

voices

Paralyzed yoga teacher spreads word on reconnecting mind, body

• This author who shared his personal tale is on a mission to help others become more self-aware.

EDITOR'S CORNER
SAM BARNES



Matt Sanford's book, "Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence," is in its fourth printing, and they're talking about taking it to paperback.

The 40-year-old Minnetonka yoga instructor, who wrote his personal story of reconnecting with his body years after being paralyzed in a car accident at age 13, has been taking his message all over the country.

He's been on a couple of dozen radio shows from Vermont to California, and he's even taken his message overseas on Voice of America. He's also made a couple of dozen personal appearances at book stores, most of them around Minnesota but some as far away as San Diego and, soon, Austin, Texas, and Phoenix.

In short, the book has done well. Everyone involved with it is thrilled with its success. "It's exceeded their expectations," Sanford says.

But what comes next Sanford might say is the best part.

He wrote the book not to bask in the limelight as an author but to spread a message. He wants people to appreciate

this, his personal epiphany:

"On a practical, everyday level, minds and bodies work better together."

While that might seem obvious on the face of it, he says, "We're not always good at it."

The effects show up in a variety of ways — notably in the form of stress. Re-establishing the mind-body connection can help in coping with stress in the workplace, for instance.

And in the aging process, it can help in dealing with life's inevitable downturns. "Even if you can't do cartwheels anymore," there are ways to re-establish the connection, he says. Regardless of your age, "when you stretch out from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet," you re-awaken your awareness of your body. Just "stand with your legs wide apart for a while" and see.

You are more alive, he says, "by being present in your body. The body is what picks up a glass of water. It's as close to the world as you can get."

Ultimately, you need to make the most of the mind-body connection within the limits that Nature has dealt you.

He explains it this way:

"I didn't overcome my disability and become a yoga teacher. I am a yoga teacher because of my disability.

"You can't overcome your life, and you can't overcome your body."

But you can make the most of the experience available to you "by being as present in the



"Being as present in the world as you can be," Sanford says, can help you overcome stress and manage life's ups and downs.

UPCOMING LOCAL APPEARANCES

- 7 p.m. Sept. 27, Barnes & Noble, Eden Prairie Center mall.
- 7 p.m. Dec. 6, Excelsior Bay Books, 36 Water St., Excelsior.
- Noon-1 p.m. Dec. 8, Barnes & Noble Downtown, 801 Nicollet Mall.

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"Waking" is Sanford's way of spreading that philosophy — and offering personal proof of how well it works.

"The truth is, I'm a relatively private person, but I wrote a really intimate book," he says. He never had a burning desire to share so many details of his life. But the book is achieving what

he had hoped: Getting him into more settings where he can share his message.

He'll soon be speaking at some high-profile rehab centers around the country, spreading the word among patients and caregivers alike.

Next week he'll be speaking again at the Mayo Clinic, as part of its integrative medicine health program. "To get my message out on as wide a basis as possible, I need to be training the trainers."

He'll also be spreading the message among his colleagues in yoga as the keynote speaker at the Yoga Journal's national conference next May in Lake Geneva, Wis.

All this is now possible because of "Waking." "All the work I'm doing pivots out of the book," he says.

For individual readers, here's what he hopes they get from it: "One of my goals in 'Waking' is to make people think about their own lives. Everyone has trauma. It's about how you respond to it.

"I want you to look at your own life and see that there might be more depth. Look at your life more deeply, not just as obstacles and impediments, but to see that it's there to teach you something.

"Your whole life is there for you to learn from. If you really listen and pay attention, there's an underlying message."

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