



Three men prove their life-altering accidents did not change their drive to work hard. From left are Brad Baimbridge, Stuart Wagner and Mike Sullivan.

# Determined Despite Disabilities

Men operate heavy equipment after devastating accidents

Story and photos by Craig Reed

Combine the determination of Brad Baimbridge, Mike Sullivan and Stuart Wagner, and it would fill a log truck or several dump trucks.

These men have not been denied their preferred professions, despite suffering on-the-job accidents and subsequent spinal cord injuries. They are determined to continue working in the logging and construction industries.

Both Brad and Mike use wheelchairs. Stuart beat the odds after his accident and is able to walk slowly with the help of a walker. But all three continue to operate heavy equipment, as they did before their accidents.

“For the most part, people with spinal cord injuries don’t get any further than their injury and deal with the misery of it,” Mike says. “Don’t listen to the medical field on what you can and can’t do. Figure it out for yourself. Don’t give up, try to keep a clear head, try to avoid feeling sorry for yourself.

“There’s always somebody in a worse situation than me. Every day is a bonus for me because it could have ended—probably should have ended—in 1979.”

Mike, who owned a logging company, was injured when his vehicle was hit by a wheel and tire that came off an oncoming lowboy truck on a rural highway. The wheel and tire hit a front corner of Mike’s vehicle, flipping it onto its side before it was hit by the vehicle traveling behind the lowboy.

Mike suffered several cracked vertebrae and two dislocated ones, leaving him paralyzed from the upper chest down. He has full use of his arms and hands.

After returning home, Mike traded his bulldozer for a modified dozer he could operate, and went back to work in the woods.

Mike says he went through several



**Three years after a 7-foot segment of a drought-killed tree landed on him, Brad operates a logging shovel despite having no voluntary movement in his lower body.**

years of depression and constant physical and emotional pain. But he was driven to support his wife, Louise, and their two young children.

“She was with me every day,” Mike says of Louise, his wife of 47 years. “Her dad was a logger, so she knew the business. She wanted me to do what I wanted to do. We had the equipment, the investment.

“A handful of people helped us get back into business. Some people out there believed in us. They encouraged me and they didn’t act like I had a disability. They put me to work.”

Stuart was injured in 2015. One day while working as a log truck driver, he pulled the cable wraps off his load at a log yard. A log unexpectedly rolled off the top and struck his head. He suffered a shattered vertebrae, two dislocated vertebrae and a pinched spinal cord. After surgery to fuse together two vertebrae, he was given a 5% chance to walk again.

“I kept trying,” he says. “My right leg doesn’t work very well, but I managed to be able to kind of walk with a walker.”

Stuart bought an excavator and started his own business. He had a wife and two

children to help support.

“I wasn’t willing to just give up,” Stuart says. “I don’t like to sit at home. I’d rather work.”

Stuart was good friends with Michael Sullivan Jr., so he knew of the older Mike’s situation.

“Mike just told me my best option was self-employment, that I just needed to find my place in the industry,” says Stuart, who received his contractor’s license and went to work with his excavator.

Brad was falling a tree July 4, 2018, about 10 minutes before the 1 p.m. closure because of fire regulations. He was just starting a backcut on the tree.

“I don’t remember anything after that,” he says.

The top of a drought-killed tree, about 30 feet long, fell and hit him in the head and back, driving his head down between his knees. He fell face-first in blackberry vines before 7 feet of tree landed on him.

“I don’t know what caused it to come down, no idea,” Brad says. “I was knocked out. When I woke up and tried to move, I couldn’t.”

Brad suffered a hyperextended spinal cord, two fractured vertebrae, five

fractured ribs, a punctured left lung and an injured left shoulder. He has 60% to 70% feeling in his lower body, but no voluntary movement.

“I knew what I was up against,” says Brad, who earlier in his life had worked as an EMT and volunteer firefighter and had seen others suffer physical trauma. “You have hope, but you have to be realistic about your situation.”

Brad was friends with Stuart and spent several hours talking to him about life and disabilities. Through Stuart, Brad met Mike and the two men talked.

Brad also got help keeping his body stretched out from Terry Brock, the owner of Bodyshop Total Fitness in Sutherlin. While still in the hospital, Brad received a call from Terry, who volunteered his time and facility to help Brad in his recovery. Their goal was for Brad to get back on his feet and walk.

“I obviously didn’t, but Terry gave me 100% of his effort for a year,” Brad says.

Sitting at home was no fun for the injured man, so he accepted an office job at the Department of Human Services in Roseburg. After six months inside, he knew he had to get back outside.

Brad bought a modified bulldozer in 2019 and started yarding logs. In 2020, he bought and modified a skidder so he could run it, then bought a modified logging shovel.

“I grew up running heavy equipment,” Brad says. “I’m most happy in the woods. Truly one of the challenges of going back to work in the woods was trying to get folks to believe that I could still do most of what I could do before.”

Through persistence and dogged determination, Brad, Mike and Stuart proved their capabilities.

“I’m still running heavy equipment,” Mike says. “That’s my therapy.”

“Don’t set limits for yourself,” Brad adds. “You can do a lot more than you really think you can. Just try it. I wouldn’t be healthy mentally if I wasn’t being me.”

“Don’t feel sorry for yourself,” Stuart says. “You have to find something you can still do, something you enjoy doing and something you’re capable of doing.” ■