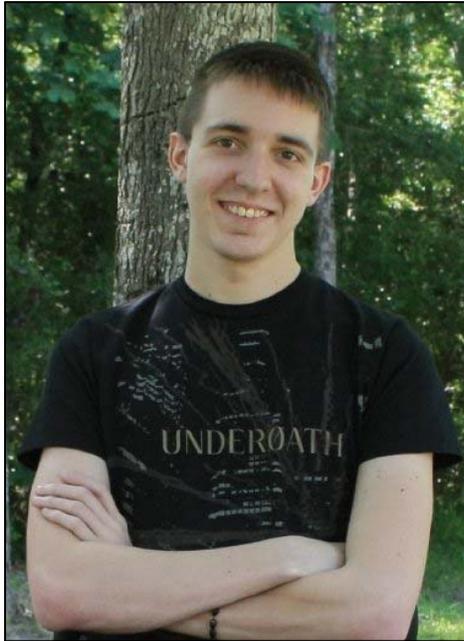




Bright Light Foundation

Caleb Keleshian

2009 BLF Recipient



Caleb was your typical senior, socially active, and working to finish high school. On November 22, 2008, at the age of 17, Caleb was jumping on a trampoline at his girlfriend's home. He performed a back flip, a stunt he had done many, many times. This time he instantly lost sensation and movement below his waist, forever changing our lives. He was transported to Herman Memorial Hospital in downtown Houston. CT scans revealed our worst nightmare. Caleb had shattered his T-12 vertebrae and his spinal cord had been compromised, resulting in immediate paraplegia. Surgery was performed by the chief of spinal surgery to stabilize his spine. During surgery, they placed two 10-inch Harrington rods and eight pins and screws. Bone was harvested from his right hip and fused onto the damaged vertebrae. After three days in Intensive Care, Caleb was moved to the post-surgery floor where he remained for five days.

On December 1, 2008, Caleb was transported to Herman Memorial's The Institute for Research and Rehabilitation (TIRR) for acute care and the first of many phases of therapy. During his four weeks at TIRR, Caleb endured countless hours in intense physical and occupational therapy five days a week. In addition to the medical care required, we attended classes on a variety of subjects related to paraplegia and the secondary conditions to which he is now susceptible. Many of these can be life threatening, including but not limited to deep vein thrombosis, autonomic dysreflexia, pressure ulcers, osteoporosis, urinary tract infections, bowel and bladder paralysis, and spasticity.

During his four weeks in rehab, Caleb's father and I adopted a schedule that rotated daily. We ensured that neither Caleb, nor his younger brother, were left alone. While Caleb was continuing his therapy, we were also preparing for his return home. Because we have a two-story home, remodeling was required, as Caleb's room was on the second floor. The downstairs half-bath was remodeled to include an ADA-compliant roll-in shower, and ramps were installed to allow wheelchair access. A hospital bed with a mattress specifically for someone prone to pressure sores was also required. Doors had to be widened, and our downstairs office was transformed into Caleb's new room. On December 23, Caleb was released from TIRR's Phase I therapy and was sent home in a back brace to heal. We were instructed to



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exercise his legs daily and return in March for Phase II therapy, which included basic skills of “life in a wheelchair.”

Just one week after Christmas, Caleb’s father was laid off after 25 years of service due to an acquisition. And, because Caleb required around-the-clock care, his father became his full-time caregiver. Over the next four months, Caleb received home-bound teaching services to continue his education. Additionally, he received home-bound physical therapy twice a week to prevent muscle atrophy and to encourage his paralyzed legs to “wake up.” Although the therapy was often painful, Caleb endured, and he regained strength. His complex nerves and paralyzed muscles showed signs of improvement.

Refusing to accept the prognosis that our son would live the rest of his life in a wheel chair, we set out to find someone that offered hope. We spent countless hours researching treatments and therapy for paraplegia. We quickly discovered that many of the treatment options available in the Houston area excluded Caleb’s level of injury, and they wouldn’t allow him to use the advanced, yet highly advertised equipment. Finally, we found the Brain and Spine Center located in Austin, TX. Immediately after graduation, Caleb began three weekly therapy sessions. Unfortunately, the center is 145 miles away from our home in Magnolia, TX, which requires three hours of driving each way and an overnight hotel stay. Caleb showed immediate signs of improvement and has conquered every task they’ve given him,



including re-learning to crawl. He has also regained movement and sensation in his hips, which allows him to walk short distances with long leg braces. With that, he was custom fitted for a pair of hip-knee-ankle-foot orthosis (HKAFO) braces, or long leg braces, and we are thrilled he is now able to walk with a walker despite having no sensation or controlled movement below his hips.

Over the past eight months, our lives have been on a constant physical and emotional roller coaster, juggling therapy, work, job-searches, doctors’ appointments, specialist visits, and adjusting to our new life. After only eight short months, Caleb’s expenses have exceeded \$400,000 and, although we have health insurance, the bills and un-covered expenses are overwhelming. Caleb is still in a loaner wheelchair as the insurance has yet to approve the \$8,000 expenditure. Unfortunately, we have also exhausted our insurance’s annual allotment of 40 physical therapy sessions and, now, each session must be paid out-of-pocket on top of the weekly travel expense of \$300.

Despite Caleb’s injury and prognosis, he has continued to show the strength of a lion’s den and the courage of an army. But more importantly, he continues to have an incredibly positive attitude. He has worked very hard to regain his independence. First, he was able to discontinue the pain medication that we were told he would require for the rest of his life. Second, he began driving his truck again, with the aid of adaptive hand controls. He also graduated Magnolia High School on May 31, 2009, on schedule,



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as a recognized student. *James 1:12 -- "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life."*

Caleb will attend Lone Star Community College this fall to continue his education and be close to home to continue his physical therapy. His goal is to pursue and complete a bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering.

From the very beginning, we made the decision to do whatever it takes. While currently there is no cure for paralysis, we refuse to give up—to accept Caleb will live the rest of his life confined to a wheelchair. He has made great progress and continues to amaze the medical and paralyzed communities. We must and will continue to further our search for advanced therapies and treatment.

Jeremiah 29:11 -- "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future".

Words alone cannot describe our sincere gratitude to the Bright Light Foundation's vision, volunteers, sponsors, and contributors for selecting our son, Caleb, as a 2009 recipient. God Bless!