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# ◆ THE DERBY CITY NSCIA NEWSLETTER ◆

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JUNE 2009

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*The Derby City Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association Network- Serving Kentuckiana.*

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## Message From the President

Dear Members & Friends-

June's meeting is our annual dinner at Kingfish River Road in Louisville—see calendar for details. **YOU WILL NOTE THAT THE DINNER IS ON JUNE 22, WHICH IS THE 4TH MONDAY.** It will start at 6:00 p.m. There will not be a meeting in July. The August meeting will be held at Frazier Rehab Institute; 220 Abraham Flexner Way; Louisville; 11th floor, room number 1119.

- David Allgood

## THE MOUNT SINAI HEALTH AND WELLNESS SERIES

This Health and Wellness Series consists of seven videos on topics that our survey said were the areas that those persons with SCI were most interested in finding out more information on. Now that the videos are available at <http://event.netbriefings.com/event/mssci/Archives/Reg/> we would like to ask you to visit the website, take the short survey, and view the videos as often as you would like.

A sample of those web casts are on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3621QVETT50>

The survey portion of this project is an important part of this project. After about 8 months we will be contacting each of the SCI participants that viewed the web-casts via email and asking them to take another brief survey regarding the impact of viewing these videos.

I would also like to contact each of you regarding the progress that your chapter is making in disseminating the information of the Health and Wellness Series as well as any help we can provide you.

Thank you for your help.

Jim Cesario  
SCI Outreach Coordinator  
Mount Sinai Spinal Cord Injury Model System  
Department of Rehabilitation Medicine  
NY, NY

*Condensed from New Mobility.com. Left out of the article is testimony from a quad whose breathing was improved with yoga.—ed.*

## AWAKENING YOUR WHOLE SELF

By Roxanne Furlong

“Can you feel that sensation in your spine?” asks Matthew Sanford, after pressing on my sternum while I lean forward from my wheelchair, my hands pressed on a chair in front of me, breathing from the back of my rib cage. “Everybody has the ability to feel this sensation.”

I'd just spent about an hour in one of Sanford's adaptive yoga classes at Courage Center in Golden Valley, Minn., in a dimly lit room. I was there to observe Sanford, a T4 para, and his students whom I'd interviewed for this piece. But with Sanford's enthusiasm and belief in the value of yoga for people with disabilities—and because of my curiosity—I was soon breathing deeply, feeling my sits bones, stretching through my spine, bringing my arms wide to release the stress of my day and feel the sensation in my tired, stressed, aching muscles.

In this class, disabilities range from traumatic brain injury, MS and CP to paraplegia and quadriplegia. Usually there are enough volunteer assistants to help everyone transfer, but not tonight, so while some yogi transferred to the floor, others, including myself, practiced in our wheelchairs.

During the 90 minute class, Sanford adapted each move to each yogi's needs. One woman with paraplegia had an epiphany when she felt sensation in her spine. “Oh my, this is huge, this is huge,” she whispered over and over. I watched, as Sanford went from yogi to yogi, detecting and announcing when they felt sensation in their spine. I can't say I felt anything special in my body other than the usual back kink and an urge to feel what others

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# **Refrigerator Calendar**

## **\*2009**

### **JUNE**

**1st - Elderly & Disabled Advisory Council Meeting.**  
**Mon 1:00 p.m.; TARC; 1000 W. Broadway; Board Room.**

**22nd - Derby City Chapter annual dinner; 6:00; Zorn Avenue Kingfish**  
**Mon 3021 Upper River Road; Louisville; Meal provided by Chapter for dues-paying members.**

**20th - Metro disAbility Coalition Meeting; 3:15 p.m.**  
**Sat Urban County Government Center; Barrett Avenue; Louisville**

### **JULY**

**13th - Elderly & Disabled Advisory Council Meeting**  
**Mon 1:00; TARC; 1000 W. Broadway; Board Room. Please note this is on 2nd Monday this month due to the 4th of July holidays.**

**20th - NO MEETING**  
**Mon**

**18th - Metro disAbility Coalition Meeting; 3:15 p.m.**  
**Sat Urban County Government Center; Barrett Avenue; Louisville**

**For More Information Call**  
**David Allgood at 502-589-6620**

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**Derby City Area Chapter**  
*of the*  
**National Spinal Cord Injury Association**

**ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

The Derby City Area Chapter of the N.S.C.I.A. is a membership organization for individuals with spinal cord injuries, their families, and health professionals. Founded in 1984 as a Charter Member of the N.S.C.I.A., it was incorporated under IRS Section 501 (c) 3 as a not for profit organization. The Board of Directors consists of the Officers, Past President and the Board Members At Large.

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Editor- Barbara Davis

Contributor- David Allgood

Visit Our Website at

[www.DerbyCitySpinalCord.org](http://www.DerbyCitySpinalCord.org)

**The Derby City Area Chapter Newsletter is brought  
to you through the generous support of Frazier  
Rehab Institute**

**AWAKENING, CONT'D**

were feeling. The journalist in me wondered if the power of suggestion, coupled with Sanford's enthusiasm and each yogi's desire to feel, made their sensations real.

At the end of the class, Sanford instructed everyone to become comfortable. Those on the floor lay on their sides or back, some with their feet up in a chair, others with rolled-up blankets under their heads. Those of us in our chairs rested our hands in our laps or let them dangle; two students tilted their chairs to recline. We closed our eyes and for eight minutes listened to Sanford's gentle and encouraging voice as he slowly calmed and relaxed us, and bid us "Namaste."

Using adaptive yoga to transform trauma, loss and disability by awakening the mind-body connection, Sanford, 44, of Orono, Minn., is on a nationwide crusade to change the way we—and doctors, therapists and caregivers—view and use our bodies. Through his nonprofit, Mind Body Solutions, in Minnetonka, Minn., Sanford is training volunteers and instructors, with and without disabilities, to teach yoga as an approach to health and wholeness.

In 1979, at age 13, after Sanford was injured in a car accident that killed his father and sister, he was told by his doctors and therapists to forget about his legs. He became a "floating upper torso" until 25, when he began yoga and for the first time in 12 years felt sensation in his whole body when he "took his legs wide."

"When we become injured (or disabled), we stop living in parts of our body...we're encourage to," Sanford says. "When I took my legs wide, I felt sensation that I hadn't felt in 12 years." It's an altered sensation, of course: "What I now feel in my legs and in my paralyzed body is different from what I feel in my upper body. Our body never gives up. With every ounce of energy it has, it moves toward living," he says. "It will keep pumping from our heart, and if it has cancer and is growing the wrong cells, it will try to move toward living. Your body stays faithful toward living. It's your mind that waivers."

Sanford believes practicing yoga is an excellent way for individuals living with a disability to develop a mind-body relationship. Begin by feeling your whole body in the shower, he says; take your arms wide and your legs wide while lying in bed; place a bolster or pillow lengthwise beneath your back and let your chest open with gravity; feel more, breathe through your nose more.

"Try to feel rather than just overcome," he suggests. "That's the beginning of the mind-body practice...it can happen in all different forms."

Sanford's been teaching adaptive and nonadaptive

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## AWAKENING, CONT'D

yoga since 1998 and founded Mind Body Solutions in 2001. He warns that the message we've been told—that our body is just an object that we wheel around—is a negative view of humanity; the key to living well is to live more fully in our entire body.

Sanford explains the general misconception of yoga as being able to perform difficult and complicated physical movements that require extraordinary flexibility. Though rare in the U.S., there are some who make yoga into a religion. He doesn't push spirituality necessarily, but describes yoga as "increasing the quality of interaction between mind, body, and whatever you want to call spirit."

"This is not about being able to grip the snot out of your poses, or to really work your muscles hard," he says. "It's learning to access deeper levels of experience within ordinary movement. Yoga is bringing more consciousness to movement rather than less. This is not going to make me walk again but allows me to experience as much aliveness and vibrancy in my entire body as is possible."

Sanford is not alone when he talks about the sensation and emotion he experienced when he took his legs wide. When Kevin Bjorklund, a 45-year-old, T4-complete para from Lakeville, Minn., had his yoga breakthrough, he cried all the way home from class.

Borklund was a 3-year-old farm kid when he became paralyzed during a tragic tractor mishap. He has memories of a spiritual, out of body experience of the accident when he went unconscious and stopped breathing after the tractor rolled over his skull. The muddy, soft spring ground saved Bjorklund from a crushed skull. His father revived him and saved his life.

"But I felt this peace and presence, which I think is our true nature," Bjorklund says. "It's what has helped me get through the tough times. I grew up with a Swedish heritage, where you didn't analyze thoughts or talk about what you were going through, you just moved on. I had to bury a lot of my feelings.

In his late teens and early 20s, Bjorklund began abusing drugs and alcohol, until he became sober in 2000. He says spirituality and going to meditation centers—moving away from religious aspects of his Presbyterian roots—is what has helped him remain sober.

"I knew that there was a truth that seemed to be missing in a lot of what was taught and what I experienced," he says. "Everyone has to find their own way, and I just needed something deeper and truer that resonated with me. It's about connecting to a deeper self, which is what I connected to when I had that accident."

Meditation taught Bjorklund how to breathe, become still and quiet his mind, but meditation alone did not offer the deeper awareness of his body. After 40 years of "dragging around" the lower part of his body, he attended a yoga class at Mind Body Solutions. The first time he got down on the mat, he felt sensation in his whole body.

"I was taught by the medical community that there is no connection to your lower body, just to try to avoid pressure sores," he explains. "This is a very Western-medicine approach, and it doesn't take into account the biggest piece, the spiritual component, which can open your mind to many new things. It's very organic."

While sitting straight on the mat that first time, Bjorklund was being helped by Sanford through a posture when a volunteer assistant gently pushed Bjorklund's feet forward. "I had my eyes closed concentrating on my senses and breathing and had this faint sense of energy," he says. "I had a feeling of outline of my body beyond my waist. It was amazing."

"All it took was someone to help him realize that if he listens to his whole body, he will feel the sensation that is there," Sanford explains. "He was so young when he was injured, he doesn't remember that sensation and was never told to watch for it. I'm looking for health care that doesn't take someone like Kevin 42 years to feel his whole body."

When practiced correctly, according to Sanford, yoga allows you to open your body energy and chi (the traditional Chinese life force). Bjorklund admits he can't physically feel sensations due to his SCI, but says this feeling is a different level, like a light pulse sensation. "It's like taking strings of Christmas lights and plugging them together," he illustrates. "If you have one bad bulb, you have to replace the whole string. When the right string connects, each bulb works from the first to the last. All the energy works together, and the whole connection is made."

Bjorklund and Sanford explain that the assistance given by volunteers to each yogi is critical to those who have disabilities. They help by "referencing" with certain poses. "They can help you get your leg up in the air, stretch your arms further than what you can stretch, or help you balance better," Bjorklund says. "They lend a crucial physical component, which also allows that connection to take place and allows energy to flow so you can feel that energy and remember it."

Bjorklund says his mind learns what that experience feels like and allows him to practice at home. "Every time I feel this, I try to engage my mind and remember, so when I'm home and getting into that position, I can still remember back to that reference and bring that feeling back into my body on my own. Sometimes I can, sometimes I can't."

**(Continue On Page Five)**

## AWAKENING, CONT'D

But that first night that he did feel his energy, on his 50-minute drive home, Bjorklund had tears running down his face from 42 years of holding back emotion, and then thinking about the future he now knew was reality. "I had such a feeling of gratitude and a tremendous feeling of hope about the possibilities," he says. "We're told so many stories as part of our rehab. Now people have a lot more opportunities to not hear about them as much as I did when I was growing up."

"But I can feel my body, which I never believed possible, what does that mean? Does that mean I have the power to reconnect and feel my spinal cord on my own?" Bjorklund asks. "There are so many things we don't have a clue about. Feeling that energy—energy we all have—and feeling that power behind it and not getting stuck in a negative place gives us limitless possibilities."

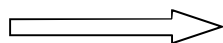
Sanford explains that if we try to think of movement just in terms of muscular action, or presence in our body in terms of following or activating muscles, we're following the path right into our disability. Instead, yoga helps you think differently about your disability and its effect on your body. He says our body never stopped talking; it just changed its voice. "I've been doing the same poses for the last 18 years, and I keep having breakthroughs with them," Sanford says. "That's part of the freedom that yoga brings to someone living with a disability. It's not just about your mind overcoming your body. There are things your body can teach your mind. Regardless of neurological deficit or whatever disability you have."

Sanford says the mind-body approach of yoga will increase strength, balance, and help your breathing and immune system. Being more present in your body calms your mind, manages stress and helps increase energy and stamina levels. It will also help those with chronic pain.

"The first reaction to pain is to avoid it, right?" he asks. "I have chronic pain and I know avoidance doesn't work. You want to surround the pain you have. If you have pain in your back, you want to be as present as you can in your legs. Experience your body beyond where it hurts." Sanford suggests distributing your awareness throughout your body, to not focus on the pain source. The pain then becomes part of something as opposed to limiting your awareness.

Chris Becker, 30, has been a Sanford student since 1998. His CP causes stiffness and spasms throughout his body. Yoga allows him to direct his energy to separate his hands while transferring. Sanford and Becker are learning how energy moves through his body.

(Continued Underneath  
For Sale)



## FOR SALE \*\*\*

**2004 Buick Rendezvous CX, Gold Sport Utility 4D, AWD;** 52,953 mi; seats 5—rear compartment contains Sonic scooter Bruno lift; new battery; numerous special features. \$8,800. Call Bryan Fantoni at 502-644-4446 or email at Bryan.Fantoni@mozlaw.com.

**Easy Stand Glider 600;** like new—barely used; allows transfer, stand and glider movement of legs. Paid \$6,000. Will sell for \$3,000. Call Shirley at 502/228-1271.

**93" E150; EZ Lock WC System Elec. w/Quantum 600 wc/swivel captain's chairs/3-way power driver's seat/remote start burglar alarm/front-rear air/power wc lift/new upholstery.** \$11,000, negotiable. (502) 543-5948/(502) 773-2337.

**WC Lift;** \$1,000; **Invacare Storm TDX 3 Power WC;** full reclining; less than 1 year old; \$1000; **Call David 589-6620.** **NC topper;** used; 3 E&J Manual chairs; used; 1 Quicksilver Action manual chair; Monarch hand controls. 93,000 miles. Price negotiable. **Call Ruth @ 239-9754 after 5 p.m.**

**\*Cookbooks for Sale:** Recipes compiled by Chapter members; \$10:00. Call David @ 589-6620.

**\*Video tapes for sale.** Various topics related to spinal cord injuries. Call David Allgood or Buddy Lawson.

♦ **SCI -Shirts for sale.** S, M, L, XL. David—589-6620.

*\*\*\*If assistance is needed to pay for any of the above items, contact Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation at 1-800-327-5287 for information on loans at 5% interest to qualified individuals.*

## AWAKENING, CONT'D

"By learning this, I can relax my arm so the energy will flow and relax another place in my body," Becker explains. "It also helps me to sit straighter, keep my head straight and align my back, which in turn helps me to speak and breathe better." By moving and breathing better, Becker has also been sick less often and has had fewer pressure sores.

All of the students I spoke with mentioned a moment of clarity with their body—a connection that convinced them to continue yoga.

Sanford is working with Courage Center to teach residents that the more they are "in their whole body, including their feet," during transfers the better their balance will become, and the more substantial their whole body will be. For those who think they can't do yoga, Sanford says: "Living with a disability is itself an unbelievably spiritual practice. It's relentless; it never gives you a day off, yet you keep showing up."

*You are cordially invited to join us!*

*The Derby City Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association consists of people with spinal cord injuries and similar physical conditions, their family members, friends, and professionals or other interested parties.*

*We meet:*

*WHEN- Third Monday of every month from 6:30 to 9:00 PM*

*WHERE- Frazier Rehab Institute, 10th floor Dining Room  
220 Abraham Flexner Way, Louisville, KY 40202*

**If you wish to be a member, donor, and/or be on the mailing list of the Derby City Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association please complete and mail the following form to the address below**

**National Spinal Cord Injury Association**  
**Derby City Chapter**

Membership & Organization Sponsorship Form

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 Level of Disability \_\_\_\_\_ Other Disability \_\_\_\_\_  
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Membership is open to all individuals and sponsorship to all organizations interested in spinal cord injury.

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