

## **Magui Dunn**

### **Previous Rehab Patient at The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (TIRR) Memorial Hermann Hospital**

*Interview conducted by  
Nichole Sheridan  
in 2016 in Arlington, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor  
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### **Biography**

Although she currently resides in Spring, Texas, Magui Dunn was raised in San Antonio and was born in California on October 29, 1980. In 2010, after a car accident left Dunn paralyzed, she became a part of Rolling Inspiration, a peer support group in San Antonio for spinal cord injuries. There, Dunn met old and new injured individuals and families and instantly became a part of the spinal cord community. During this time Dunn quickly realized how her voice could help change the stereotypes commonly associated with those in wheelchairs. Since then she has participated in numerous adaptive activities, and often attends sporting events and other social activities.

### **Topics discussed**

- Childhood and life before acquiring a disability
- Family attitude before acquiring a disability
- Acquiring a disability
- The rehabilitation process, adaptive technology, and resources
- Disabled community, and coinciding old identity with their newly disabled identity
- The participant's accessibility within school, jobs, housing, and the community
- Gender and disability

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### **Sheridan**

This is Nichole Sheridan interviewing Magui Dunn. Today is March 24, 2016 at 3:36 PM, and I am interviewing her for my independent study for Fall 2016 semester on the rehabilit... er, Acquiring a Disability: The Rehabilitation Process.

Hi Magui, how are you?

**Dunn**

Oh, I'm good.

**Sheridan**

<topic> Childhood and life before acquiring a disability</topic>

My first question is can you tell me a bit about your childhood and what sorts of activities and family activities or community activities you were involved in?

**Dunn**

Um, okay. Well I was born in California and I was very active. We had a whole...I was just telling my friend the other day we had a whole bunch of trees in our backyard, and my dad tied a rope up there, and so we had a rope swing. So my sister and I were like... my mom would keep us really girly, and my dad would wrestle with us in the front yard and climb trees. California is all about the outdoors, so we were always outdoors and havin' fun. That's just how I was raised in a very positive, active family. (speaking to someone else) Yeah, Nichole.

**Sheridan**

<topic> Family attitude before acquiring a disability</topic>

Did you have any interactions with anyone with a disability? What were your very first interactions or initial thoughts about what disability meant? Or anything like that?

(speaking at the same time)

**Dunn**

Well, that's interesting cause my aunt had polio. My mom's sister...she had two aunts...she had two sisters that had polio. One of them passed away when she was like, twenty-one I think. And then the other one, she's still alive, but she uses braces, like arm, leg braces. She just walks around on her crutches, and she's had the same crutches when she was a baby. She's from Mexico and they don't have a lot of money there. So what they had, was just like, basically what they had. So my aunt had polio and she used crutches. I just knew she couldn't use her legs, but, I mean that was the only...but I still didn't put her in the same category as, disabled or...like she wasn't in a wheelchair. So to me that wasn't disabled.

**Sheridan**

Okay, so the specific image of a person with a disability, can you describe that to me--I know you just did a little bit, but can you describe it a little bit more?

**Dunn**

Yes. So, before when I was able bodied I didn't know why people were in wheelchairs, or like what a disability--growing up everybody says they have, a learning disability...well, not everybody. Uh, you know, people have learning disabilities....there's all kinds of disabilities but the one that I identified disability and wheelchair in the same shot, like the same thing, the same category. I knew that people were depressed, and that was a disability, and that people had a hard time learning, and that was a learning disability. People had speech disabilities, like, to me disability, wheelchair, handicapped.

### **Sheridan**

Were you aware that there was a disability culture, disability community at all?

### **Dunn**

Kind of, but not really, just because of the movies that I watched, like--you know the more independent movies you watch, the weirder the topics get. So I knew that there was very different cultures for lots of different things, and the deeper you dive in the more you find out.

### **Sheridan**

<topic>Acquiring a disability</topic>

Can you describe your disability, kind of how it...like, what happened to you, the extent that your disability is and your everyday life?

### **Dunn**

Yeah. Okay so I was born able-bodied and in 2010 my friend and I were driving.... I was a passenger in her vehicle, we're driving home, and we were hit by a drunk driver, and our car spun out of control, and landed in the fast lane. When the car went into the fast lane, it became disabled and an 18-wheeler came and crushed the car, and the steering wheel crushed my friend on impact--she died. And then I was left with a C5 spinal cord injury, which means that I am paralyzed from my chest down--I don't have like, finger function, uh, the muscles past my chest don't work. So, I need help, doing everything cause I don't have...I don't have strength. I don't have.... I have biceps but I don't have triceps. My diaphragm is now weak because the muscles don't really work how they're supposed to. I need help using the restroom. I need help getting in and out of bed. I need help getting dressed, like, I need full assistance with everything that I do. Recently in these past couple of years that I've been doing more things by myself because my body isn't in as much pain as it was when I was first injured. I broke both of my shoulder blades, so (laughs) those you really can't go and fix. My lungs collapsed. Because of my level of injury, my muscles in my diaphragm didn't work so I needed to be put on a respirator. I was in ICU for a very long time, and by long time I mean like a month...but you know, anytime in the ICU is a long time. Then I was moved to warm, uh, TIRR [The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research] Memorial for rehabilitation, and I stayed there for a while.

### **Sheridan**

<topic>Disabled community, and coinciding old identity with their newly disabled identity</topic>

After you acquired your disability did you become engaged in any new communities or activities as a wheelchair user?

**Dunn**

As a wheelchair user, yes, because I didn't know what to do.

My husband and I, were married for five years before that...before, we were married in 2005, and so he was going through this whole thing with me. I guess we were so young in our lives, age-wise, that we hadn't had much experience with the like, medical conditions. Our parents were getting older but we still didn't even have to deal with that with our parents, so for us to be thrown into that.... We had no...we didn't know what to do.

The rehabilitation center and my doctors were really good about putting us in touch with people with similar injuries. So I learned, you know...I met, I met some people who...I met, well, my doctor was telling me about this guy who ran a support group in San Antonio. So then, like, immediately... I was lucky to find it, so that, after my injury be put into this group. He had just started it that year. So I was really fortunate that it was a group that could like...people with similar... a spinal cord injury group. I was lucky to find something like that, and with that they helped me, like with medical questions. Then we'd, take little tours and field trips, and we go out and a lot of us play sports. We're just all involved in the disabled community in so many different ways that it branches out more than just spinal cord injuries.

**Sheridan**

Did your identity shift after you acquired your disability and what was the process of trying to integrate your old self with your newly acquired identity? Or was there a difference at all?

**Dunn**

Okay, see, I like that. Because it didn't...my disability after my injury, it didn't change me as much as I thought it would, or as much as I was expecting it to. Before, like I was really active. I had a scooter, I had a convertible...like I was just out. I loved the fresh air, I loved being outside. I liked riding my bike. I liked going for walks. I liked doing everything. I was in hair...you know I was in cosmetology school when it happened, so I was using my hands every day. When Christmas time I was the one...my husband and I, we were out there putting our Christmas lights on...gardening, using our hands, just doing everything that we could. So after my accident it was, I was scared. I was really scared that I was not going to be able to enjoy life the way I had enjoyed it before my accident. After that, I was going through a lot of mourning. You know, I lost my friend, I lost my body, there was a lot that I lost...it's horrible and awful, but it's like I had no choice...I have to learn...I have to learn how to feed myself, or I'm not going to eat, and then I'll get sick, and then my body won't be strong, and then I won't be able to use what I have. So it's like, I got to make it a win situation for me.

(Speaking at the same time)

So like I said, recently, its been six years. The past six months are the first couple of months that I've been doing my makeup... I didn't know I could do my makeup. I figured out how to do it.

**Sheridan**

Mmm-hmm. You're going to look hot every day, even more so!

**Dunn**

I try! I try, boo, I try!

**Sheridan**

When you got into your accident, and as you were going through your rehab did your relatives, family, or friends, did they have a reaction to it? Were they negative, were they positive? How did they come around to your disability?

**Dunn**

Okay, I was lucky that I had, I have, super awesome friends, and really positive people around me, and my parents are amazing...and my husband is kind, and nice and patient... I'm really lucky like that--to where we were just kind of "okay, well, what do we do next?" There was really--my mother says that she did not know that I was going to be a quadriplegic the whole time I was in the hospital until they released me to go home, which was six months later...but just, I can't, I can't believe that's true...

I guess for my parents it's hard because, they raised you for a long time to one day live in a different city...and this happens to me and they, as parents they can't control that situation and, I can't control that situation either, but...like...me as a woman, as a married, mature, thirty-five year old woman, I want to be able to do things for myself...and then there's my parents want to do things for me, so, there's like a struggle there about...am I a woman, am I a baby, am I a handicapped, am I disabled, am I like...you know, what am I? But I'm always their daughter. I'm really lucky that way, that I have that, I'll always be their daughter before I'm anything else kind of thing.

Then my friends...they're positive. They came...I had...my best friend came and visited me. It was either her, or her husband in the hospital with me and my husband, like every single day. That's kind of like rare to find so young in your twenties...and she was a new mother. So the fact that they made time for me like that, was really nice...and my friends from San Antonio came up to visit me. I'm just really lucky that I, the people that I know are good people...and are willing to put forth the effort into...and after I came out of the hospital I'm still doing the things that I did before, nothing has really changed...like they (laughs) hand me stuff all the time and I'm like, "I can't get that!" People hand me things all the time and it's--when you do what you can, they forget about the things that you can't do kind of thing, so...that's just how we do it, at least me.

**Sheridan**

Yeah.

**Dunn**

Yeah.

**Sheridan**

<topic> Accessibility after acquiring a disability</topic>

Since your disability have you specifically had any trouble accessing any type of schooling, jobs, or housing? Or any type of community activities or social events? And if there was like, a specific time can you kind of tell me about it, or how you went about kind of solving it?

**Dunn**

Okay, well, I don't know if I'm wearing pink colored roses...or rose colored glasses because I don't, I haven't had...places have been accessible, people have been accommodating. We go on road trips and everything is...I don't feel out of place, I don't feel...I mean I do feel out of place...but we, I fit, like I should...everything...things are accessible.

What was the question, Nichole?

**Sheridan**

If you had trouble accessing any type of schooling, jobs or housing?

**Dunn**

Oh, okay.

(Speaking over each other)

**Dunn**

Housing is tricky...the schooling, I went through DARS [The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services] which is uh, Department, yeah...Rehabilitation Services. That was when I was first injured and they were going to help me find a job and...except then I was like "well let me go to school." I don't...I'm not the type of person who would go to school. So, the services that, you know--I don't know, Nichole. I don't know this one.

**Sheridan**

(Chuckles) Okay, that's fine. So you live with your husband Charles. Is it just you and him that live in the house now? Or I guess, apartment, or house?

**Dunn**

No, oh, we had this house for ten years, five years and then the accident... we moved away. This house is old, it was built in 1970...well, I say it's old, but it's an older home, like, 1976, before uh...

**Sheridan**

The ADA.

**Dunn**

Yeah, so, I didn't think I was going to be able to move back into this house. This is like, my dream house. This is (chuckles) --when Charles and I bought this house our friends were like, "what are y'all doing with this house? It's old. It has...it's so big and it's just y'all two. What are y'all doing?" We were like, "no, no, we know what we're doing." And we do! Now I'm really happy that we--after my accident I came home...after rehab I came home and I wasn't able to fit through the doors...it's a two story home and I couldn't get upstairs. Luckily the master is downstairs and I'm able, uh--so we moved back to San Antonio after my accident cause I was like "I don't, I can't live in this house, I don't know what we're going to do."

So we moved back home to San Antonio with my parents. We lived with my parents for a while, before we bought our, before we found our own place in San Antonio. And then we were like "what are we doing here?" So we moved back to San Antonio, and in that time we had renters in our house, so...cause we didn't know what to do with the house and we wanted to be close to family right after the accident. So we had renters in our house, and these renters...their lease was coming up. Well we decided to move back. So when we moved back I was kind of sitting downstairs like, how we could...how I could live in this house and I was like, "you know what?" I could put a lift from one closet to another closet and all we did was widened some doorways and lower light switches...and I'm able to live in my house... my dream house. It feels like my home. It's me and Charlie in our home that we bought years before we bought anything, when we thought we were invincible, I guess.

**Sheridan**

That's really cool.

**Dunn**

It is really cool...and we worked (stumbles) \_\_\_\_\_(??) For a year. But Charles and I designed the whole house. He's an engineer, so he knew what to do with all the extra space, and I kind of picked out the colors and made sure that this bathroom didn't look different from that...you know? When you come in you can tell that me and...Magui and Charles live here. I love having people over, because it's so accessible and because I like to show people, look, it's not...lower the light switch, widen the doorway. There's stuff out there to make it easy, you don't have to go through some of the government programs that are out there that have been using the same methods for the past ten or fifteen years when technology and society is changing so quickly...you don't have to go the old way. Check this out, kind of thing.

**Sheridan**

Yeah, uh...

**Dunn**

I get excited when I talk about my house, my life.

**Sheridan**

No, it's completely fine, and I actually want to come back to that because I know you say, you said that you can control everything with your voice, but I want to come back to that after I ask you a few more questions.

**Dunn**

Okay.

**Sheridan**

Can you describe a typical day in your life, from the moment you wake up to the moment you lay down to go to bed?

**Dunn**

Yes, okay. Charlie is back at work, so I'm here at the house. We get up together, and we get up at like six o'clock...it lets me use the rest...--I have to use a catheter to use the restroom, so he helps me use the restroom. Then, we take a shower, then he gets ready, and I kind of sit around and get ready, play on my iPad, or do something, and then he goes to work. Then I take the morning--he'll leave at around 8:30, and I'll take between 8 and 10 to just kind of do my own thing, relax...wake up. I'm alone during that time and then from like 10...at 10 I have a caregiver that comes in, and she'll help me do my hair. She'll hand me my makeup, and she'll--sometimes when Charlie leaves I'll do my makeup in between the time and when my caregiver comes. When my caregiver comes, she helps me brush my teeth. I can do things, it just takes me a long time. If I were to get my toothbrush, it would probably take me a day just to get it in my hand. I could do it, but it takes a really long time. Whereas, caregivers come in, pick it up, put it in my hand, and I can kind of guide it around my mouth. I brush my teeth, I do my makeup...get something to eat, do some errands...my friends come over.

My caregiver leaves around five or six. Then Charlie comes home, and we have dinner, hang out, and we chill. On the weekends, we have...there's always stuff scheduled in between. That's basically...I get up figure out what I'm going to do that day and do it.

**Sheridan**



Yeah. What is your relationship been like with attendants? Do you ever have issues finding one? Is it basically you have a friend and they kind of... you hire them? Or how do you go about finding one and have you ever had issues finding one and keeping one?

**Dunn**

That is the hardest part of the injury. I don't want people in my space like 100% of the time. I like...I'm very private, I like to be, I don't like to sit here and entertain somebody...and with caregivers--whenever you go through an agency they only pay them so much, and when you only pay them so much, they're limited as to what they can do for us. So, I have found most people from agencies won't work as hard. I'm fortunate to where I can have a little bit of private pay. I find my own caregivers, and I have really really really good care... super good care.

Here in Houston... in San Antonio I had really good care. My mom, my mom found some lady in you know, who took care of her dad as her dad was passing. So my mom was like "hey my daughter needs help." And so that lady, she was a little Puerto Rican lady, I loved her. She was so nice, and if she could still take care of me, she probably would. Then my other caregiver was a friend of mine that I went to hair school with...who--she moved down to Houston, San Antonio and helped me...We just lived together, me, her, and Charlie just...working, trying to keep me alive. Cause we're--she was young, I was young, we're all young trying to figure out. --I can't talk because I have too much mucus, and I can't use my stomach muscles to cough it up, so my friends are getting, elbows deep in my injury helping me, and I was really grateful for that. That's how I find my caregivers. Here in Houston, it's been really hard because nobody's going to care that much about somebody they're not really invested in. I'm really, I think I'm really good at picking out the weasels that aren't going to be good caregivers...the ones that are going to be unreliable, the ones that aren't going to give 100%...the ones that will leave their personal business at the door...but I have to go through a lot of them before I find the good ones. I'm doing that right now.

**Sheridan**

Yeah, I understand. I'm in the same exact boat.

**Dunn**

It's not fun! I don't want to wake up, I don't want to wake up and be in a peppy mood. I don't want to wake up and hear about your day, I just want to get up and go in a room and do my thing.

**Sheridan**

Uh-huh.

**Dunn**

I know you know! It's hard! Tough stuff, caregivers. Finding people who care, finding people you want around you all the time. Finding someone who understands--yeah, you're not at work. We're not at work, this is our life. Not fun.

**Sheridan**

<topic> The rehabilitation process, adaptive technology, and resources </topic>  
So back to when you were in rehab how long, you said you were in there for six months?

**Dunn**

I think, I think that's how long they want you in there for. I think--I don't know if it's six months or six weeks. I'm really bad with numbers. I'm pretty sure six weeks is not that...maybe three months. That is the information that...time kind of does a weird thing when you're in the hospital. When you come out you're not all there. You kind of have to get your bearings down and be like okay, what's going on? What day is it? Where've I been? So it's hard. But I was in rehab for a while, probably like three months.

**Sheridan**

What type of therapy did you do? Occupational therapy, speech therapy?

**Dunn**

Okay, so, I did physical, occupational... I did not have to have speech therapy, I had to do breathing therapy cause I was on a ventilator for my entire rehab stay. And because I was on my ventilator...that thing is huge and attached to your neck. Not fun, like an old vacuum cleaner kind of thing. I'm in a power chair with broken shoulders, and busted, bruised ribs. I'm in a weird state, I can't move my body, so the therapy was just...it was hard. I couldn't do anything. All I could do was kind of--this is what they taught me in therapy...that's where I learn to use my voice too. I couldn't breathe and I had to learn how to take the air from the diaphragm, from the ventilator and use the air to make noise to call for help. So they had my husband, Charlie stand on the other side of the room and--this is how weak my muscles were. I could not speak louder than a whisper. He had to stand in another room, and I had to call his name a certain amount of times, and he had to count how many times he heard. It was hard for him to hear because I couldn't--which is crazy to think now because I can shout clear across the backyard now, and he could be able to hear me. Before, I couldn't, so that's what we worked on a lot was my breathing, and managing the air. They really did try to get me to do therapy, but it was so...I was in so much pain. I was in so much pain, but it was really hard to do anything.

**Sheridan**

So would you say the main focus of your rehabilitation was the breathing aspects and using your voice again?

**Dunn**

No, the main thing they were doing for me was getting me fitted for a wheelchair. That's basically what they did for me the entire time I was in rehab was...I think they had me in three or four wheelchairs. They had me wanting to get out, but I mean, I couldn't get in and out of bed, I couldn't transfer, there was no way for me to try to use the chair. I would say the majority of it was learning, family members learning how to move me and position me in my chair to prevent bedsores, to prevent broken bones, to prevent.... it was a lot of hands-on training for my family. For me it was healing, getting off that ventilator, that they didn't think I was going to get off of. But yeah, the majority rehabilitation...The therapy they wanted you to work, but I couldn't move. It was really hard.

### **Sheridan**

Did the therapist do strictly functional activities or did they try and mix fun into therapy to try to get you more motivated to do something?

### **Dunn**

They were really sweet, the therapists were really sweet. They made things fun. They would have obstacle course races, we would go outside. On Sundays we would have functional group. I think throughout the week it was functional group. I called the dysfunctional group though, cause none of us could move. (Laughs; unintelligible). It was basically our family members that were playing for us...but it was fun. I had a really good time. (Unintelligible). In functional group, that's when we all really got to talk and meet each other. That was the funnest part, I think for everybody.

### **Sheridan**

So there was a community of sorts in the actual hospital within the floor that you were on?

### **Dunn**

(Laughs) yes. We had... my roommate in rehab... we had... it was so much fun. I had a lot of fun in rehab the first time. I mean it was awful, and terrible, but my friends are there my husband was there. I'm not shy so we made friends with the new injury patients. We were in the 501, so they called us the 501 girls. It was me and another girl who was doing her second therapy. You go to rehab for a stay, and then you go home, and then they bring you back. She was on her second...her second time, so I was the newbie--and they put people in 501 cause it's the closest...

(Dog barks) Alamo! Sorry, my dog is barking. So basically people--outside, hold on, let me get him out.

Okay, all right. They put people in room 501...those are the worst... you need the most monitoring cause they're really close to the nurses station. So, room 501. We turned it into a positive where the 501 girls are--the therapists would take us on an outing...and one of them made us 501 girl shirts--and there was another guy there and--I speak Spanish and he spoke Spanish so we made friends with him and his family. We would do things. On the weekends, none of the regular therapists or staff were there so we would run amuck.

(Laughs) We would run amuck in that hospital. It was fun. But I don't think everybody has that same experience.

**Sheridan**

With your adaptive technology can you tell me some of the equipment that you use? And some of the stuff that was prescribed to you that you use basically on a daily basis?

**Dunn**

Okay, that's what's so cool about the technology that I use isn't anything that's prescribed, or that my doctor suggested to me. It's just stuff that's out there, like, my phone. I use my phone for everything, I don't have to--it's made for people like me. There's shortcuts on your phone that makes it easier to where you don't have to swipe so hard. I can use my phone to just search anything I want, to send a text. I just tell it what to do, and it does it...there's apps that will turn--I have light bulbs in my house that will work with your phone to help. I can turn off my lights with my phone. I have--you heard me talk about Alexa, an Amazon product, Echo. When I'm in my bed, I am against the gravity, so I am unable to move my arms...when I'm in bed, I'm in bed. I can't move anything. I'm going against gravity so it's really--I can't turn. When I'm in bed, I'm in bed. So that Amazon Echo, her name is Alexa because that's just what...the name they gave her. With her, I can ask her questions, I can have her play me music. I can...if I forget to turn off a light in another room I can just use my voice and tell her to turn off the light, and she'll do it. I can control my TV with that. It's less than \$200 and it's a life-changer. It really is.

What my doctors prescribe? You know, nothing. (Laughs). Nothing. Show you to put a stick in your mouth and tell you to hit the light with it. You know? It's not...no. You don't have to think that outside of the box to have accessibility.

**Sheridan**

How did you learn about it?

**Dunn**

How did I what?

**Sheridan**

Learn about it.

**Dunn**

I've always been kind of nerdy, science-y, technology--that's one thing that my husband and I have in common is--I'd say I out geek him by a hundred. He's naturally geeky, smart; and I really have to do research to on what I am interested in...and once I am interested in it I like to know everything about it. So I just happen to be interested in technology, in gaming, in figuring things out...like, what's next? Luckily, with my iPad I'm able to browse

the internet and be involved, be part of the change that is coming when it comes to technology.

I'm really excited, Nichole, about self-driving cars. That is the next biggest thing for us. Women, or people who can't drive...the technology is out there. Google is developing a software they're using the stuff everywhere. I want to test one so bad. I need to win the lottery like twenty times, but I want to test one so bad. Cause I can drive, I've driven before. They've given me...I have driven before in my paralyzed state. It's just not...I don't feel comfortable because my muscles are so weak, but if I have a car that can drive itself with...and I need to just kind of guide it, I would feel safer and that would make life so--it's coming within the next three years, I know. I mean, they're all over Austin. I just happened to...I'm just am really interested in this stuff. That's how I find out, it's just me nerding out in my room between eight and ten.

(Laughter)

### **Sheridan**

<topic> Disabled community, and coinciding old identity with their newly disabled identity  
</topic>

After you acquired your disability...I know this is kind of redundant cause you kind of answered it earlier... did you come into contact with any other people who have disabilities did they help you with the transition between being an able-bodied person and a person with a disability?

### **Dunn**

Okay. This is cool because with the support group...when I joined he had just started in January. This is the guy who had been injured for like seventeen years maybe? So the people in the group were kind of...they had been injured for a while and –

2010, 2009 was like when technology first started evolving, becoming more mainstream. Before, we had flip phones where you would have to push the button a whole bunch of times to text or whatever. I feel like I am from a different era of disabled, wheelchair community because when I would go to the meetings I would see these people and they just seemed stuck in their routine...I'm gonna sit and figure out what I'm going to do for the rest of the day kind of thing, kind of complacent. I don't know, maybe I just had a different energy. When I started going to the groups it started becoming more exciting. Things started, you know...happening. The people I met kind of--they helped me realize...I don't know. We do things together and it's fun, and I don't think it's something that they...I don't know what I'm trying to say here. I'm saying, the community was a good community, but I think that having the support group was really helpful for everybody to get out of the norm of whatever it is...whatever they were doing, whatever we were doing before.

The support group really helped bring everybody together as a community. I hate the word "empower," but it's true. When you do things as a group with other people who are like you, you're like "okay, well what else can we do? We did this today, if we put our thinking hat on what can we do tomorrow? We all learn from each other. And we're all, like I said, we're all involved in different other communities, not just like wheelchair communities. Some people are involved in their church, some people are involved in their sports. We all bring something different to the table. Yeah, I can't knock my support group. They keep me alive.

**Sheridan**

<topic> The rehabilitation process, adaptive technology, and resources </topic>  
When you were discharged from the rehab or the hospital resources were available to you? Either emotionally or equipment wise? How did you find them and how was it paid for? Like your wheelchair and other equipment that you use? How were they paid for and how did you find them?

**Dunn**

Okay, this really sucks. Before my accident, Charles and I did pretty well. We were both working professionals. We had double income. I was going to school to learn a new trade. So we had, I don't know, I don't know how to explain this part...the finances. Because we were fine before the accident, after the accident happened car insurance...I feel...I don't know how to say this. When we had a lot more space in--we had a lot more trust in our...I don't know...we basically drained everything that we had to pay for my injury. I didn't qualify for...because I was working before my accident I was just like a couple of dollars from qualifying for assistance. So I don't qualify. The first couple years after my accident I didn't qualify for anything, everything we were buying was out of pocket. We sold a lot. We sold our furniture, our cars. We moved in with my parents. We had nothing.

I got my wheelchair. Luckily for us, luckily for me, Charlie was a really big advocate for me when I was injured. We would ask any of our vendors, like the wheelchair vendors for a hospital bed, and they were like, "you wish." The other people in situations where they couldn't really get the help that we need it, what they would do and one of them suggested that we call a congressman. My husband called a congressman and got me, I don't know what he did but, on the list to where I was able to get a wheelchair, I was able to get a hospital bed when I got out of the hospital. If you don't get out there and bust it then you're really, on a waiting list for a lot of necessities that you need. A wheelchair, if I couldn't get my wheelchair I would be in bed. If I'm in bed, I'm going to get sick. That's going to cost more money. It drained us financially and morally. We were just like, "what are we going to do?" Everything has to be special, specialized for you. Customized, there you go. You can't just go to the store and get a wheelchair; you have to get one that fits your injury and your needs. You can't just go to the car lot and buy a car, you have to get one and it takes time, it takes money. It's not like I could just get up and go get a job. We depended a lot on other resources that we really didn't feel like... we had to go out on our own and do it, and that was hard.

**Sheridan**

So the process was pretty confusing and you basically didn't know what was out there until you kind of went and found it yourself?

**Dunn**

Well, the doctors would guide us, but because we were in a different situation than norm it was...there weren't options for us. We really couldn't dig deep into the options because it was like "oh." The rules were kind of black and white. You have this so that means you can't get this. There's no stipulations, there's no bending the rules. There was nowhere else can

we get this? Because there's only certain places to get it, and there are certain requirements to get it. We didn't qualify for the things that were out there, so we had to do it on our own.

**Sheridan**

So because... because this is kind of the same boat that I'm in...because you were in a different financial bracket all of the programs available...You didn't qualify for? I think for me the thing is those programs don't realize that the money that you make is going directly towards hospital bills and everything anyway.

**Dunn**

Yeah. Yeah. So you're left with two dollars at the end of the day. With me I only make seventeen dollars above the minimum of what it is to qualify for things. I'm having to pay out...The money that I would be getting for whatever... I don't even know how it works because they don't let me do it. Sorry, Nichole. Yeah. Yeah, it's hard because I'm only seventeen dollars above the minimum so I don't qualify for the things that other people get. Catheters are like seven dollars apiece. Every time I use the restroom it is seven dollars...seven dollars from the money that they expect me to pay bills with, to get groceries with. It's medical bills, it's insurance. I only have that. I'm not saying that I can't make anymore, but for other people that's all they have. Even if they make one dollar too much, it's too much. You don't get the help.

**Sheridan**

Yeah, I understand.

**Dunn**

(Laughs) yeah, I know you understand. You get it! You get it! It's not fun.

Then there's other people that are like, "oh, don't you get that for free? Oh, you don't? Why not?" It's like...well, cause.

**Sheridan**

Can you think of ways that either the resources or the whole rehabilitation process could be made easier? Or if there was one thing you could change if you could go back? What would you want to focus on? What would you have been easier or more prevalent in the whole process since acquiring your disability?

**Dunn**

The medication. The medication in rehab was terrible. After my accident, I had a spinal cord injury. Doctors are familiar with spinal cord injuries, they've done the research, they've done the studies. They know what's going to happen, how the body reacts to a spinal cord

injury. I'm talking about--I had really bad nerve pain and when I was there they thought it was muscular pain so they were treating me with the wrong medication. I'm all about opening a dialogue with the doctors. I talked to my therapists and let them know "hey, I'm still hurting. I don't feel like doing therapy because I'm tired. It's the medicine." They give you narcotics when you're in rehab, so that makes you so tired you don't want to do the physical therapy that they want you to do.

Your body is going through all these changes and they pile these medications on top of medications on top of medications, that sometimes you have to wait six weeks to even know if it's going to help whatever it is that they're trying to treat. When they wean you off of it you're left with side effects, which, you know, withdrawals, ugly thoughts.

It's terrible because they don't tailor the medication for a specific person, they tailor it for the whole spinal cord... anything that falls under spinal cord injury. They give you the same stuff and if that doesn't work they pile more stuff on it. In rehab, in therapy, the functional group, the outings, the doctors, we even had therapists that would come and talk to us...That throughout my inpatient, I used to utilize the psychiatrist they had on staff. The people that come talk to you. I do utilize that, because that sometimes is more helpful than the medication. But yeah, the medication. They need to lay off of it a little bit. That is what I think most rehabs should...Find alternative ways other than crazy chemicals. I didn't take medicine before my accident, so after my accident they gave me all this medicine and my body didn't know what to do with all that. The exercise, the therapy, everything else was great. Well, not great, but everything else I get. I understand, but not the medicine.

### **Sheridan**

<topic> Gender and disability </topic>

Yeah, the next question is over gender. Do you feel like gender plays a role in how you were rehabilitated? Like if expectations for people with disabilities or performance differ between males and females?

### **Dunn**

Yes, I think boys got treated better because the girls...For me, all the way up until recently they were like, "oh come on! Let's learn how to do your makeup, let's show you how to do your..." everything they wanted me...They wanted me to learn how to do my makeup, they wanted me to learn how to do my hair. I was like, I know how to do my makeup. I can do my hair. I can do that stuff. I want to learn eat, I want to learn how to feed myself. I want to push my chair from here to there. The boys, I thought they were...The girls were in power chairs, and the boys were in manual chairs. I remember asking my therapist "how come I don't get, why aren't you encouraging me to be in a manual chair?" And they were like, well, "we just don't ever think you'll use one" because my injuries were so severe. Teach me how to eat, teach me how to be mobile. Don't focus on putting on my makeup. Don't focus on...You know, I get it. I just think that they put, they're really interested at getting your vanity boosted up. The boys are lucky, they have an easier time with their injury too I think. They don't need as much help when it comes to using the restroom as girls, like, we need help.

### **Sheridan**

We can't just whip it out.



**Dunn**

Yeah. We need more assistance with that. If they were to teach us--I don't know! Teach us more about how to be independent. Not how to be pretty. That really irritated me.

**Sheridan**

Yeah. That's basically everything that I wanted to go over. I'm going to kind of lead the last couple of minutes or whatever so if you have anything that you feel that you should tell me, or you feel that was important that I didn't ask or that I should ask next time. Is there anything jumping out at you that you just feel the need to mention?

**Dunn**

No.

**Sheridan**

No?

**Dunn**

(Laughs) no.

**Sheridan**

Okay. Well, thank you so much for being willing to be interviewed and if you have any questions with the forms just let me know and I can call and explain them to you.

**Dunn**

Okay. When do you need them by?

**Sheridan**

Definitely by Tuesday.

**Dunn**

Oh, okay.

**Sheridan**

If you can get them to me over the weekend, that would be great.

**Dunn**

Alright, I'll do that.

**Sheridan**

Alright, well thank you so much, Magui. I super appreciate it!

**Dunn**

Cool, yeah. Anything else you want to ask me?

**Sheridan**

Not that I can think of, I think we're good. But if I have any questions I'll call or text you and if you have any questions feel free to just reach out!

**Dunn**

Okay, cool.

**Sheridan**

Thanks girl!

**Dunn**

Well, thanks for thinking of me! Alright, are you done recording?

**Sheridan**

I'm pressing end now.