



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

November 23, 2021

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By Elly Clary

## Dean Otto Friendship, Forgiveness & Thankfulness

Runner and bicyclist Dean Otto survived a collision with a pickup truck, faced a two-percent chance to beat paralysis, but made a full recovery.

On the first anniversary of his accident, he ran a half-marathon with his surgeon and the man who hit him.

“This Thanksgiving and every Thanksgiving, I don’t have to think very long about what I’m thankful for,” he told Charlotte Rotarians. “It took me a long time, but I got it all back – with God’s grace and a little bit of hard work and a whole lot of help from professionals.”

Otto calls his recovery from paralysis from the waist down one of acceptance, forgiveness, humility and gratitude. Along the way, he found what he feels is the reason for his experience.

“I need to inspire people,” he said. “Frankly, our attitude and our actions are the only two things that we can control. If you live in the negative, negative things are going to happen. If you live in the positive, positive things are going to happen.”

A recovering alcoholic, Otto’s experience with tragedy started around 6 a.m. on September 24, 2016. A truck hit him while he was peddling along Providence Road. Lying on the asphalt, Otto couldn’t move below the waist.

He said a quick prayer, placing his predicament in God's hands. And he forgave the truck's driver.

"In that moment, I had zero fear," Otto said.

An ambulance zipped him to Atrium Health Main and soon he was in the hands of surgeon Matt McGirt. Speed was vital. Dr. McGirt snapped Otto's broken back into place, rushed him into surgery and screwed his spinal cord together. Immediately afterward, Otto could muster only minute movement of his right big toe.

With hard work, McGirt told Otto, full recovery was possible. A committed Otto challenged his surgeon to run a half-marathon on the accident's first anniversary.

Otto's bones were super dense from running and he was in half-marathon shape, having just returned from a 13.1-mile race in London. Further, he'd learned acceptance, forgiveness, humility and gratitude in the 12-Step Program alcoholics use.

While dealing with excruciating pain during in-patient rehabilitation, Otto met a mom with a son who'd suffered an accident. Otto told the boy if a 51-year-old like him could get up and walk, he could, too. By afternoon, the kid was ambulatory. "That is why I'm here," Otto thought. "I need to inspire people, to show them there is a path through forgiveness and acceptance."

Inspiration efforts mushroomed to "Ellen," "Today," "The 700 Club," "ABC News," "Runners World" and "The New York Post." He raised thousands of dollars for spinal initiatives and wrote a book titled "Two Percent Chance: A Journey of Resilience, Recovery and Rebirth."

Something else: "The man that hit me found me in the hospital," Otto said. "He apologized. I said, 'I've already forgiven you, man.'" Otto and Will Huffman became close friends, as did Otto and McGirt.

And on the first anniversary of the accident, McGirt and Huffman joined Otto in a half-marathon.

\*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/649611455>  
Mr. Otto's introduction begins at 18:40 minutes.