

Tecumseh's Cam Wells, who turns 34 years old tomorrow, created and will be teaching a course called 'Accessible Diversity' through Canterbury ElderCollege. Wells' radio show, Handi-Link, airs every Thursday at noon on CJAM 99.1 FM and is carried by affiliates across Canada through the National Campus & Community Radio Association Program.

11 High Cost H Should Know A Your Shorel

Shoreline Area Home
According to industry expert over 33 physical problems that are under scrutiny during a home inspection when your home is for sale. A report has been prepared which identifies the eleven most common of these problems and what you should know about them before you list your home for sale.

Whether you own an old or brand new one, there are a number of things that can fall short of expectations during a home inspection. Problems identified and dealt with, any repairs needed could cost you dearly if you wait until the building inspector flags these issues for you, you certainly experience costly delays close of your home sale or, you drive prospective buyers away.

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'Prejudice is the one condition I think we can cure'

Meet the man who created the 'Accessible Diversity' course

By Naama Weingarten
Special to Shoreline Week

Before September 29, 1995, Cam Wells was just an average Grade 4 student.

That day during his lunch break, while eating a can of frozen juice, what he first mistook as a brain freeze turned out to be a stroke.

As Cam stumbled across his classroom rug and lost consciousness, he heard a crashing sound.

Even now, 25 years later, he can still recall the dream he had while unconscious.

He was standing in his schoolyard and saw a friend of his. She was crying. He tried talking to her, reminding her that he was there and everything was okay, but she wouldn't respond to him. Instead, she kept crying as though she knew something bad had just happened.

Upon waking up, Cam was told he had just been in a coma for six days.

From there on, his life was never the same. He was unable to move his arm or leg for months and suffered severe brain damage.

To this day, he still experiences numbness in those limbs, which stripped him of the ability to drive, and has trouble processing certain information.

Now Cam is utilizing his lifelong experience to create and teach a course called 'Accessible Diversity'.

The course was set to start through Canterbury ElderCollege this week, but due to COVID-19 concerns, has been postponed until May or June.

Through the course, Cam hopes to destigmatize and bring awareness to the struggles people with disabilities face on a regular basis.

"It's not like a coat you can take off when it's inconvenient," he says.

Cam's stroke was caused by Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM), where a tangle of blood vessels disrupts blood flow in the brain.

Upon waking up, Cam remembers his mother leaning towards him as she tried explaining what had happened to him.

As he sensed the severity of her words, he cut her off mid-sentence.

Then he started telling a joke.

"I just wanted to let her know that I'm still me, I'm still the same person," he recalls.

Surgery

The first surgery to eliminate the anomaly in his brain was unsuccessful.

After Canadian doctors suggested a second surgery that yielded an approximately 60 per cent chance of turning him into a vegetable or putting him in a catatonic state, his family found an alternative option in Detroit.

It was a Gamma Knife Surgery, a procedure that was rare at the time and had never been performed on a child his age before.

See **CAM WELLS** on page 12

Cam Wells' message about people with disabilities: 'They're not broken or in need of fixing'

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Following the stroke, Cam was unable to walk for six months. No longer was he able to run, play, and climb trees as the other kids did.

"I physically couldn't get to them and I felt lousy about that," he says.

But that all changed when his sister, tired of seeing her young brother lounging on a chair all day, grabbed a can of Dr. Pepper, Cam's favourite drink, and placed it all the way across the room.

"You can have it if you can get it," she said.

With the sudden surge of motivation, Cam got up, walked, and got his drink.

Cam had been told previously by some doctors that he might never walk again.

School

Upon returning to school and going through specialized treatment, things didn't necessarily get easier for Cam. He still had a severe limp, which didn't help when it came to making friends. Kids would try to stick magnets to his legs to see if they were real.

Some of the brain damage Cam endured because of his stroke had also remained.

He had trouble processing certain information and often had a hard time catching up with the rest of his class. Cam went from being the kid who got extra homework to because he was done so fast, to be a cause for concern for his teachers.

However, academics aside, Cam says his biggest struggle was fitting in socially.

"Know that little filter that everyone has in their brain to keep them from acting on everything? I don't have one of those anymore," he says.

Following his stroke, he started having a hard time picking up on social and visual clues.

High school was a little easier for Cam. Despite being told by several teachers that he would never be able to graduate, he did. Later, he went on to become a four-time college graduate.

Coincidentally, while getting his journalism degree, one of his professors was the journalist who covered his rare Gamma Knife operation in Detroit years back.

Upon graduating in 2008, he found the footage she had filmed, burned it onto a DVD and handed it off with the words "you gave me a piece of my future, now here's a piece from your past."

After obtaining his first college diploma, Cam started his own radio show at CJAM 99.1FM, sponsored by the Italian Canadian Handicapped Association where he works.

The award-winning show, called Handi-Link, explores the lives of people affected by disabilities.

Whether it's through the tale of a guy with cerebral palsy who learned how to do martial arts with crunches, a blind kayaker, or the man who inspired Terry Fox to take up his run, Cam's stories provide a rare glance at disability life that we rarely get through mainstream media.

"There was sort of this void between the way disability stories are told and the way conventional stories are told," he says.

Throughout his college education, Cam noticed that all of the courses about disabilities have a similar void that can leave many aspects of disability life unknown or misunderstood.

From his experience, the courses primarily narrowed to the scientific, or harmful aspects of disabilities instead of focusing on the people behind them.

"They wanted to portray disability as a statistic, as something they can quantify. It's not. It's people. Its men and women, its children, it's an entire way of life in many ways."

Solutions

Cam says that although some problems in the world might seem bigger than us, the solutions don't have to be.

With the hope to bring awareness and destigmatize the misunderstood aspects of disability life, Cam figured education is the place to start.

"Prejudice is the one condition I think we can cure. We're not going to do it by getting out there and getting all angry; We're going to do it through proving there is intelligence, rationality, and wisdom behind these stories."

Single-handedly, Cam created the college course Accessible Diversity, which he will teach himself through Canterbury ElderCollege. Through the stories of people affected by disabilities, Cam hopes to expose the aspects of disability that nobody touches upon.

He says that for many, it's easy to see someone limping around. It is, however, harder to see them when they go home and have to worry about things most able-bodied individuals often take for granted.

"I don't want it to be 'oh, pity the poor disabled guy,'" Cam says. "I want it to be 'this person has lived and achieved.'"

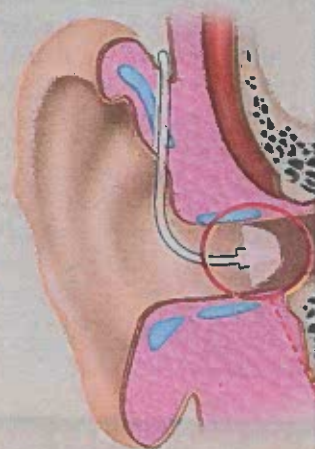
Cam's goal is for the course to be offered at more schools across the country.

But regardless of the school or the person teaching it, Cam wants students to have one major takeaway:

"People with disabilities . . . they're complete. They're not broken or in need of fixing. They're human beings. They're just everyday people."

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