

Jeff Eisen introduces Jeff McCaffrey

John Lennon once wrote, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Such is the case with Jeff McCaffrey. Jeff's story is featured on the web site of the Missouri Coalition for Lifesaving Cures. Here is what Jeff wrote to introduce readers to his own experience:

"In the fall of 2002, I was a college freshman, playing football at the U.S. Air Force Academy. A cadet, my aspirations were to graduate and serve as a commissioned officer. I had every intention of leading a life of leadership and responsibility. Just before Thanksgiving that year, while on a weekend trip to the mountains with some buddies, I suffered a spinal cord injury in a car accident. I have been paralyzed ever since."

"Life" is what happened to Jeff while he certainly was making other plans.

Of course, we have great hopes that Jeff will have the opportunity to recover from his injuries. Those hopes lie in the promising work of Missouri's medical researchers, scientists and medical practitioners, who come closer every day to finding a cure for Jeff's spinal cord injury. Each day, they come closer to finding the key to unlock the secrets of stem cells.

Many people are surprised to learn that stem cell therapies are not really new. Did you know that stem cell therapies have been used successfully to treat blood diseases since the 1960's? And the discovery of early stem cells is approaching its 25th anniversary. Today, we're just getting better at the science. Newer technologies allow our researchers to learn more each day - and every day we're a little bit closer to Cadet McCaffrey's return to the Air Force Academy to fulfill his dream. Jeff's daily routine is a constant preparation for that day. He attends the University of Missouri at Kansas City three days a week, and works out three days a week, constantly aware that the stronger he grows, the more able his body will become to accept and respond to stem cell treatment when it's available.

Notice I didn't say "*if*" it's available, but "*when*."

Still, there is cause for concern. There are some in Missouri who proposed legislation to not only ban the search for a cure for Jeff and the thousands like him, but they intend to make criminals of those who seek to cure Jeff. They believe that Jeff simply belongs in a wheelchair. They believe that Jeff isn't worth a second chance at the Air Force Academy. They would sentence him to a life without hope of ever rising from his wheelchair, of walking again or running again - or *marching* again. They would deny him his dream to serve his country.

There are some here today who know all too well what it is like when ignorance prevails to deny the deserving the opportunity to serve. We are privileged and honored to have among us Montford Point Marines and Tuskegee Airmen; you men who suffered and persevered until you ultimately dismantled the walls of race barrier in America's Armed Services. You are Americans who refused to be denied - and you are heroes, one and all. It is most fitting that you join us today, to support another young man whose dream is to serve - and who refuses to be denied.

Jeff McCaffrey suffers and perseveres and comes before you today as a symbol of yet another group of Americans who won't be denied their rights. They seek to affirm their rights to the best medical treatments and therapies we can provide, and God willing, even cures.

The Semper Fi for Life Foundation recognizes the special relevance this holds for those men and women who serve America and those who served before them. Service men and women, and veterans of all ages are subject to the same diseases that strike all humankind. There is the same statistical incidence of heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, sickle cell disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's and other diseases as those found in the civilian population. However, military duty by its nature makes those who serve more susceptible to amputation, serious burns, spinal cord injury and paralysis. This makes them a "special class" and deserving of our most special consideration and our most special attention.

In this light, we focus on the hope for treatments and cures for those who have sacrificed and suffered on our behalf. We would be remiss, if not negligent, if we failed to support the efforts that hold the greatest promise that modern medicine can conceive, invent, discover and implement: The miracles that lie in stem cell research.

It is for this reason that the Semper Fi for Life Foundation is proud to become the first military-related organization to endorse the Missouri Stem Cell and Cures Initiative. And we are extremely proud, honored and humbled to be surrounded by such distinguished company. It is particularly apropos that our resolution be accepted on behalf of the Missouri Coalition for Lifesaving Cures by Jeff McCaffrey. Because like Montford Point Marines and Tuskegee Airmen before him, though he suffers, he has monumental strength of character – and he refuses to be denied.

It is my great privilege to introduce Jeff McCaffrey.