

Paul Franklin: The ‘Spinal Fusion Guy’

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Paul Franklin is a force to be reckoned with. Enduring a major spinal injury when he was just 13 years old, Franklin has endured more physical, mental and emotional pain than most of us could even fathom. Yet, none of this pain could keep him from pursuing his passion — cycling.



Image: Paul Franklin

Born in New Zealand and now living in Ireland, Franklin was born and raised to love the outdoors. But, in 1971, a tragic accident left him with an injury that would affect him for the rest of his life.

“I was playing in a school field, I was 13 at the time, playing a game called piggyback,” says Franklin. “You have someone on your back and you fight each other to see who will fall on the ground. It was playtime on the playfield and the grass was a bit slippery, from memory, and I fell forward on my forehead with a guy on my back. He was quite a big guy and I fractured my neck at C3.”

Hard As Nails Podcast Episode 14: Paul Franklin

For the next two years, Franklin was forced to wear a neck brace, being deemed “Frankenstein” and “brass neck” by his fellow classmates, and, in the years to follow, he sustained many more serious injuries and surgeries that would have benched nearly anyone else.

“I had my neck injury in 71’, I fractured my left fibula parachuting in 1980, in 1999 I had my right knee operated on, then in 2000 I had my corpectomy, that was in my neck because I was losing feeling in my little finger ... I had what was doomed a Swan’s neck. My spinal cord was touching my vertebrae, and that’s when they fused my C2,3, and 4. Then I had both of my shoulders operated on in 2002 and then I had my lower back fused, L5 to H1, in 2014,” says Franklin. “That’s a brief summary of what I’ve had done.”



Image: Paul Franklin

But, no matter the injury, Franklin was determined to keep cycling. Through all of his physical traumas and surgeries, he has done cycling tours in 20 different countries including Ireland, Japan, Norway, and New Zealand.

“The great thing is that I’m pushing myself to know what I can and can’t do. I think people in your life motivate you or inspire you, to encourage you to go far beyond what you think is possible,” says Franklin.

One would think that the fear of adding salt to the wound would cause some hesitation before heading out on tours. But, according to Franklin, he doesn’t fear the possibility of sustaining further injury and decides to instead live his life to the fullest through adventure.

“In terms of fear, or ending up in a wheelchair, I don’t fear it, and I just try to live with what I can do now,” says Franklin. “I wanna do what I can do now, you know to hopefully bring awareness to people that have gone through similar but different problems. It’s not a fear of me ending up in one, but, even if I did, I would be doing stuff in one.”

Franklin’s next goal is to walk from Malin to Mizen Head in Ireland. He has accomplished incredible feats, even with all odds stacked against him, and, he is proud to be the Spinal Fusion Guy who can’t wait for his next adventure.

“Where I am now I’m content,” says Franklin. “It’s a beautiful word when you can look back and say, ‘I am content with what I have done’ and I am”.