

Dean, would you like to include a headshot here?

**R. DEAN OTTO** lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife, Beth, where they have raised their two children, Will and Grace. Dean is a native of Louisville, Kentucky, and consequently a huge University of Kentucky Wildcat fan. He loves the outdoors, and in his spare time enjoys fishing, hunting, hiking, golf, cooking, and gardening. Dean still runs and works out on the Peloton about six days a week to stay healthy and burn off the cookies.

He gets the most joy in life from helping others and sharing his story of forgiveness with businesses and organizations around the world.

**ONE DEVASTATING ACCIDENT.  
A 2 PERCENT CHANCE OF EVER WALKING AGAIN.  
THREE LIVES INTERTWINED FOREVER.**

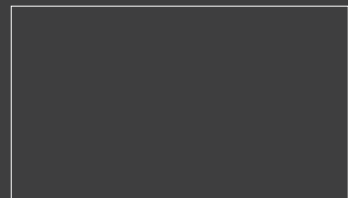
Accidents happen. But what if you were involved in an accident so horrific that it left you with a 98 percent chance of permanent paralysis? Would you lose faith? Lose hope? Would you find yourself angry and resentful? Or would you find the courage to forgive? What if you had been the driver of the truck? Or the neurosurgeon faced with putting a man's life back together as his window of hope to ever walk again rapidly closed?

These three men were faced with such a scenario one steamy Charlotte morning after Dean Otto was accidentally run down by a truck while out for a bike ride. As he lay there broken on Providence Road, his spine shattered, unable to move his lower half, Dean knew his life would be changed forever. But he could never have imagined the journey to come, or the deep bonds he would form with the man who hit him and the doctor who healed him.

Featured on *Ellen* and the *Today* show, Dean Otto's miraculous journey has already inspired millions. This is a story of hope, inspiration, and the power of forgiveness. It's about the lives of three men becoming forever intertwined because of the choices they made to lean into a single moment of their lives—to allow the best of humanity to shine.

And to light the way for others.

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**A JOURNEY IN RESILIENCE, RECOVERY, AND REBIRTH**

**R. DEAN OTTO**  
**2% CHANCE**

**AFTER HIS SPINE WAS SHATTERED  
IN A DEVASTATING ACCIDENT, DEAN  
OTTO WAS TOLD HE'D MOST LIKELY  
NEVER WALK AGAIN.**

His reaction? To challenge the neurosurgeon who put him back together and the man who hit him to run a half marathon with him on the one-year anniversary of the accident.

You see, Dean is no stranger to pain. To beating the odds. To digging deep to find the willpower to rise beyond adversity as well as the courage to forgive. Because years earlier, he had faced another form of paralysis—one caused by alcoholism.

It would be the same road map he followed to sobriety that would lead him onward, along with the love and support of his family and friends. Because sometimes things happen beyond our control. The only power we have is that split-second decision of how we respond in the moment.

And sometimes, that one decision can make all the difference.



CHAPTER ONE:  
**THE PAIN**

***Growing up, all I ever*** wanted to do was belong. I wanted to feel a part of the group and wanted people to like me. Whether that was being the cool kid in the neighborhood, the one with the house where everyone wanted to hang out, or the popular and funny kid in school, I wanted to be that guy.

Athletics was another way to stand out. I played most sports, only slightly sucking at baseball. I was pretty good at everything, but not outstanding at anything. Good enough to make all the teams and play, but not the star. I really wanted to be the star. I could lead, but I wasn't blessed with outstanding athletic skill. But people would follow me. I was blessed with speed and a great motor—a *want to* that enabled me to outwork and outwit many I came up against. And my German heritage gave me a stubbornness that allowed me to compete.

Trophies were how I measured myself. And I wanted them. Badly. So I gave it all I had all the time. I played hard. I practiced hard. I didn't stop. We didn't get trophies for showing up like later generations. We earned them. And if you didn't earn them, you were weak. No way

I was going to be called weak. So I toiled and toiled, until one day I won a championship. It was in soccer. I was in the sixth grade. I played center forward and didn't score the most goals, but I scored plenty. Finally, I was content. Sort of. For a while. Until the next season. The next sport. The next schoolyard game. I had to win. I had to kick *your* ass. When I was on the field or court or track, I hated you. I hated whoever was in between me and the trophy. I ended up winning lots of trophies. Trophies in all the sports I played. It felt so good to win, and I was always chasing that "winning buzz." Unfortunately, chasing buzzes would become a common theme for me.

I was a crappy loser too. The refs always sucked. The foul was never on me. Your parents were jerks. The other teams were the enemy and had to be destroyed. If I sound like a jackass, I pretty much was. I loved my family and my friends and teammates, but my dial was pretty much set to win and destroy. Except for schoolwork. That was a bunch of crap I didn't need to know. Because I already knew everything. And if you questioned me or challenged me, I would blow up.

But I was also pretty darn charming, good at getting what I wanted. And funny. Really funny. I feared no teacher or coach. If I made you laugh, you would like me, and I would feel a part of something. That helped me a lot in life. So did my uber-competitive nature. Man, did it help me. I wouldn't know how much it would help until later in life. Much later. When I learned that God doesn't give you anything you can't handle. He gives you all the tools you need to make it through life.

**I had a lot to learn, so I had to go through a lot of pain.**

As a child, however, I had no real relationship with God. I only went to church because my parents made me. I never listened or wanted to be there. In fact, I felt so uncomfortable at church that I literally

ran outside and threw up several times. I suppose I never much liked being told what to do. This worked against me quite a bit. It took me losing almost everything I had, at least the most important stuff like my wife and kids, before I was ever able to accept God and His will for me. Pain is a great teacher. Most times the only teacher I could learn from. I had a lot to learn, so I had to go through a lot of pain.

And did I ever on September 24, 2016.

I woke up that Saturday morning with a plan to do what I always do. Work out, then head to my weekly fellowship meeting. But that morning was a little different. I had just returned from a weeklong business trip to London. Although the primary reason I was there was to make sales calls, I had managed to inquire about a half marathon in Kew Gardens—the Richmond Half. It's a very popular race, one you need to register early for, as it sells out quickly. But with only two months until the race, it was already full. The only way to gain entry was to enter as a fundraiser for charity, which seemed like a cool thing to do. So with my mom recently requiring round-the-clock care in a skilled nursing facility in my hometown of Louisville, it made sense that I chose to raise money for Alzheimer's. In fact, I ended up the number two fundraiser and made a donation of over \$4,500. Talk about gratifying.

The race and countryside were as beautiful as advertised—a lovely park run for the first couple miles followed by many miles along a tow road that paralleled the Thames, ending in Richmond Park. It was great fun, with a festival at the finish. I spent some time postrace wandering around Richmond Park, taking it all in.

But the next morning I awoke to a really sore right hamstring. The same one that has bothered me since I ran the New York City Marathon in 2015—a little celebration for turning fifty years old—and a challenge to myself. I decided that if I was ever going to run a

marathon, I needed to get it done. And being the egomaniac that I am, naturally I had to run the biggest one.

So I called a friend of mine, Kelly Fillnow, who is a world-class triathlete and a coach. I told her that I not only wanted to run the New York Marathon but also get my time under three hours and thirty minutes, so I could qualify for the big daddy: Boston. And then I was going to hang it up.

She got me into the best shape of my life in the three months leading up to the New York City Marathon. I had zero injuries. There were no hiccups. I did every single thing she told me to do to the letter. It's amazing what happens when you follow instructions. I came into that race rock solid. I had run a twenty-three-mile stint three weeks out, a couple of twenty-mile stints, and a couple of eighteen-mile stretches as well. Man, was I ready.

Based upon my times, I figured I was going to run about a three-hour-and-twenty-three-minute race in New York ... which would have qualified me for the Boston Marathon easily. But it happened to be 60°F at the start on November 1 in Manhattan. It's never that warm. In fact, it was 70°F in Central Park when we finished. I'm of German heritage, so my body prefers the cold. I ended up running a great race, but the heat slowed me and lots of other runners down a little bit at the end. I missed the Boston Marathon qualifying time by five minutes.

It was a few weeks after that when I started having a nagging hamstring injury, pretty much a chronic deal. Basically, my gluteus muscles just weren't firing properly on my right side, forcing my hamstring to do all the work, getting inflamed and hurting like hell after a hard effort.

Kelly and I tried just about everything to fix it. First, we tried Active Release Technique, which is a combination of movement with

specific pressure points around the injury to release the muscle and tendons from being all jacked up. Then, we tried TENS, stretching, strengthening, acupuncture, and even a cortisone injection ... *no bueno*. The only thing we didn't try was rest. Imagine that. So after the half marathon in London, Kelly told me I needed to take a month off and only bike and swim ... no running at all. I reluctantly agreed.

Funny thing about the bike. I never really wanted to buy one. Bikers get hit by cars all the time in Charlotte. Don't get me wrong—I enjoy the bike. I love the speed and the wind moving across my body, the struggle and the feeling of accomplishment after a hard bout of biking. But I feared what *could* happen. Most of my bike rides would be on streets with bike lanes ... the few streets in Charlotte that have them, that is. But like anything else, I got bored with the same routes and gained enough confidence to set out on a route that didn't have designated bike lanes.

Saturday morning, the plan was an hour-long ride along a loop I had ridden many times. The difference this time was in both time of day and conditions. It was late September, and we were coming up on the time change. Fall back. So at 6:20 in the morning, it was still dark. First light was close behind, but with the leaves on the trees and the heavy tree canopy of Charlotte, it was really dark.

I also had a couple other things working against me that morning. It was super humid. The dew point was in the mid-70s, and the air was heavy ... so much so that I could feel the dampness on my handlebars just a few minutes into the ride. It was also a new moon, so combined with the sun not quite beginning to backlight the sky, there was no moonlight at all.

Never one to worry about a few extra things to overcome, I geared up like any geeky dad would. Helmet, light on the back of my bike, reflective socks, and even a vest with reflectors and flashing LED lights.

It wasn't quite like 30 Rock in New York City on Christmas, but in the dark with lights on, it's actually easier to see something than in the middle of the day when you can get camouflaged by all the other things going on around you. I felt like it would only be a few minutes until light anyway, so I set out.

It's about a mile from my house on Silver Bell Drive to Sharon Lane, due north. As I pedaled up the hill, the heavy air was on me and on my handlebars ... I felt it all over my body. When approaching Sharon Lane, a boulevard separates the road. It's comprised of cedar trees and grass, and you could smell that distinct and comforting smell of cedar wood. My front wheel hit a couple small potholes—holes I

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trust your gut.  
It's almost  
always right.**

couldn't quite see in the darkness—and it jarred my body. No streetlights yet. At that point I thought it might be best that I turn around, so I did. But just for a few yards. I went back to where the boulevard divided the road and said to myself, “Come on,

Dean, just get it done.” So I turned back north and headed out of the neighborhood. Note to self: trust your gut. It's almost always right.

I took a right on Sharon Lane, reassured with the safety of the streetlights. I could now see better and rode the half mile to Providence Road. Incidentally, *Providence* means “under the care of God.” At Providence, the light was red to turn left, but at the early hour, not a car was in sight. So I turned left and headed north toward Uptown Charlotte.

As I began my ride northward, I picked up quite a bit of speed quickly, given that I was riding slightly downhill. Not thirty seconds later, I was traveling over twenty-three miles per hour, and three cars came flying by me on my left. Providence Road is also North Carolina Route 16, a state-maintained road and one heavily traveled. But at

6:30 on Saturday morning, those were the first cars I encountered in either direction. It's also four lanes, boulevard divided, and I was riding in the middle of the right lane. So I was doing everything right, at least that's what I thought when these cars that appeared to be racing came flying by. I looked to my left and thought, *Why the heck are those guys in such a hurry?*

Just as I refocused myself and looked straight ahead, I heard a terrible sound: wheels locking up behind me. I thought, *This guy is losing the race, and he's recklessly trying to catch up with the three cars that just passed me. How can he not see me? What the heck is he thinking? Is he texting and driving?*

About the time that last thought left my head, I felt the impact. I heard the tires lock up, rubber wailing, my own rear tire and wheel exploding, and then ... silence.

Upon awakening, I could hear faint siren sounds, growing louder. Two young guys stood over me. One started to pick my bike up to move it. Even with the force of a Ford F-150 truck traveling at 45 mph, my feet managed to stay clipped in. My hands rested near my handlebars, bloodied. My Day-Glo-yellow bike jersey was torn to pieces, my left shoulder shredded. I could feel the blood on my left cheek as I came to, my face laying on the asphalt.

I stopped him and said, “Leave the bike alone. Don't move it, and don't move me! I can't feel anything below my waist. I can't move my legs. I think I'm paralyzed.”

They told me to stay still, that they had called 9-1-1. The sirens were getting louder. My initial reaction? I was totally pissed! How did they not see me? I was lit up like a Christmas tree! I did everything right. Had all the gear on. Rode in the right lane. Had a light, had a vest with lights. Had reflective socks. Dammit, how did they not see me?

Then I asked them myself, “Guys, how did you not see me?”

The driver of the truck spoke up first. “It’s really dark, and the condensation on my windshield made it hard to see. I didn’t see you until I was fifteen or twenty feet from you, and as soon as I did, I slammed on the brakes. But I knew it was too late, and I knew I was going to hit you. I’m so sorry.”

I looked up at him. And then I did what I always do when I meet someone for the first time. I said, “Hey, I’m Dean. What are your names?”

“My name is Will,” said the driver. “And this is my friend, Andre.”

Then the training kicked in, and I knew what to do. When I got sober seven years earlier, I learned some things that not only keep you sober but also keep you sane. Right-sized. In the moment. And in that moment I did what I knew I had to do. It wasn’t a chore. It was instinct. I really didn’t even think about it. I just did it. I began to pray.

At that moment, I prayed: “God, I have no idea what you have in store for me. I know that your plan for me is beyond any human comprehension. I just ask that you take care of my family and you give the doctors the wisdom and skill to put me back together and to serve you.”

In that moment, I also forgave the driver, Will, this man who I had never met. A man who ran me over with his truck. I had to forgive Will, because resentment is the evil seed that makes us crazy, steals our serenity. It steals our sobriety. It takes our energy and turns it against us.

Through God’s plan, Will crossed my path, and God had a plan for both of us. And then I was at peace. I had no fear. I had God’s love. When you have God’s love, there is no fear.

God had this, and I had to trust that.