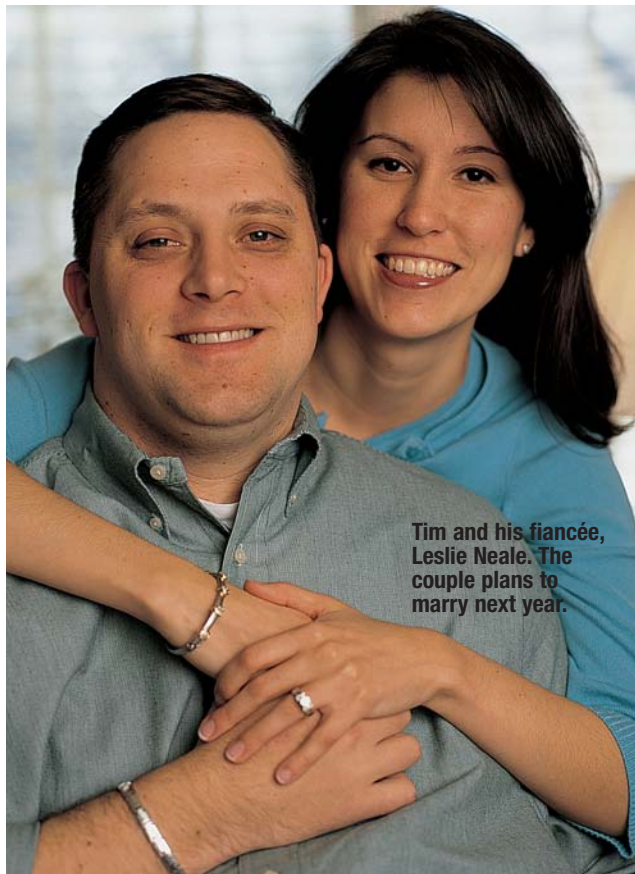
Their courting consisted mostly of chasing each other during recess and talking on the telephone. Tim called Leslie whenever his mother left to go grocery shopping. Their romance ended when Leslie transferred to public school in fourth grade. They met just once a few months later at a skating rink. After they skated together, they had no more contact for 17 years, despite living nearby.

Leslie never quite got over her crush on Tim. In high school when his name appeared in the local papers, Leslie’s sisters would cut out articles and draw hearts around Tim’s name and give them to her. When he appeared on television after his injury, she cried, wishing she could help him. She went to Penn State and had an active social life but never found anyone she could give her heart to. Like Tim, she began to believe love and marriage might not happen for her.

Leslie graduated from Penn State in 1998 with a major in therapeutic recreation. She grew up in a close-knit Catholic family and returned to the Washington area to be near her parents, two sisters, and two brothers. She worked for a company doing auditory training for children with special needs, many of them autistic.

One evening nearly four years ago, Leslie’s older sister, Trissy, short for Mary Beatrice, by chance ran into Tim in Bethesda. She told Tim he had attended the same elementary school as her twin sisters. Tim remembered. He turned to friends and said, “Her sister was my first girlfriend.”

Trissy called Leslie at 3 in the morning. “You’ll never guess who I ran into to-



Tim and his fiancée, Leslie Neale. The couple plans to marry next year.

night,” she said.

Still sleepy, Leslie didn’t much care.

“Tim Strachan. He remembers who you are, and he said he’ll call you tomorrow.”

Leslie sat upright in bed.

Tim and Leslie went to dinner at Copeland’s. It wasn’t really a date, Tim explained. He said he was committed to doing well in law school and would have little time for a social life. For Leslie, being with Tim reawakened many of the feelings she’d held for him over the years.

Over the next months she and Tim met casually, often in the company of Leslie’s younger brother, Stephen, whom the family called “Scrappy.” Tim and Stephen grew to like each other. They shared an interest in sports, and Tim enjoyed Stephen’s humor.

One night in July 2000, Stephen and a friend went to an Orioles game with Leslie and Trissy, but they drove home in separate cars. A Penn State student at the time, Stephen dropped off his friend and was killed in a one-car accident on South Glen Road in Potomac. Tim came to the wake to console Leslie.

After almost two years of casual friendship, Tim had grown to admire her character and values. She believed strongly in family. He began calling her more often until he realized he’d fallen in love with her.

Now Tim pulled his van to a stop and rolled his chair onto the school parking lot, looking for the spot where he had first asked her to go out with him 20 years ago. It was a cold, starry night brightened by the glow from the outside lights of the school. Leslie sat in Tim’s lap as they moved toward the front of the school.

“I think it was right here,” Leslie said.

Tim had rehearsed that afternoon reaching into a satchel and pulling out a small, velvet box. A few days earlier, he had invited his and Leslie’s friends and families to Caddies on Cordell Avenue in Bethesda for that evening.

As they huddled together in the cold, Tim and Leslie talked about love and commitment, about what they wanted from life, how they both wanted children.

“I just want you to know how much I love you and how much I’m committed to you,” Tim said as he reached into his bag and pulled out the velvet box.

“Will you marry me?” Tim asked.

“Of course! Of course! Of course!” she answered.

He opened the box and gave her a ring he had designed. It had a large center diamond, surrounded by four smaller diamonds, representing Leslie and her four siblings.

Leslie’s eyes flooded with tears.

“I want to call my family,” she said.

“Everybody already knows,” Tim told her, smiling. “Our families. Our friends. They’re all meeting us tonight for our engagement party.”

A friend of Leslie’s once asked her if she knew what she could be getting herself into by marrying Tim.

“I don’t see Tim in a wheelchair,” she answered. “I just see Tim.”

On a sunny morning in early March of this year, Tim, his parents, and Lindy went across Washington Street to a garage next to the home of Pooh Bear and his wife and their three children. Tim’s two other brothers, along with their wives and children, also live nearby.

Wearing red University of Maryland shorts, a gray sweatshirt, and black baseball cap, Tim remained in his wheelchair while his father attached ropes to the rock-climbing harness he’d strapped on Tim at home. The first thing that startles anyone seeing Tim for the first time is the size of his legs. After his accident, his muscles had atrophied and his legs had become shrunken

Photograph for The Washingtonian by Simon Bruty

and spindly. Now they appear thick and muscled, almost as if he had never stopped playing football.

Before coming to the garage, Lindy had put her hands on Tim's arms and legs to manipulate his nerves. She's helped Tim for ten years and helps other people seeking help for problems such as back and neck pain. She's never asked to be paid. She put Tim through a series of sit-ups that further tightened his abdominal muscles, and he then lay flat on his bed as Lindy ran her hands over his legs again.

“You gonna walk when you're ready to walk,” Lindy teased.

“It's not all in my head, Lindy,” Tim said.

Rich on one side and Lindy on the other tugged on ropes that wound through pulleys and O-bolts that Rich had anchored into the garage's walls and ceiling. As they pulled, they hoisted Tim off the ground and flipped up his legs so he hung horizontally suspended in the air while his mother unfolded the treadmill beneath him. Tim returned to a vertical position, and Rich and Lindy lowered him until his running shoes touched the treadmill. They secured the pulley ropes on cleats to stabilize Tim and started the treadmill.

With Rich kneeling down on one side and Lindy on the other, they kept moving Tim's feet to keep pace with the slow-moving treadmill. “I walk like Quasimodo,” Tim said.

These three-day-a-week treadmill sessions began in fall 2002 after Mary had read that Christopher Reeve was experimenting with the exercise device. The therapy is helping Tim's muscles recruit more voluntary neurological signals as well as increasing blood flow, which in turns helps strengthen his leg muscles. It is all part of a process to “awaken” the signals coming from his brain and to his legs.

For the first time since his injury, Tim was now able to lift his legs himself. He needed to lean his body and lift each foot slowly and not always steadily, but he exerted some control over them. As he laboriously moved his legs, Rich and Lindy continued to guide his feet. Thirty minutes later, his energy spent, he stopped.

Tim remained upright for a few minutes while he swayed slowly back and forth to strengthen his hip flexor muscles needed for balance. Rich and Lindy lowered Tim into his wheelchair, and Rich slid hard plastic braces that look like knee-high boots on Tim's legs. With Mary kneeling and pressing hard against Tim's knees, Lindy and Rich lifted Tim out of his wheelchair. His muscles began to spasm, but Tim stood on his own for several sec-

onds as his parents and Lindy helped with his balance.

Tim stood up again. “I look six-four, don't I?” he asked. He's grown nearly an inch since his accident. He sat and stood two more times and then stayed in his wheelchair, exhausted.

“If I could just stand and turn around and get into bed on my own,” Tim said, “my life would change completely.”

Tim's parents say he is “light years” ahead of where he was ten years ago, and Dr. Bernard Brucker agreed. Tim has returned every year since 1994 to Miami. Brucker says Tim has had “phenomenal change” and is helping shatter the myth that people with a spinal-cord injury must accept their fate. He says Tim has gotten signals back that didn't exist when he first began measuring him, and more are returning. He now has elbow extension and far greater control over his wrists, changes that may sound small but for Tim are important.

“Every year we're eking a little more motor signals, and that tells us there is some long-term repairing going on with Tim,” Brucker says.

While continuing with his treadmill therapy, Tim is now looking into “energetic medicine.” Using SCENAR (self-controlled energy neuro-adaptive regulator), this technique stimulates the nervous system and “teaches” the body to heal itself. Used in Russia since the early 1980s, it is now undergoing clinical trials in this country.

Will Tim ever walk or stand on his own?

Brucker says the honest answer is that it is unlikely but not impossible. He says Tim has a better chance of walking than someone has of winning the lottery. Anyone who knows Tim won't bet against him.

Tim's dream to one day walk again, and even toss a football, has never wavered. He believes that by holding onto that dream he'll keep pushing himself so that, at the least, he might attain more modest goals of dressing himself or putting himself to bed.

But even if he is never able to extend his physical ability beyond where it is now, Tim feels he has won the most important victory of his life. At the end of his Christmas talk at the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Tim summed up where he is.

“I may be in a wheelchair, and I'll tell you what: It sucks. It's not something I ever thought I'd want to do in life. But I'm not going to let this wheelchair or anything else get in the way of enjoying my journey, of enjoying my life.” 