

Andy Stevenson: Hello Daniel, I believe you're calling us from Hong Kong now. Could you paint a picture of where you are?

Daniel Chan: Yes I'm at home just after training, hello everyone.

AS: In the UK, we would all just assume Hong Kong is hot and humid all year round. Where are you in terms of the seasons and weather?

DC: Because we are in the summer, we are so hot and humid here. Today is a rainy day but the humidity is 100%. I'm the kind of person who hates hot and humid so I don't know why I burn in Hong Kong! I really enjoy when going to Europe because it's cooler but I have been here for over 30 years so I'm used to it. When I'm driving, when I jump into my car, I always have air conditioner on.

AS: And you're happy with me calling you Daniel, because your real name is Chan Ho Yuen. Is there a reason for picking Daniel as an alternative?

DC: Yes, I'll tell you a funny story. When I meet foreign friends they ask why I have this name because every English name is from parents or family, but Daniel I took when I started working, I thought I should have an English name. Because Chan Ho Yuen is a pronunciation from Chinese, so it's not really an English name, it's a Chinese name. It has no meaning! It's not like the culture in Europe where everyone's name is from parents. I just took Daniel for myself.

AS: You just chose it then. Some people might be expecting a baby soon and thinking about names... did you go through a list of names?

DC: Well of course when I took this name, I checked the dictionary. Do you want a new, a trendy or a traditional one? In Hong Kong, there aren't many Daniel's so you don't need to think about there being too many in one place. If you take Peter, Paul, Tom, there will be a lot. But Daniel was a good one.

AS: We're going to focus on a life changing road accident you were in 12 years ago, but I want to talk a bit about life before that moment because you were very sporty.

DC: I can't sit for 15 minutes. When I was in school studying, my academic performance was not good because I wouldn't sit down to revise or study, I needed to walk and move. I can't stay still. Before my accident I was a half professional badminton player, training five days a week. I would still train three or four nights a week after working, I loved badminton. I love football, I would play them both quite often.

AS: Do you have a football team that you follow?

DC: Well Manchester United for 30 years.

AS: Oh dear Daniel, we're going to have to stop the interview there I'm afraid.

DC: Is your favourite team another?

AS: I'm a Liverpool supporter so things are going quite well for me at the moment, not quite so well for you. I had to watch plenty of Manchester United trophies growing up so this is payback time. This might be an odd question but before your accident, what kind of person were you?

DC: I was active, I love to talk and I think I would like to perform myself quite often. But because you were not that outstanding at the moment and you can't perform inside a group of people, I was that kind of person before the accident.

AS: We're going to talk today about recovering from and dealing with accepting a disability that comes to you without warning. Can you describe what happened in 2008, you were 22 when life changed for you forever.

DC: Yes. It came really suddenly and I still remember the day. We have Lunar New Year and the day I got my accident was the Lunar New Year's Eve. The next day I would come back from China to Hong Kong and celebrate with my family. But unfortunately I had my accident during my way back to Hong Kong.

It is my first ever holidays and I spent my time in ICU. I was there for four days in the hospital and then the coming 10 months, I was always in hospital. That day I had a really tough time in hospital to recover my body and mental side. It's quite hard to accept suddenly becoming a disabled person. I remember at that moment I was ashamed to look at myself in the mirror, you can't admit it is yourself. Before I was six feet tall, which is really tall in Asia. Not bad looking, good life and future. I was young but at that moment, it was really difficult to admit that I had the accident. I would ask myself why I was so unfortunate.

AS: Do you remember the accident?

DC: That day was the New Year Eve. I was working in a factory and it was the culture to have a celebration with all of the factory members together, we would have a dinner and a celebration. Then we would wish for a great next year. We just finished the party and went back to Hong Kong. I was the passenger of a vehicle and my manager was the driver. The last image, and I got a little bit drunk so I was in the back seat of the car, the last image is getting into the car, putting on my seatbelt and then I sleep. And the next image I was in the hospital. It's lucky that I haven't got any screams about the accident, I have no fears now when I'm driving. I have pieces of memory because I would wake up a little bit because I was in too much pain, then it's like you're in a movie, you sleep again. Small pieces of memory like that but not a complete memory.

AS: I guess you must think you were lucky to be asleep in some ways?

DC: Yeah, true. Now I have no fear when I'm driving, nothing to scare me and no bad memories. So that is good.

AS: You spent 10 months in hospital, had 15 major operations and had your left leg amputated right up near your hip. Can you put that experience into words when the doctors told you it needed to be done and when you woke up?

DC: I still remember when I first woke up. I was still in the ICU and then I saw my doctor, I asked him in English 'have I lost my legs?' and he told me that I had lost one leg. Then I made a joke, 'but I'm still alive, right?' And he said yes. So that is my first thing when I woke up, then I went back to sleep. I had body surgery 20 times, then small body surgery 30-40 times. So you can't imagine what happened every three days, it was a surgery, for three months. It really was a tough time. And nobody would tell you how much you can go back to life before. Can you run or jump? Even the doctors couldn't commit. My left leg was 80% taken off and my right side is a good leg but not really good because my ankle

was lost in the area of accident. They used the ankle of my left leg to put it in the right side and then they used a nail to fix it. Now I can't move my ankle. It's a little complicated and they said I was the first one in Hong Kong to have such a complicated thing. So you make a joke because laughter can reduce pain. I still remember at that moment, the pain for the body is okay. But when you think about your future, your mobility, your parents, your loves. Everything you cannot and it is really tough.

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AS: I'm listening to this thinking how on earth did you get through those days and weeks and months in hospital. Are there things that you can pinpoint that you did or you were saying to yourself, or ways to pass the time and deal with this massive trauma and all of your fears for the future.

DC: Mmm. I still remember that period being the dark age of my life. Because I was young, the nurses, they were quite in pity of this boy because he was young but had bad changes. They came and talked with me so often but not about serious topics. The news, anything. They would just take the focus away and my family, my friends and my girlfriend, today my wife, they came to me everyday. I can say at that moment I was surrounded with love. It's not really difficult at that 10 months but the disaster was when you come out after 10 months, you leave hospital and you face the real world. That is the problem. Everything becomes so cruel at that moment.

AS: You mention the love of your family and the support of your wife Sandy. We have a little surprise for you, listen to this.

Sandy: Hello, thank you for giving me this chance to surprise my husband. Daniel has a positive mindset, he always sees himself as a normal person even if he became person and this is crucial to his success. I'm happy to see him staying at home much longer this year. He even prepares dinner for me and looks after the dog, which I very much appreciate. To me he is perfect.

DC: Was that live?! Or did you record it before?

AS: We recorded it before, yes. Sandy sent us a clip to use.

DC: It shocked me... thank you so much, wow. I can't focus because my wife suddenly came on!

AS: Could you have got through it without your wife and family members?

DC: My hands were still available so I would play my PSP. I can only lie on my bed at that moment so I would do upper body exercise from the physio. And if my family or girlfriend is not here, I would call friends on my mobile to talk. In the hospital there are some people, even the patients, we would take care and talk a lot. These people would help me to pass through the dark age.

I always have down moments and negative things but I need to appreciate my wife because she is the rubbish bin in my life. I push all the negative things to her and she just flushes it into the toilet. She is the main listener in my life, I would tell her everything, good or bad. Especially now I'm doing a lot in the community. If something comes from the association that is ridiculous, you have negative thinking. You are really negative but this negative you can't share to the society because people look at me like an icon of positivity. You have that role to show them positive. You need to have your own way to solve your negative things and give the energy to others. I think my wife, she is really a good listener and is very rational. She can analyse everything to be good, what you should do and not do, I thank her.

AS: I want to go back to this. Was there a difference between how you coped with things in hospital compared to when you then came out and into society?

DC: Well every time, I was doing a lot of sharing in school with young people. Every time they would ask me my hardest time, they all think the hospital is the toughest time. In hospital it was really wrong though. I had so many surgeries, I needed to face the bad changes. But they're wrong because inside the hospital, everyone got a problem, a physical problem. Everyone was a patient, nobody would discriminate you. I had lost my leg, you wouldn't discriminate someone else. We were all like neighbours or a family, and the nurse and doctor would give you good care and take care of the mental health. I can say in hospital it was warm and like a small unit inside. But in the real world, everyone is normal. They are the majority, you are the minority. When you go outside, the first two years I was in a wheelchair and then I would walk. But I would sit on wheelchair and people would look at me every day, every moment. You look strange so they put their eyes on you. When one person looks at you, it is normal. But when everyone is looking at you, it makes it uncomfortable. You need to continue life because in hospital you are there to survive, when you are out you need to continue life, not just survive. You need to make sure you can move one more step than yesterday. You find a job because you are 22 years old. If you have 80 years in your life, you still have 58 years to go. You need to make sure your life is good, so it was really difficult at that moment.

AS: It's interesting to hear you describe the hospital as warm, in part because you had other disabled people around you. Had you had any experience of other people with disabilities in your life before your accident?

DC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. These people helped me a lot. In my ages at school, when I was in high school, one of my school mates was the boccia player (Yan-Chi-Lau). He was a gold medallist of BC4 in 2004 in Greece, he was the gold medallist. But in 2002 and 2003, he was my classmate. So he was my first disabled friend but at that moment, I was able. We would really work closely together.

AS: So he was your friend before the accident, then after your accident he was one of the first people you contacted. What were the kinds of things you were asking him?

DC: Every player in boccia has really serious disabilities. Compared with them I'm really lucky because I have a chance to walk. When he came to visit me, I started to understand and I told him myself, he has a much more difficult life than me. He is really supporting me but he does not need to say much, he's just sitting in front of me and his story is more than enough to encourage me. And because he's a gold medallist and he graduated from a very famous university in Hong Kong and is now a social worker, he is telling me

that even though I'm disabled, it doesn't mean you can't have a meaningful life. We still keep close and in contact. I think he's glad that I can stand up again physically and in my life. I really am glad to have a friend like him.

AS: I wonder Daniel, you mentioned your classmate, he helped you through and was somebody to talk to and lean on. Do you yourself have people contacting you to say 'this has happened to me, I've had an accident', do people come to you with that same advice?

DC: After my accident, some of my friends would visit me and try to convince me because people are quite worried that I would hurt myself or commit suicide, because I was young and I have the accident. They come to visit and try to talk with you. Many of them are trying to say 'no worries, I understand'. And you know, through my life, if people tell you that they understand, but they are not really, they are the majority of society. They're 100% physically good. So how can they understand what you are suffering? Every time I listen to things like that, you feel worse when you hear that. Lau Yin Chee is the only one powerful enough to tell me he understands what I feel. He knew I just needed to enrich myself everyday. You believe him because he shows you. He is one of the role models in my life.

AS: And have you been that role model for anyone else in life?

DC: Well, I don't know whether I am like him but I do a lot of visiting for people with cancer or disabilities. Not only handicapped people, because my achievement in sport and I got a community award for having an outstanding life. When people have hard times, they come to me. So I do a lot of visiting with elderly people or people with different nationalities in Hong Kong. They are so poor in their life, not as in money, but they have discrimination from friends or other people in society. When people need energy, I will go and be their Lau Yin Chee. I have been doing that for six or seven years.

AS: And how do you give them that energy?

DC: Doing a sharing with people face to face is very difficult to open their minds and hearts. Every day you are getting discrimination so you close the door to your heart. I tell them my story and how I came back to normal. I would tell them some very funny story. I can tell you one. When I was sitting on wheelchair one day, I had my racket and was ready to practice. A crazy man came in front of me and said 'you must have done bad things in your last life' because in Chinese, we believe you have a last life and then another life. The crazy man is saying 'okay, you have done really bad things, you are a criminal. This life you have your accident' and they say some bad things out on the street. I was young and didn't know how to react and the people are totally physically good. So what can you do? Shout at him back and get angry? No, I came across him and ignored him. I have my disability with the physical but he must have it with mental, so I do that. Then you just leave the crazy man with a smile. He hasn't destroyed your day, so that's good. END

AS: That's an amazing way of looking at it. I think in English, I would say you are the bigger person in that conversation, emotionally bigger because you could have got angry but you stayed calm and don't put yourself through anger or hurt. You just ignore and smile. I read the quote earlier about how you couldn't look in the mirror.

AS: It's an amazing coincidence. I just want to read a quote from you, you said ' I was 22 years old, it should have been the best time of my life. Instead I could not even look at myself in the mirror. I refused to accept I was that person.' How difficult was it to look at yourself in the mirror and what kind of thoughts were going through your head at that time?

DC: I can describe this as a different time. When I was 22 and facing my disability, I always saw the youth out for parties, to bars. Then to have their fruitful life. I stayed on my bed for over a year. I stayed in my wheelchair for over two years. I lost much of my time. My life had passed when I was on my bed. When I was 22/23/24, the accident really brought me a lot of inconvenience and destroyed my life. But when I look back today, my accident is rebuilding myself and creates a better me today. Before my accident, I was really hot-headed and bad tempered. I urge everything to come. But because to become a man with a disability, you can't be. You're sitting on your wheelchair and you want to arrive in places but you have a stair in front of you, you can't urge that. You can just find another way. At that moment it made me a better personality through the accident. Today when I look back I have a good career in sport, a good path for serving the community and doing so much in society. People think I'm a good man all because I had that accident.

AS: How do you accept those moments when you realise you cannot do something or you don't do it anymore?

DC: Everything coming to you will go away. When bad things come, maybe you haven't got good emotions to solve the problem at that moment. When I have tough times coming to me, at that moment I will put myself in really busy modes. I will go to the gym or to do something where you sweat, you spend all your energy. Something where you don't need to think for two hours. People will make wrong decisions when they are emotional, so you just avoid that and you use your anger in sport and after a shower, you come back with a pure you, a calmer you and you think again of the way out.

AS: I think you're suggesting your personality has changed, you're different to before the accident. What other changes have you noticed?

DC: Yeah it's strange. I was 100% hot headed with people and I urged everything. I'm still hot headed but not as much, because case by case, you become smoother. Me and my wife, we review our life every year to see what the disability has brought us. We look back and it's already the fourth time of doing it now. People always imagine if I'm not in my accident, where would I be? Would I be a millionaire today, or a bad guy? Everyone thinks that you have your accident and your life goes down, but I don't think so. I have a more fruitful life through my accident. We will have a discussion to see if we're having a better or worse life, and it's always better. In some interviews with the media I told them the crash was a correct move in my life. I'm the first wheelchair badminton player in Hong Kong. I can have my sport career in disabled sport and because I'm the first, I get more and more passion and responsibility to develop the sport in Hong Kong and the world. I am getting more duty and pressure on my shoulders. You will grow from that. Because of this interview, if I didn't have this accident 12 years ago, maybe I would be a playboy! I would change my life every six months. But I am very stable, I enjoy my life everyday and I am doing what I love every day, and I am really lucky. I think it's a good thing.

AS: That's absolutely fascinating. I have heard this kind of thing before from people who have disability thrust upon them by an accident or illness. I'm disabled from birth so I'm just me, there's been one of me throughout. You're saying you are a different and better person now.

DC: Especially as an athlete, I'm the first wheelchair badminton player in Hong Kong. I can have my sport career in disabled sport and because I'm the first, I get more and more passion and responsibility to develop the sport in Hong Kong and the world. I am getting more duty and pressure on my shoulders. You will grow from that. Because of this interview, if I didn't have this accident 12 years ago, maybe I would be a playboy! I would change my life every six months. But I am very stable, I enjoy my life everyday and I am doing what I love every day, and I am really lucky. I think it's a good thing.

AS: Was exercise the most important element of you accepting your disability?

DC: I don't think like that but I knew I needed a life with sport. Maybe not badminton, but I need to find a sport to let me live life. Before and after my accident, people need to have a sport to share time and they need it to perfect their life mentally or physically. But at the same moment, sport perfected my life because it rebuilt my confidence after my accident.

AS: So how important was it to get back to badminton and how different was it playing wheelchair badminton?

DC: Erm, it was really funny that people thought when I first played, I was jumping and running but now sitting. But before I sat on my sport wheelchair, I was in an electric chair, so it was very limited. The first practice I had, I honestly thought I had my wing to fly in the sky because I had no limit. I can move where I want when it's manual, you move it yourself. Especially because you're in a familiar sport in a familiar area just like before. I love my first training and I still remembered it. I had one second and I fell in love with it.

AS: And how did it feel being able to play again?

DC: Wheelchair is really different. It's okay because you can let the ball come to you in leisure but for professional, it can make me angry and bring pain and a kind of uncomfortableness. It's real life.

AS: I'm sure there are people who have no connection to disability listening, but have had huge changes in their life, bereavement, break up. I hope they're listening to this and using what you just said, 'actually I can use these huge events in a way to make my life better'. That's such a powerful message for you to be giving.

DC: Yes. In my sharing with young people, I always tell them it is important because you can't decide what happens to you or how people look at you. But you have the choice what your attitude is or facing how people look at you. It's all your choice. If you look good, things go well. It's all your choice.

AS: Do you have your down moments as well?

DC: Yeah. I always have down moments and negative things but I need to appreciate my wife because she is the rubbish bin in my life. I push all the negative things to her and she just flushes it into the toilet. She is the main listener in my life, I would tell her everything, good or bad. Especially now I'm doing a lot in the community. If something comes from

the association that is ridiculous, you have negative thinking. You are really negative but this negative you can't share to the society because people look at me like an icon of positivity. You have that role to show them positive. You need to have your own way to solve your negative things and give the energy to others. I think my wife, she is really a good listener and is very rational. She can analyse everything to be good, what you should do and not do, I thank her.

AS: When you look in the mirror today, what do you see?

DC: A confident person. Very confident. Last year I was getting an outstanding award. We have an award for people under with a really outstanding life, the name is 10 Outstanding Young Persons. One night I got that award, it's for the whole of society. When I was doing the interview, it's a really good thing to tidy your interview material and your resume, you need to say what you are doing for society. Now you are an athlete, you have a very good result in your own area, but what about society? So I have my mission is to make Hong Kong a city that every disabled person can come out and raise their head. Now everyone in Hong Kong with disabilities are locking themselves in their own home, go out for food but just look at the floor when they go outside because they lack confidence. They won't raise their head and look at people because they discriminate them. I wished for myself, through my story and doing some job opportunities or some gatherings, I hope to make people with disability pick up confidence. Disabled people are just unlucky, they haven't done anything wrong. They shouldn't have no confidence.

AS: I asked you about times where you feel low or not positive, or optimistic and you mentioned Sandy. Sometimes are there feelings you just have to accept that things can't be perfect for you? How do you accept those moments when you realise you cannot do something or you don't do it anymore?

DC: Everything coming to you will go away. When bad things come, maybe you haven't got good emotions to solve the problem at that moment. When I have tough times coming to me, at that moment I will put myself in really busy modes. I will go to the gym or to do something where you sweat, you spend all your energy. Something where you don't need to think for two hours. People will make wrong decisions when they are emotional, so you just avoid that and you use your anger in sport and after a shower, you come back with a pure you, a calmer you and you think again of the way out.

AS: As you say that, if exercise and sport weren't possible for you, how much more difficult would it be now to accept your disability?

DC: It's really frustrating. Because of Covid-19 everyone locks down at home. Luckily I have a handbike and a stationary bike, but when you are locked down like a prison, you go crazy.

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AS: Looking to Tokyo next year. How excited were you when badminton was added to the Paralympics for Tokyo?

DC: Our event, I still remember everyone shaking hands in 2014 when announced, sharing posts on Facebook and it was like we'd won a war. It was a long way to wait for the news. In my first international it was the 2010 Asian Games but in the game, it's been announced that we wouldn't be an official event in 2016. That meant the earliest it would be was Tokyo, so I'd have to wait at least 10 years. So it was a long way to go for your dream and a dream can be unchaseable, but dreams can come true. It was a whirlwind because okay, now you have six years to prepare and then four to qualify. It would be 2018 or 19 for qualifying, so you need to prepare and I wasn't as good as today back then. I had a long way to go. I started the second day thinking 'okay, I should put more time in to make sure I'm good enough to be there'

AS: I know you have a huge rivalry with the South Korean player Kim Jon Jing, which we look forward to seeing. Just to end, how significant an end point is Tokyo. When you look at that along your life's journey, we spoke about how you worked so hard to accept your disability, how significant would it be to compete in that journey?

DC: For a Para athlete, the Paralympics is a holy place. It's the highest platform for every athlete to perform themselves and let the world know how good you are. 10 years ago I tried to tell some of my friends and family that I'd like to be the first to be in the Paralympics. Half of them thought I was crazy and it was impossible. But I'm going to achieve it. If you chase a dream and pursue it in the right way, somehow, some day, you will achieve it. So it's right that many members, my mother, my wife, some of my good friends really support me and believe in me that I can achieve a mission impossible dream. They are believing and giving their energy and support to me. They see the result is coming out. I think of them in supporting myself.

AS: You show incredible character to come back from 2008 and I'm sure some of the things you've said will stick with the people listening. That accident and disability, to come back from that. There's an incredible acceptance, isn't there. It's a celebration almost of what happened to you, as disastrous as it was.

DC: I hope I don't change my mind! I wish I can create my life more fruitful and I won't regret, even though I'm getting old.

AS: Thank you very much for your time, it's been a pleasure speaking to you apart from the Manchester United bit. We look forward to seeing more of you in 2020.