

DAD HAD A SPINAL CORD INJURY, AND WHAT HAPPENED NEXT



Written by Diane Turner
Illustrated by Scott Wrigg

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NSW HEALTH



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Also available on the ACI website:

http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/155287/dad_had_a_sci_Oct2406.pdf

When a person sustains a spinal cord injury great pressure is placed on that person and their family, relations and friends. If that person is a parent, their children undergo enormous changes to their lives. Parents, themselves struggling to cope with the changes to their own lives and roles within the family may find it difficult to recognise and address their children's needs.

'Dad has a spinal cord injury, and what happened next', is Melissa's story of her father's spinal cord injury. It outlines milestones on the journey from his injury to his return home. Readers with spinal cord injury are encouraged to tell their own stories, to enhance communication with their children.

This book is dedicated to Mick and Katelyn Jurd, who by sharing their story with me, were the inspiration for this book.

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Please note this is a child's perspective of spinal cord injury. If you have any questions about spinal cord injury you should seek professional advice.



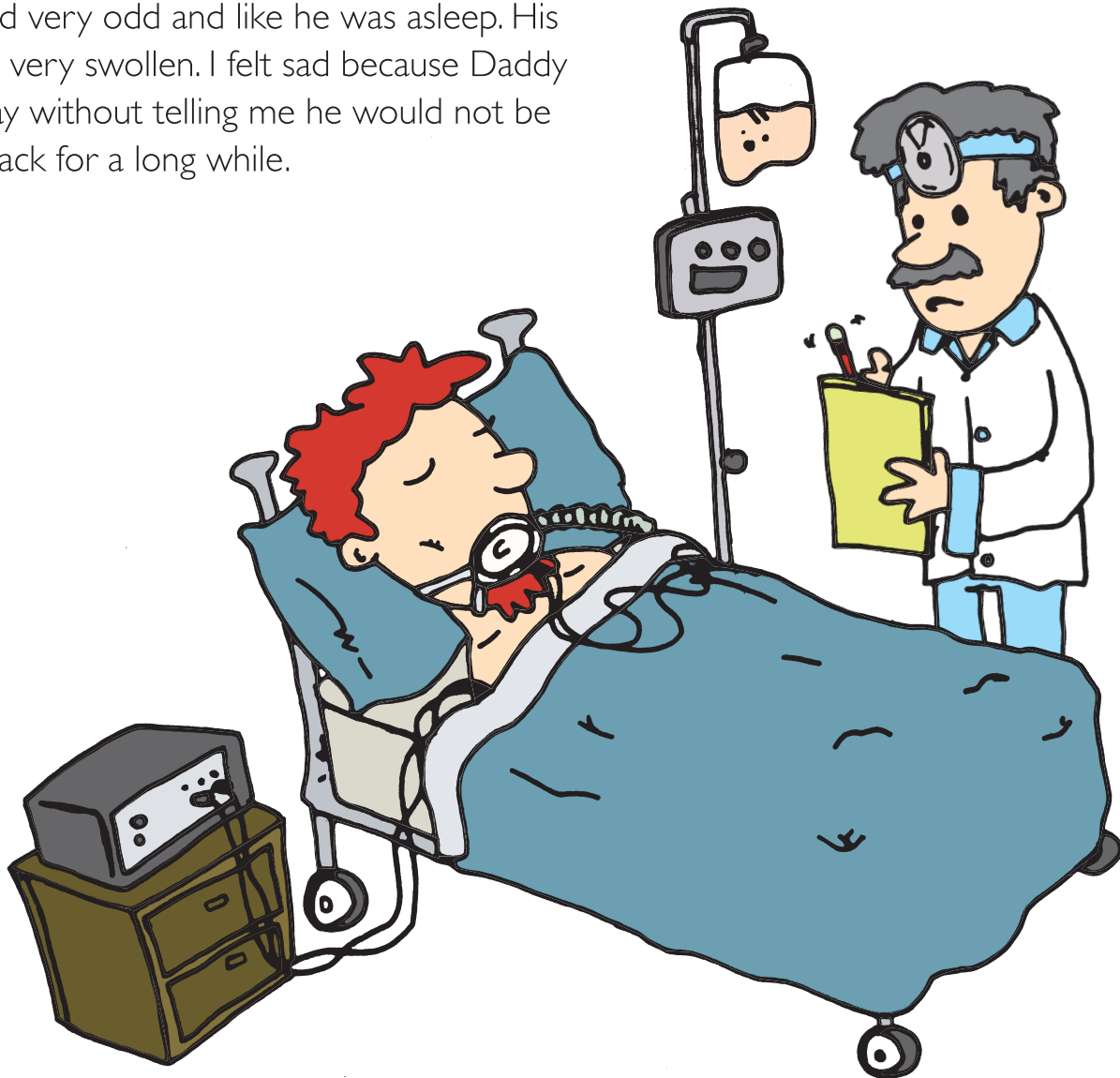
My name is Melissa. I have two older brothers Luke and Tim. We live together in our own house with our Mum and Dad.

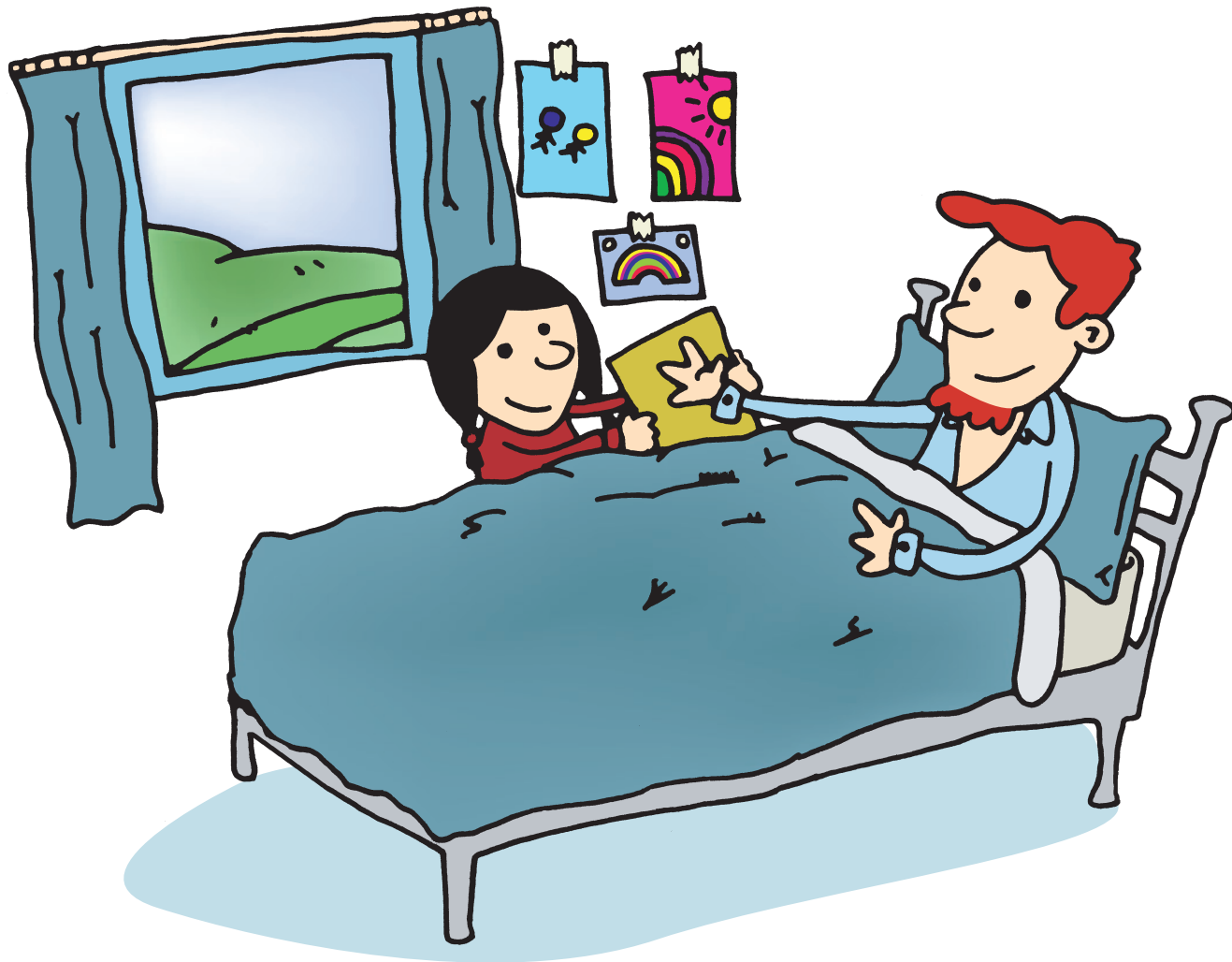
When I was very little Tim, Luke and I did lots of things together with our Dad. We were Dad's helpers when he was gardening and fixing the house. The whole family liked to fly kites together.

When I was 4, Luke was 9 and Tim was 12, Dad had an accident on his way to work. He fell off his motorbike and went to hospital.

When Dad was in the Intensive Care Ward he had lots of tubes coming out of him. We had to be very quiet and Dad could not talk.

He looked very odd and like he was asleep. His head was very swollen. I felt sad because Daddy went away without telling me he would not be coming back for a long while.





I knew something bad had happened because everyone else was also very sad. I drew lots of pictures of the sun, rainbows and birds with Dad and me.

Rainbows come out when the rain has gone. I was telling Dad I hoped he would get better soon.



After a while Dad moved to the Spinal Unit. I met lots of people there and when Mum was talking to Dad I often went to visit them. I remembered all their names.

After a while Luke didn't want to talk to Dad when we went to the hospital. He just played with his cars or soccer ball.

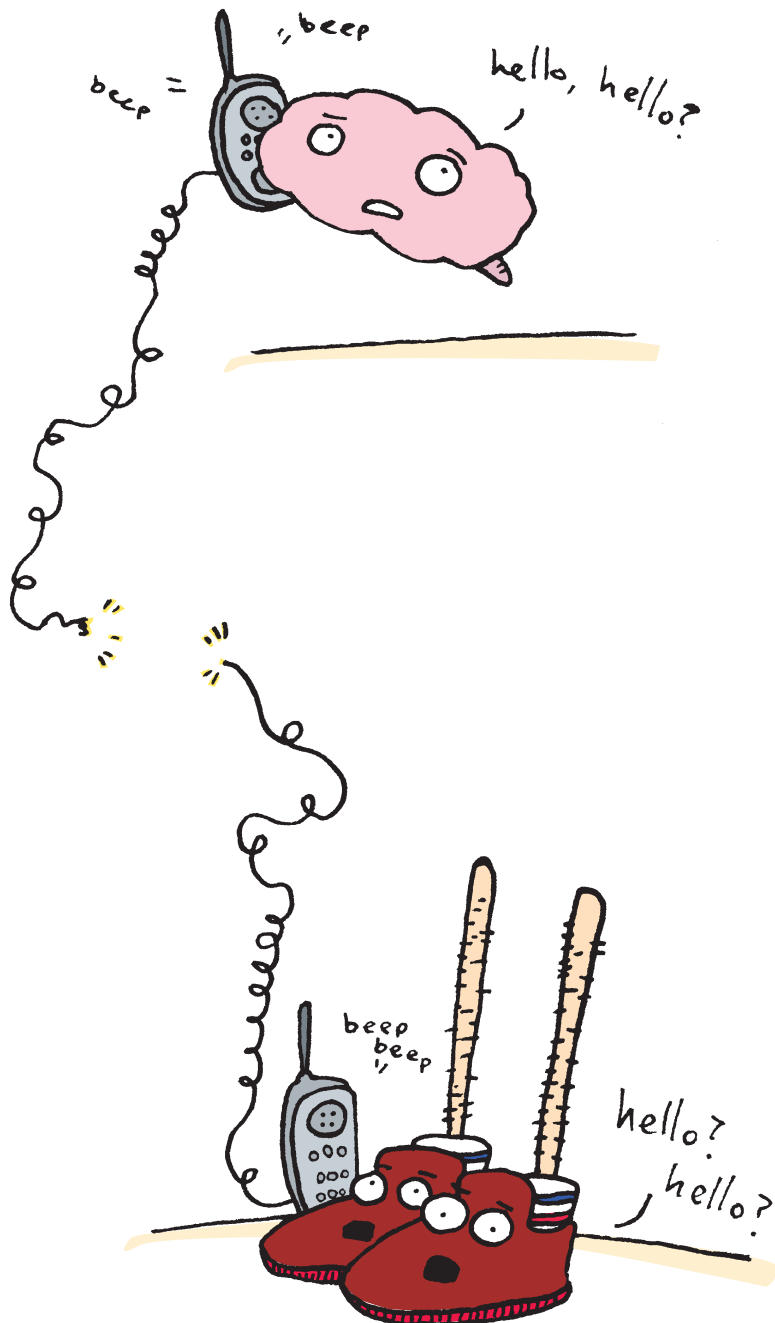
Tim said he was bored and wanted to hang out with his friends so he kept asking when it was time to go home.

After a while the doctors told Dad and Mum that Dad had injured his spinal cord very badly and now had paraplegia at T6 level. They said that while the bones or vertebrae in Dad's back got better, the spinal cord nerves were squashed and couldn't send messages to Dad's legs anymore.



The doctors said that the spinal cord was like a telephone cable. If the cable is damaged people can't use the phone to talk to other people.

If your spinal cord is broken or damaged, you can't control the parts of your body below the place where your spinal cord is damaged.





For Dad that meant he couldn't walk any more. He had to use a wheelchair to get from place to place. He could still use his arms and hands like before, but because he couldn't use the muscles below his chest, he sometimes found it hard to balance.

He had to learn how to transfer, or move from one place to another, like from his bed to his wheelchair. To learn these things and get strong, he went to a Rehabilitation Centre.

When Dad moved to the Rehabilitation Spinal Unit he learnt to get around in a wheelchair and lots of other things. I kept hoping he could start walking again and come home.

I missed him being at home because I could only see him some days instead of every day. Mum was very busy visiting Dad and looking after all of us.

One day she had to see Luke's teacher at school because Luke got into a fight and came home with all the buttons off his shirt. It took him a long time to tell Mum he was upset because Dad couldn't play soccer in the backyard with him anymore.

Mum said Dad could still watch Luke play soccer.



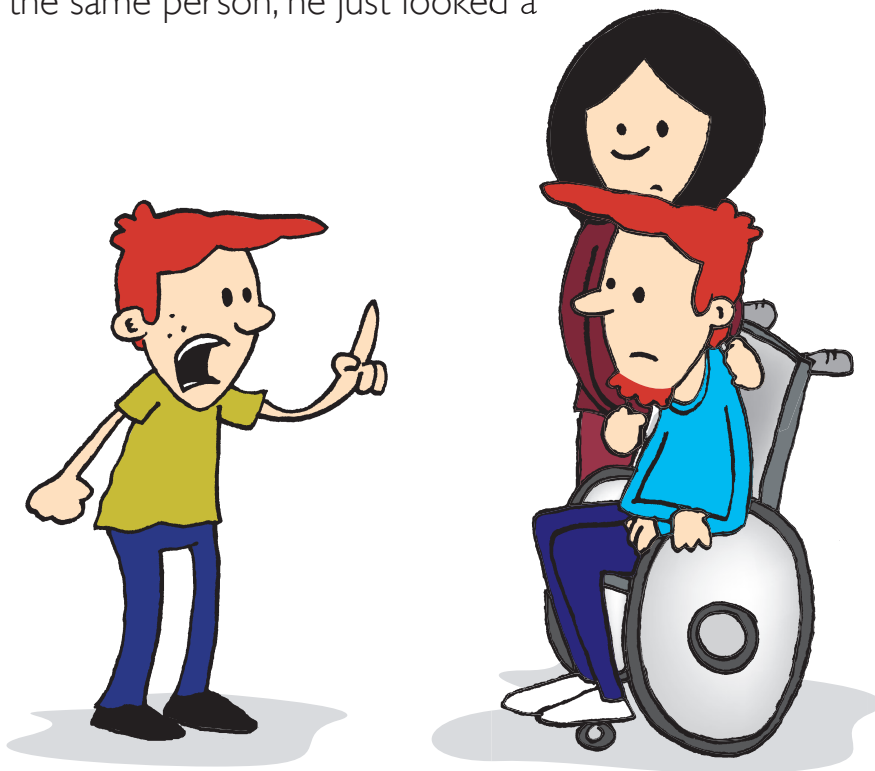


After a while Dad started coming to stay at a motel near home for the weekends. That was really great because Dad could be at home for a while. I was Nurse Melissa. I helped him pick things up and looked after him if Mum had to go out.

Tim sometimes went out with his friends when Dad came home on the weekends. One of Mum's friends told Tim he shouldn't talk to Dad about his worries or concerns because Dad had enough worries of his own. Tim thought he should be strong and look after the whole family, but this was too hard because Tim was only 12.

Tim and Mum had a big argument one day. Tim said it was embarrassing having Dad in a wheelchair. He said he didn't want to be seen with Dad in public.

After that Dad and Mum talked to Tim and explained that while Dad couldn't walk, he was still the same person, he just looked a little shorter!





We had to move house because Dad could not get around our old house in a wheelchair. Tim, Luke and I were excited because we got the chance to choose our own rooms.

Dad was a bit sad about moving because he had done a lot of work on our old house all by himself. Mum was just glad Dad was able to love us like before and in the end they both were excited and sad at the same time, about moving.

Dad had lots of tools in the garage so Tim, Luke and I helped Dad pack his tools to get ready to move.

After Dad came home from hospital it was only a few sleeps until Christmas! For me the best present of all that year was having Dad live with us again. When Dad came home we drew lots of different pictures, coloured in together and watched videos. I went on lots of rides on Dad's lap while he pushed his wheelchair.

After Dad came home, the whole family went out to dinner at a restaurant. Some people looked at us when we all went by and the waiter asked Mum what Dad wanted to eat. The waiter got a surprise when Dad said he'd order for everyone





Sometimes it's hard for Dad to get places and so people help Dad. Other times there are ramps, like when we went on the train to the city. All we had to do was ask the guard to call the next station and someone got the ramps out so Dad could get off the train.

Dad says we just do things differently now, for example, we have to plan more if we want to go on holidays and it helps to have a good sense of humour.



In winter Luke played soccer again and Dad went to every game, cheering him and the team on.

Dad even drove Luke and some of his friends to games when they were a long way from home. Next year Dad is going to coach the team.



Last summer, before Dad had his accident Tim, Luke, Dad and I played with our water pistols. I found them again when we were unpacking. I asked Dad if he would chase Tim or Luke if they wet me. Dad said, 'sure thing'. He said he'd be the quickest if it was downhill.

This summer we played chasings with the water pistols. Dad chased both Luke and me. He was the quickest downhill, just like he said!



Writing your own story

The story you have just read is a composite of many people's stories. Writing a story about your child's experience of your spinal cord injury can be a powerful way to re-engage with your child. It provides a chance to understand how your child has been affected and allows you to re-establish yourself in a parental role even while still in hospital receiving treatment for your spinal cord injury.

It is important to include things that have special meaning for your family. For some, this may be through writing, but for others, doing drawings, collecting mementos, making a photo album or making a video might be the preferred way to tell your story.

About the Author

Diane Turner has been a Social Worker for over 30 years. For 13 years she has worked with people with spinal cord injury, first in the Royal Rehab Spinal Injury Unit and then in the NSW Spinal Outreach Service. She is currently the Social Work Professional Leader at Royal Rehab.

About the Illustrator

Scott Wrigg is a Sydney based Graphic Designer and Illustrator. He has achieved a Bachelor in Communication Design through Billy Blue School of Graphic Arts and Swinburne University. He has provided illustrations for publications within Australia and New Zealand. To contact Scott please email him at scottwrigg@hotmail.com.

