

Unit 7: A Giant Step

Frank: I'm a T-6 paraplegic. I was injured in a motorcycle accident on December 6th, 1998 that left me paralyzed just below the chest down.

Frank's mother: I didn't accept the fact that he was hit by another person, and he became a paraplegic but, Frank, he has that will and desire to go forward. He has that inner strength.

Frank: There's always a hope in my heart that some way, through science, technology, that I won't be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life.

Narrator: Today, that hope may be answered. Frank is getting strapped into a battery-powered bionic device. If it works, his dream will come true, and Frank will be able to stand and walk.

Doctor Guy Fried: How you doing, Frank?

Frank: Fantastic.

Narrator: Doctor Guy Freid has worked on Frank's rehabilitation since the accident.

Doctor Guy Fried: Today is an absolute milestone for Frank. It's a milestone for me. Today is the first time Frank will be able to take his first step. So the technology has finally met the body.

Narrator: The plan is for Frank to use the walker as he relearns how to move on his feet. The therapist will push a button that activates sensors throughout the leg brace, which lift and bend the knee to let Frank step forward. Push, push, push, push.

First, Frank must make sure he can position his feet to support himself and maintain his balance. But after being in a wheelchair for more than a decade, it's not easy.

Nurse: Let yourself come forward a little bit.

Narrator: Frank is facing tough odds.

Nurse: Don't rush it. Shift.

Narrator: For the first time in years, Frank has pulled himself upright.

Nurse: Okay, now try to find that balance point right in the center.

Frank: Got it.

Nurse: Perfect.

Frank: I got this.

Narrator: He finds his footing, for the moment.

Frank: Feels great. This is awesome! Wow!

Narrator: Just being vertical is intoxicating.

Frank: Feels good.

People with disabilities, people in wheelchairs are constantly looking up, you know? There's something about standing, too. When you stand, you feel like who you are.

Narrator: Now comes the hard part.

Nurse: Ready to walk?

Frank: I'm ready.

Nurse: Push through your hands, stepping right.

Frank: Okay. Wow!

Nurse: Okay, now we're going to shift. To the right, and then forward. Step left.

Doctor Guy Fried: You're walking! You're a natural!

Frank: I'm in the rhythm. Here we go. Got it. Got it. Here we go. Feels good.

Narrator: Step by step, Frank walks again.

Frank: I got this.

Doctor Guy Fried: That's the superhero we need. I'm looking for you to fly at this point.

Frank: This is insane.

Frank's mother: We're reaching the stars right now. It's very overwhelming and, as a mother, it makes me feel like my boy is whole again.