

# The Mind-Body Link

## A Lake Superior Native Helps Others Find Wholeness

by Konnie LeMay

**M**atthew Sanford dreams of changing how the medical community – and the rest of the world, for that matter – understands the connection between our mind and body.

The Duluth native envisions healthy individuals as in tune with their physical selves as they are occupied with their brains. He foresees doctors advising those with paralyzing conditions to remain aware of their full body, even the unresponsive parts. He pictures schools where “phy ed” includes teaching about integration of the physical with the mental.

Matthew has mighty big dreams, but compared with what he’s already learned, with the journey he’s traveled and with the things that some people (though not Matthew Sanford) would say that he has “overcome,” the sure bet is on Matthew and his dreams.

For most people just meeting Matthew, it’s hard to drop the initial distraction of his physical condition – there is that wheelchair, after all.



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“You don’t have to be an athlete,” says Matt Sanford, yoga instructor and founder of Mind Body Solutions ([www.matthewsanford.com](http://www.matthewsanford.com)) in Minneapolis. “You just have to be in your body and you’ll find your own recreation.”

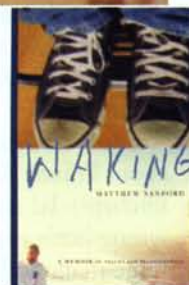
“It’s definitely a double-edged sword,” Matthew says of his paralysis. “It’s the thing that catches people’s attention and it ends up pigeon-holing me.”

Matthew was 13 and on a trip from Iowa back to his home in Duluth when the family car skidded off the highway. His father, Loren

Sanford, an attorney with Fryberger Buchanan Smith and Sanford, and sister, Laura, died in the accident. Matthew’s mom, Paula, and brother, James, were uninjured. Matthew’s injuries paralyzed him from his chest down. Matthew tells about his recovery in *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*, published by Rodale in 2006. The book, in its fifth printing, won both a 2007 People’s Choice Minnesota Book Award and a 2007 Northeastern Minnesota Book Award.

The accident, and the medical treatment and advice that followed, led Matthew to disconnect from his lower body ... so much so that during his recovery, the 13-year-old asked his mother to have his legs amputated to make him lighter for his arms to lift.

What Matthew had imposed on him by an accident, most of us slip into accidentally; we ignore our bodies or disconnect from them as we age.



### Do Try This at Home (or in the Office)

Matthew suggests these ways for readers to get a taste of the mind-body connection:

“Try standing equally on both feet. Pay attention to the weight on the front, the back and both sides. Many people tend to stand more heavily on one side. Try to take weight on the other hip. We live our lives asymmetrically, and then we wonder why we wear out unevenly.”

“Pay attention to your breathing as a sensual experience. ... When air comes in, feel it, feel how it gently comes through the nose, how it presses against your ribs. Take a moment, sit up straight, feel your hip bones, feel your feet on the floor and now try to feel your breathing for a minute. Maybe you breathe more through one nostril than the other. Just breathe more through your nose. When you breathe through your mouth, it’s not as deep, not as nourishing.”

## Event

"Mind-Body Integration, the Environment and Our Survival,"  
a talk by Matt Sanford  
7 p.m. November 27  
at Mitchell Auditorium, College of  
St. Scholastica, Duluth, Minnesota

Yoga changed Matthew and his life. Through it, Matthew learned not to block out his "silent" portion but to seek it and listen to it. This revelation helped him to regain an important sense of connection with his body. It brought him the simple pleasure of sitting up straight (a lot easier when your mind is aligning your feet to your head rather than your chest up).

"There are connections between mind and body that are never going to make me walk again, but that are essential to rehabilitation," Matthew says. "Being more in your body is about being alive. It's about being present. It's about living and living well. It's about being in life and being in love."

Matthew found his own love back in his hometown. He reconnected in Duluth with a classmate Jennifer Otos during his East High School 10-year reunion and the romance blossomed.

"Everything has kind of started in Duluth," Matthew says.

After the wedding, Matthew and Jennifer lived in Santa Barbara, California, where he earned a master's degree in philosophy.

"They are just a wonderful couple who have so much appreciation and respect for their roles in this partnership. They're a great team; an absolutely great team," says Duluth friend Ina Myles. Ina's husband, Mark, was Matthew's elementary school principal.

Duluth was also the place that Matthew started *Waking*, at a writing workshop at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Matthew was working through another family

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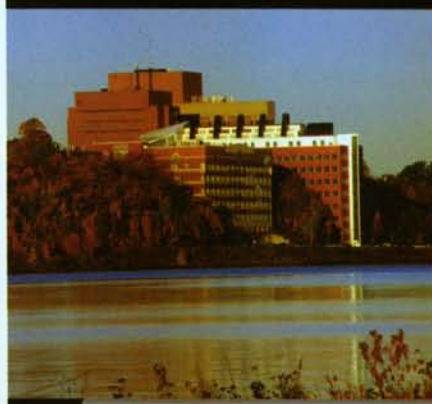
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tragedy. One of their twin sons, William, was stillborn. Their son Paul is now an active 7-year-old.

As a yoga teacher, Matthew works to bring the mind-body philosophy to his students, to the general public and, perhaps most significantly, to the medical community. "I'm trying to make yoga accessible to people living with disabilities."

Matthew founded the nonprofit Mind Body Solutions in Minneapolis. He's given talks at the Mayo Clinic, to national conferences and to audiences in his hometown. He will speak again in Duluth at the College of St. Scholastica (see Event box).

Dr. Jennifer Pearson, a good friend of Matthew's, brought him to speak at the UMD Medical School. "Matthew's an amazing person, he always has been. ... He brings a personal testimony to what Eastern

traditions have often tried to teach, but that someone like Matthew can more easily show us."

Matthew gives workshops to improve mind-body connections. "Bringing Your Body to Work" and "The Third Category of Health" sessions deal with handling stress and the mind-body relationship while "Yoga at the Desk" teaches stretching and relaxation for office workers.

In Duluth, Matthew has helped to connect St. Mary's Medical Center with Yoga North, operated by Ann Maxwell. Matthew trained Ann. "He was the best three hours of the 200 hours of training. He is a moving testimonial of the power of yoga. He



NANCY OTOS

Matt Sanford and his wife, Jennifer, and son, Paul, often return to Lake Superior shores in Duluth or nearby Solon Springs, Wisconsin. "I used to say it's so big it's like an ocean," Matt says of Lake Superior. "I'm grateful it's not an ocean. ... It's just so much more nourishing for me than the ocean."

embodies it beautifully. No limit to the mind-body connection," she says.

Looking toward the future, Matthew sees more ways to fulfill his dreams with integrative health care and a new rehabilitation model.

"I'm right on the edge," he says, "of helping a whole bunch of people."



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