My name is Edward Willis, Junior. I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I went to Bastrop High School where I met my wonderful friend Colton at the age of 17. We decided that we were going to enlist into the military and attend Airborne School. Later, I would earn my wings. My plan was to continue school and join the Rangers. I worked very hard and had done many things in order to prepare for the Rangers. Unfortunately, availability was limited. I learned this only after I had proven that I was physically and mentally prepared. Afterwards, I was given another opportunity. A soldier within my platoon recently suffered an injury and was unable to attend Ranger school. I spoke with him, our chain of command, and I was able to fill that hole on January 1, 2016 (New Year’s Day). Fourteen days prior to shipping for Ranger school, I met up with some friends to celebrate my leaving. On our way home that evening we pulled over on a low barrier bridge as I was feeling unwell.

Around eight hours later, I awoke to my new life. As I have no recollection of the event, I was later told what occurred. While we were stopped on the bridge, I had stepped out and tumbled over the side falling down into a dry creek bed. I broke my back and severed my spine. Upon hitting the ground, my knee was sent into my chin, and it fractured in three places. When I woke in the hospital, I was very confused and stunned. I had no sensation from my hip down. I began to panic and that’s when the pain hit. I was unable to take any painkillers or surgical treatment for three days as the swelling and trauma needed to go down. On the third day, a team of surgeons performed a 12-hour surgery on my spine, inserting 16 screws, and two rods.

Two months after the accident, I was released from the hospital. During this time, I had slowly recovered and was attending physical therapy. I was given a wheelchair and a new outlook on life. I was told in my diagnosis that my spinal cord has been severed leaving me paralyzed and senseless from the waist down. I could no longer move my legs nor feel them. My lips were affected as well as my internal organs. Without electrical signals being sent from my brain down my spinal cord my organ function became somewhat limited. I struggled with properly utilizing the bathroom.

With this change in my body I had to learn new ways in order to function. One way was with the use of certain equipment such as a standing frame. My digestive system, circulatory system, and bone density were affected not being in an upright standing position. The loss of gravity on my body began to show. So it was very important that I began to stand but I faced hurdles. Medical equipment is not only expensive but difficult to obtain whether it be through insurance or state-funded programs. I tried obtaining a standing frame for months as one would assist my body and improve my life. After some time, I lost hope. I made the decision to put my efforts elsewhere. It wasn’t until I went to go see my dear friend Colton in Victoria, Texas that things changed. While I was there, Colton introduced me to a wonderful neighbor and friend. Her name is Rosemary. We were invited over to her lovely home where I later learned of a beautiful soul; Emmy. Emmy is Rosemary’s daughter. Unfortunately, she had an accident causing her paralysis which led to other health complications, ultimately causing Emmy to succumb and pass. While it saddened me very much, I wanted to be there for Rosemary. In the end, it was she who helped me the most. She had a standing frame that was no longer being utilized and she desperately wanted to help others. Hesitantly, I asked if there was any way that I could use it. She smiled and eagerly told me that it’s what Emmy would’ve wanted. She shared that she planned to start an organization in order to get people such as myself the necessary resources and tools to benefit our lives. I would be the first recipient of durable medical equipment from the new organization. Thankfully, I was able to take it home where I was standing in it for an hour a day for several months. I noticed an increase in my energy, increased flexibility in my muscles, reduction of swelling in my limbs, an increase in circulation of blood, and a growing appetite as my digestive system began flowing properly again. This also give me back the confidence and joy of what it is like to stand. I remember the first time using it, I cried. I felt at home, and I felt free. I cannot thank the Emmy Saenz Foundation enough for providing me this impactful equipment. This encouraged me to assist others and become more active. I became a physical trainer and began playing basketball. I plan to further my physical achievement and work towards the Paralympics Games in the Triathlon event. None of these changes would have been possible without the foundation.