When my young children see a spinally injured person in a wheelchair, they ask if they are a paralympian. The recent Paralympic Games in London moulded their perception of disability to the point where they expect people with disabilities to excel at some athletic pursuit. However, for most spinally injured patients their aspirations and plans for their lives are the same as most of us—they just wanted to achieve and be part of the normal things in life that able-bodied people often take for granted. Spinally injured people have the daily challenges and chores of working round their disability. The devastating and profound impact of spinal injury can never be downplayed, nor can the long hard road to rehabilitation be made light of. What is remarkable though, is how many individuals do rebuild new meaningful lives and achieve great things despite their physical limitations.

It’s My Life 2 is a collection of short personal stories from 25 remarkable, spinally injured individuals who have bravely and openly shared some of their experiences about their lives. The book is very visual, with absorbing photographs that capture the lives of the authors. This is not a heavy read about the physical realities of disability, rather it is a moving and inspiring collection of how life can be rebuilt to be purposeful and fulfilling. The book portrays what can be done rather than what cannot. Although the book was written to help new spinally injured people to see that there can be life after injury, it is a book with much wider appeal. Friends and family of newly injured spinal patients also suffer terribly when these tragedies happen. The lives of the individuals in this book portray such a positive image of potential futures that reading it will be of great benefit to those close to recently injured spinal patients. Moreover, the individuals in the book project such a positive, pragmatic image of living with disability that anyone who picked up a copy would be moved and have their attitudes to disability changed.

From reading the 25 stories, one of the strongest themes that comes through is not the challenge of dealing with the physical realities of disability but rather dealing with the limitations that others try to impose on them. Many of the stories in the book highlight that it is other able-bodied people that often hold them back. Disabled people have no
choice but to live with their physical limitations. If able-bodied people could overcome their preconceptions about disability and accept that disabled people have much greater potential than their first impressions might tell them, then the lives of disabled people would be easier and better. If you pick up this book it will change your attitudes about disability for the better. It should be on every coffee table.

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