

# Never Ever, Say Never

BY W MITCHELL

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*Nothing splendid has ever been achieved,  
except by those who believed that something  
inside of them was superior to circumstances.*

**Bruce Barton**

At the age of 28, I suffered a very serious motorcycle accident. The resulting fire burned most of my face and body and left me without hands. Yet, when I looked back just four and a half years later, I felt better off than I did before my accident.

## **Lessons of life...**

Through my recovery, I'd learned things about myself I never would have learned otherwise. I'd grown in ways unimaginable without the lessons life had taught me. Not only had I become successful financially (having started a major new business), more importantly, I had become successful emotionally. I now liked who lived inside Mitchell. It had come with enormous struggle but I'd made it.

In the years before the fire, I'd learned to fly. On recovery I returned to the skies. Even with my new stump-like hands, I finished all my pilot's training, from commercial to multi-engine to sailplane. This gave me a new freedom and enabled me to fly above it all, like Jonathan Livingston Seagull. I even bought my own plane. However, soon I was to learn that fate had not finished with W Mitchell, yet.

I remember the morning well. It was one of those crisp, clear, gorgeous Colorado mornings. I was going flying and four others had come along for the ride. Taxiing to the end of the runway, we lifted off into the air. The plane was climbing fine: 25 feet. 50 feet. At 75 feet, something was wrong...terribly wrong. The plane was not rising as quickly as it should.

Unbeknown to me, the wings of my aircraft were covered with a thin sheet of ice. This slowed the normal climb rate of the plane. Directly ahead of me, there were huge rocks. I had to make a quick decision and there was no choice but to get back down on the runway as soon as I could. I pulled the power and - the plane stalled, falling like a rock. It smashed into the ground rupturing the gas tank and spilling fuel all over the wings. All I could think about was fire. I yelled at my passengers, "Get out now!" They wedged a door open and managed to crawl away.

It was my turn to get out and I had to hurry. Starting to climb out, my feet seemed stuck under the pedals so I lifted harder. It was then I realized that I couldn't move my legs.

For several days, doctors did every test imaginable. On the third day, the neurosurgeon came to deliver the news. "Mitchell, you may not walk again. You're going to have to use a wheelchair now to get around."

"Why me?", I thought. "WHY ME!!! What had I done to deserve this plane crash, this motorcycle accident?"

I lay there on that hospital bed, once again wondering what future there could possibly be for me.

Yet again, friends came to see me. Phone calls, letters, and cookies arrived from Crested Butte, my home town. One day, nearly four weeks after the accident, a young woman called me. She said, "Mitchell, I hear you're not doing very well. I wonder if you remember when I had some problems, you told me something I'll never forget. You said, it's not what happens to you - it's what you do about it. Do you still believe that, Mitchell?"

Don't you hate it when people do that? That advice was for her! Leave me alone; I'm enjoying being miserable!

### **A world of impossibilities...**

The next morning, when the orderlies came in my room, I asked them to put me in a wheelchair. I hated it. It was impossible. I couldn't make it go places that had been so easy just a few weeks before. Even if I could, I might fall. Objects were too high. Steps were in my way. My whole world was filled with obstacles; filled with impossibilities.

But every morning, they put me back in the chair and I'd go back into the gym. Every morning, thanks to the nurses, technicians, volunteers, friends and yes, thanks to me, another obstacle would disappear. Another opportunity would appear. Every day, the thing that had been utterly impossible the day before became a little less impossible. And, every day, I hated myself a little bit less and I learned to love myself again, a little bit more.

You know, it's true. It isn't what happens. It's what you do about it.