

# News

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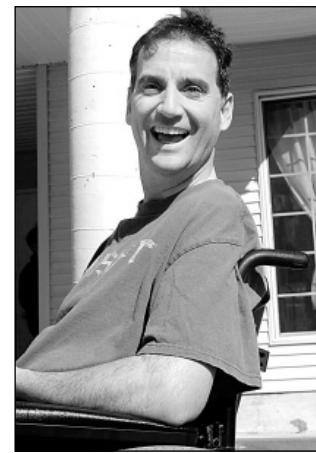
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Suzie Coss helps her son, Michael, walk down the street. The 42-year-old man has been making slow but steady progress in his rehabilitation, following a devastating accident in 2006. He spent six months in a coma before receiving hyperbaric oxygen therapy, which is speeding up his recovery. NOW photos by Paul vanPeenen

## Inch by inch, day by day

*Costly treatments help Port Coquitlam man reclaim his life after accident*

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The old Michael Coss is dead. The new Michael Coss, however, is training for the Boston Marathon.

As the founder of the Michael Coss Brain Injury Foundation, the Port Coquitlam man is trying to spread awareness about his foundation's efforts, while conveying the benefits he's experienced while undergoing hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT).

"I awoke from my deep sleep because of HBOT," Coss said.

The deep sleep Coss is referring to is the more than six-month period he spent in a coma in 2006. Along with his wife and twins, Coss was involved in a devastating car accident on the Coquihalla Highway in May 2006. His wife Ann and daughter Danielle escaped with only minor injuries, while his son Nathan spent several weeks in hospital.

"It's hard to explain, because from Day 1 you go through so many emotions when you see your child, first of all in a deep coma, and then the doctor is telling you that there is no hope," said his father, Bob, president and co-founder of the foundation. "One doctor told us it would take a miracle, and another told us there was nothing that could be done for Michael, that he would have to be put into a permanent facility for the rest of this life."

Having first spent close to two weeks in a Kamloops hospital, Coss was then transferred to Royal Columbian Hospital in late May 2006. His parents immediately flew out from Quebec City to be

with their son, and they have since relocated to the West Coast permanently.

With few options left, his family began researching hyperbaric oxygen therapy, which pumps oxygen into the body at a level higher than atmospheric pressure. The treatment has not been approved by Health Canada and isn't covered by insurance, but his friends, family and former co-workers at Molson Breweries rallied around Coss's cause to come up with the necessary funds — about \$125 per treatment.

"After the third session, we noticed that his eyes were starting to focus and so that was the first sign of recovery," Bob recalled. "After maybe the seventh or eighth treatment, we could see his small right hand finger moving. We have trillions of neurons in our brain, and therefore with the hyperbaric oxygen treatment, the focus is simply to awaken all those dormant neurons."

Fast-forward to Christmas Eve 2006, and Coss awoke from his coma. Since that time, he has had to re-learn almost everything.

"My goals are all short term," said Coss, 42. "I had to relearn how to eat because I was on stomach feeding tubes. I'm learning now how to become as independent as much as I can be, like showering. And now I'm relearning how to walk. But all in all, my morale is very good."

Inspired by Rick Hansen and the annual Wheels in Motion fundraiser, Coss set out to start his own foundation, which got off the ground last year. Its founding principle is to help people, kids specifically, get the funds they need in order to get access to HBOT.

"We have gone through a number of hospitals and met parents and their children who are either in serious need or would definitely benefit from hyperbaric oxygen therapy, but unfortunately they can't afford it because it's so costly and it's not covered by our medical system," Bob said.

After more than 250 HBOT treatments, the right side of Coss's body is fully mobile and the left side of his body is slowly following suit. He's currently residing in Port Coquitlam's Larkin House, a facility for those who have suffered severe brain injuries. Coss's speech is still somewhat slurred, and he's not quite out of a wheelchair — yet.

"Right now I'm relearning how to walk and it's going very well. I'm not yet running the Vancouver or Boston Marathon, but at least I'm training for it," he said.

Bob expects that his son will be able to reside on his own, with some form of assistance, within the next six to 12 months.

But before he leaves the Port Coquitlam facility, Coss said he plans to start putting his life story down on paper in a book he has tentatively called *The Courage to Come Back: Step by Step, Inch by Inch, Day by Day*.

"The biggest motivation for me right now is I've got a picture of my four-year-old twins on my wall right now. They give me the hope and the courage to keep on going day by day with a smile on my face," Coss said.

"I'm busy, busy. There is never a dull day in the life of Michael Coss."

For more information on Michael's foundation, see [www.secondchancestepbystep.org](http://www.secondchancestepbystep.org).

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