

By Fiona Green

For 45-year-old Dan Sheedy of Dallas, January 1st, 1997 is a day he will never forget. It was the day he died.

Dan, a former Marine who works as a fund manager, was returning home from work, heading North on McKinney Avenue when a car ran a red light and slammed into his Ford Explorer. The collision caused his car to roll a couple of times before hitting a telephone pole. Fortunately, one of the vehicles on the scene was an ambulance returning to Parkland Hospital.

While Dan has no recollection of the accident, medical staff later told him that he had to be revived twice -- once on the scene and later in the ER. His injuries included an open head wound with his skull fractured in two places, amputation of the top of his right ear, a broken shoulder, six broken ribs, a collapsed lung, three brain aneurisms and nerve damage affecting movement of his eyes.

The extent of his injuries was so severe that he was put into an induced coma until brain surgery could be performed on January 10th. Family and friends waited anxiously as 24 platinum coils were placed in his brain to repair the aneurisms. Despite the fact that doctors gave him only a 25 percent chance of functional recovery, the procedure was a success. He woke up a few days later and within two weeks he was walking slowly with some assistance.

He received daily physical and mental therapy, even having to relearn numbers and the alphabet. By day 31, his progress had been so remarkable that he was released two months ahead of schedule. He continued walking a little farther each day and within a month, he had progressed to 30 miles per week.

Over the next two months he returned to the hospital for three more reconstructive surgeries on his head, ear, and face. He was working part time during this process and slowly began running again. The final surgery to fix his eyes was six months later.

Asked about how the accident changed his life, Dan had this to say:

“I am keenly aware of how fragile is life and how vulnerable we are to circumstance. I am thankful every day and realize how blessed I am for the life and recovery I had. Additionally, it is the realization we have only so much time and we should live life passionately and exert a positive, motivating influence on those whose lives we touch. Finally, it was the acceptance of God's will and plan he has for me to motivate others to use their gifts.”

As for the toughest adjustments he had to make:

“The toughest adjustments are primarily physical. First, my eyes. Although people can't tell I need to move my head around a lot because I have a more restricted field of vision. I will never have the same upper body strength, which I guess means competitive weight lifting is out -- oh darn! The only thing I have noticed that affects my running is a

reduced ability to withstand heat exhaustion. My legs are fine and others have far more difficult challenges than me.”

Dan credits a supportive family and friends with helping him through the tough times, mentioning a neighbor who walked and ran with him throughout his recovery and the helpful staff at the Park Cities YMCA. He firmly believes that exercising helped speed the healing process.

He is clearly passionate about running, which provides him with a clear start to the day and an opportunity to appreciate nature and mentally arrange his day. He particularly enjoys the social aspect of racing and, whenever possible, he encourages others to take up the sport. His favorite race distance is the half marathon, which he believes is a good physical test and a distance where he believes he has the most room for improvement.

He also enjoys 5Ks for the great speed workout. Asked about his favorite race moment, he describes the final stretch of the Marine Corps Marathon -- “You have finished mile 26 and for the final stretch you turn a corner to go UP A STEEP HILL to the finish line at the Marine Corps Memorial (Iwo Jima Memorial of the flag raising). People are exhausted and some are walking when you see them hit the turn, but they are met with thousands of Marines and spectators screaming for them to Take The Hill!!! I can tell you I saw no one walk. All competitors were Marines at that moment in time.”

Dan boasts an impressive set of PRs :5K -- 19:48; 10K -- 40:41; 15K -- 1:06:18; half -- 1:34:51; marathon -- 3:27:42 As for future running goals, he is aiming to add a number of marathons to his race schedule over the next few months and has registered for the DRC Half and the San Antonio Rock & Roll Marathon in November.

Following this, he plans to run the Marathons of Texas -- the Dallas White Rock, Chevron Houston and Austin marathons in December, January and February.

As for his life goals, he aims to continue to grow his company's investment funds and help his clients build their wealth and businesses. He would also like to complete his doctoral studies and add an adjunct professor's role to his life so he can give back and motivate a next generation of leaders.

With his drive and determination there is no doubt that he will do just that.