Austin Bonebrake

VFTH

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A WKU junior from Portland Tennessee is counting his blessings this Thanksgiving. A sledding accident in 2015 drastically altered his life. But he refuses to let it define him. Amy Bingham has his inspiring story in this week’s View from the Hill.

21-year old Austin Bonebrake remembers February 19th 2015 very well.

“That day it was like eight inches on the ground I believe, so it was a pretty big snow so I thought I would take the chance.”

Hours after this picture was taken with his niece, Austin’s life changed forever.

“It got to going so fast that I didn’t have time to react or roll off or anything like that and I hit a tree head first shattering C5 and breaking C6 in my neck and I was instantly paralyzed.”

Austin was life-flighted to Vanderbilt for a few weeks then transferred to a rehab center in Atlanta for four months. Shortly after the accident, he turned sixteen.

“This might sound silly but it was almost just as hard knowing that I wasn’t going to get my license at 16 as knowing I’m paralyzed.”

Thanks to a huge support system, Austin says he was able to graduate from high school with his class. He then set his sights on something he had never even considered before.

“College in general before I got hurt was not really in my path. I enjoyed manual labor and everything like that.”

After two years at Volunteer State Community College, Austin decided to continue his education at WKU. About that time, one of his dreams was being realized. A Chevy Silverado adapted for his use.

“It was almost like a shock of relief in a way like this is really happening. My goals are starting to really take place. It was just I get do what I want when I need to it and it was a big relief really.”

Driving himself to campus once a week, Austin is just a year or so away from getting his degree in environmental sustainability.

He calls his sledding accident a total life changer but instead of dwelling on it, he counts his blessings.

“It’s sometimes hard to look past all the bad and see the good. But actually quite a bit of good has come out of it. Like just to be able to communicate to other people that you may have never met or people that you may be able to help along the way.”

10:20. “You can’t let one life changing event consume your whole life. You gotta make something out of it.”

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

Austin says he hasn’t nailed down a future career but he hopes to work in the state park system.

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