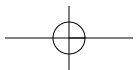
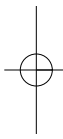
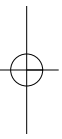


Virtual Patience



A Life Changing Event

Told by Naji Cherfan
to Karen Solomon



Virtual Patience

A Life Changing Event



Author: Karen Solomon

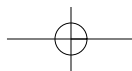
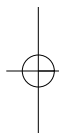
Co-author: Naji Cherfan

Edited by Naji Cherfan

Publishers: CCM International

5 Konitsis, Maroussi, 15125, Athens, Greece

Artist: Elena Chirdaris



This book is dedicated to the two best people in my life:

To my father, George Cherfan,
whose presence gave me courage to overcome all my obstacles.

To my mother, Sana Cherfan,
the woman whose love and affections were beyond support.

Naji Cherfan

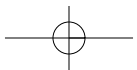
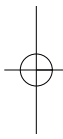
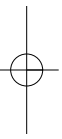
Chapter I 1978-1996 (Birth to Coma)	I
Chapter II 1996-1999 (Recovery and Rehabilitation)	5
Chapter III 1999-2006 (Virtual Notes)	30

Prologue

Life is defined as a state of being characterized by growth, reproduction and response to stimuli. Pragmatically, it can be considered a period between birth and death. This space of time is a gift. The will to live is a persistent force that maintains survival while encouraging evolution. Human beings can survive without really stretching the borders of existence. Expanding the boundaries of what is safe, comfortable and well-known requires more than mere dissatisfaction with present conditions. It requires a desire for something that raises the quality of life and the courage to implement those changes at any cost. Man's choices, decisions and acts shape his reality while determining the strength of his exterior and enlightenment of his spirit.

From first step to last breath, the organism that is man changes, continuously creating cycles of joy and pain, progress and struggle, accomplishment and failure. The face of man laughs and cries while his eyes reflect hope and despair. He speaks with a voice that soothes and angers, while reaching out with hands to caress or destroy. A dual nature caught between heaven and earth, man is a being of choice treading a tightrope. When he stands still, looking outward not down, there is the beginning of stability. When he dismisses the fear and stretches to balance, he walks. There is a connection with a thread of light that pulls him slowly ahead. Consciously or unconsciously man evolves through survival. The life force instigates change that acts internally and externally.

Naji Cherfan believes that life is a big circle in which anything can happen. For more than ten years this young man has struggled with frustration, fear, pain and rage. There is war in his speech, movement and expression. He lives in this reality while stubbornly creating a new one, based on the words of his father who said that patience is a virtue. Experience taught him that virtue is a moral goodness and patience is the quality of calmly enduring difficulty. By re-learning the basic skills of thought, speech and movement, Naji developed patience as a product of both reality and his imagination. Day by day, movement by movement, Naji Cherfan's life becomes one of "virtual patience".



Chapter I (1978 to 1996) Birth to Coma

In 1978, civil war raged in Lebanon. Sana Cherfan was pregnant with her third child and determined to stay in Beirut for the birth. However, as the bombing became heavier, her husband George made a decision to move the family to Jordan where he was working with an American company. The family settled into their new home and waited with anticipation for the arrival of this child. Seven year old Hicham and five year old Maher shared the excitement of a new baby.

On November 20, 1978 Sana gave birth to her third son. He was named Naji, which means "prayer to God". In the Arabic language, names have a meaning that can be translated into a picture, idea or feeling. Seventeen years later this child would be the living evidence of the Cherfans' faith in God and belief in the power of love.

Sometime after the birth, the family moved back to Lebanon. A way of life lived for hundreds of years had disappeared in the chaos of war. George Cherfan wanted his family to grow in a peaceful environment so he moved them to Athens and made this city the base for his business. The Cherfans became part of a large Lebanese community in Athens when Naji was two years old. Moving easily into the professional circles, George's diplomatic manner and warmth made him well-liked and respected among business associates and the social community. With good-will and positive energy, he quickly and firmly established his family in Athens.

Naji's only memory of the move from Lebanon to Greece was that now he felt safe and it was in this safety that Naji and his brothers grew. Their characters developed in a home that was comfortable and nurtured their needs. Their parents provided them with love, understanding and knowledge. Life was full of promise for Hicham, Maher and Naji. Making friends easily, they quickly learned Greek in order to communicate with other children. A bright child, Naji was full of energy and constantly moving. His early years were spent attending the Lycee French School of Athens. Five years later, Naji transferred to ACS, the American Community School of Athens. By the age of 17, he was fluent in French, Arabic,

English, Greek and Spanish. Communication was an important aspect of Naji's personality and he developed this skill to a great degree.

As a result of his own curiosity and the wealth of stimulation around him, Naji's mind was always challenged. He was a mover, a thinker, a doer. His body was strong and muscular from sports and working out. Living near the sea gave him the opportunity to swim and water-ski. Having free time gave him the chance to become skilled at table tennis, squash and tennis. Naji had been driving since the age of fourteen and was fascinated with speed, but unaware of its possible consequences. He was organized and had no tolerance for slow, inefficient people. Naji demanded that things happen fast and with little effort.

At seventeen, Naji Cherfan was blessed with family, friends, health and intelligence. He had the ability to get anything he really wanted. However, he had no motivation to press himself for anything that did not directly benefit or interest him. For Naji, nothing was more desirable than finding something exciting and using his abilities to achieve it. Fantasizing about how he wanted things to be, he created a world that had no real connection to the one in which he lived. He had a good mind, a strong will, and a generous loving nature. This was confirmed by the large number of people who cared deeply and sincerely for him. Years later he understood how blessed he was to be surrounded by these people.

However, Naji lacked discipline and was motivated only by a desire to get what he wanted as easily and quickly as possible. This pattern of behavior did not encourage the development of patience in Naji's character. It undermined his ability to use persistence as a method of accomplishing goals. Naji's lack of patience in working for things that he had no interest in gave him little preparation for unexpected challenges that might require his time and attention. He had an attitude of "do everything, get everything now". This made him unconcerned with events and situations that didn't deal directly with his material and emotional desires. He believed that he could do anything he wanted without first having to learn and practice it.

In April 1995, he borrowed a friend's bike to take a quick ride through the streets of his neighborhood. He had little respect for the powerful machine or the danger of speed and drove the way he loved to drive,

without a helmet. Teenagers feel no vulnerability to accidents as their youth seems to insulate them against physical harm. It's easy to imagine living forever when one is a teenager full of energy and excitement. This attitude, however optimistic, may lead to a lack of awareness about how things really are. In this space between over-confident youth and the power of a man-made machine, Naji drove up and down familiar streets. He loved the feeling of flying as well as the sense of controlling the speed and mood of his adventure. Unfortunately, the bike and the conditions of the street combined to give Naji something he was not expecting. The bike took a dip in the road, slipped and crashed. The force of the impact put Naji's head through the windshield. He didn't lose consciousness and only after some minutes did he realize that he was injured. With determination, he rolled the bike back to the friend's house. He was driven to the hospital with his head cut from the top of the forehead back and above the left eyebrow. Feeling relatively undamaged and somewhat immortal, Naji later told a friend that he didn't learn a thing from the accident. However, he did wait two months before getting back on a bike.

A year and some months after the first accident, Naji entered a local university as a freshman. His dream was to study drama and pursue an acting career. Although this university did not offer a degree or courses in drama, he intended to study for one semester only and then go to Montreal where he would finish university while living with his brother Maher. Although Naji loved living in Greece, he wanted to experience life in another part of the world. Greece was beautiful and stimulating, but living in Canada would offer different opportunities for developing his mind and skills.

On September 25, 1996, Naji was the passenger on a powerful motorbike, having relinquished the responsibility of driving to another person. Neither boy wore a helmet, as if they were protected from danger by some invisible armor. Their lack of fear was expressed in the ease with which they drove a machine that was twice their size and strength. As they rode, the bike crashed. The cause of the accident was never determined. Both boys were thrown from the bike and the driver was killed instantly. Naji received a severe brain injury that put him into a coma minutes after the impact. In this split second he lost 17 years of growth

and development. For the next few weeks, he floated in the space between life and death. His body relied on life-support machines and he breathed only through a tracheotomy tube at the base of his throat. The medical report listed him as being in full coma. It seemed as if he was sleeping and there was no indication that he would wake up.

One of the realities of life is that you can never go back. The only choice is to move forward from the place you find yourself at any given moment. For Naji, there were no more moments, only a space where time had no meaning and where an incredible journey lay ahead. He later considered this accident a reason for changing his values and philosophy. He believed that this event gave him a new way to grow and mature. At this moment, however, he only slept.

Chapter II (1996 – 1999) Recovery and Rehabilitation

Many people believe that Naji was kept alive through the will and prayers of his family and friends. The Cherfans searched every possibility for improving their son's condition. Their optimistic approach to this event was responsible for much of the positive outcome surrounding Naji's accident. George Cherfan knew that discipline and hard work led to success and saw what lay ahead for his son while waiting for signs of Naji's recovery. Before the accident in September of 1996, Naji's main concern was completing university and enjoying his life as a fun-loving, down to earth, ambitious teenager. In spite of being egocentric and self absorbed, he had a big heart and generous nature. His sensitive side was hidden by a cool demeanor and loud demands. He was a good friend, a party animal, and a little boy all mixed into one. Now he lay quiet and still. No one knew if he would ever speak again.

The Cherfans wasted no time in providing the best care available for their son. They believed that Naji would recover completely and return to a productive life. This life included a university education, professional achievements and personal satisfaction. George and Sana focused on their youngest son and prayed for him to wake up. They were joined by friends and associates from around the world who had a sincere concern for Naji. Many of these friends had watched him grow from an infant to a teenager. His two older brothers and classmates visited the hospital day after day to check his progress, hoping for a miracle.

Sana Cherfan shared her husband's faith that Naji would wake up and recover completely. She was a dynamic, energetic woman with a warm personality and easy laugh. A devoted wife and mother, she exerted a positive influence on her children. The older boys Hicham and Maher adored their younger brother and nurtured him in every way. Naji was secure in the knowledge that he had the full attention of all four persons in his family. These were the people who shared the grief and anxiety of his present condition. Friends stood by them in the hospital and others prayed for Naji. While Sana watched her youngest son sleep, she knitted him a blanket and kept a notebook full of signatures from the many people who visited them.

Naji spent several weeks in coma with no sign that he would wake up. Still, everyone believed that this child named "prayer to God" would open his eyes. They had faith that his will to live and their love for him would overcome the damage to his brain. They communicated with him through memory and the desire to pass strength and hope into his sleeping body. He looked the same, but the injury was severe. The doctors were pessimistic about Naji's condition and told his family that if he did wake up, he would require extensive therapy and rehabilitation because his ability to function would be at a very low level. He was kept on life support, never breathing or functioning on his own. Continually monitored for any sign that he was regaining consciousness, Naji lay suspended between sleep and survival, unaware of what had happened.

Near the end of November, the Cherfans brought over a specialist from John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Dr. Dan Hanley was in Germany when he was flown to Greece in order to assess Naji's condition. He consulted with the Cherfans about what therapy their son would need if he came out of coma. After examining him, the doctor questioned the family about what Naji liked. He hoped to elicit a response from Naji and searched for a clue as to what might trigger this response. Attempting to get a physical reaction from Naji, he went through a range of tests, even pulling his hair.

Dr. Hanley persisted in asking questions and discovered that there was a joke among family members saying that Naji would do anything for money. During this time there had been small signs that Naji was trying to regain consciousness. Taking a clue from the information about Naji's obsession with money, Mr. Cherfan gave the doctor a bill of Turkish lira marked 1,000,000. In reality it was worth about five dollars. When Dr. Hanley waved the bill in front of him, Naji opened his eyes and followed the movement of the bill. In the doctor's report it states that Naji was in a deep coma for approximately two months as the result of a serious head injury. Around November 20, 1996 he began coming out of this deep sleep. He had a post traumatic amnesia of around three to four months, but his retrograde amnesia (loss of memories from prior to the injury) was very small. In fact, he remembered up until just before the accident itself.

A coma is a unique state of mind and therefore difficult to study in a controlled environment. The testimony of the patient plays a large part

in the compilation of research. The most basic definition of a coma is a subconscious state of mental being in which an individual is incapable of sensing or responding to external stimuli. In Naji's case there were three main types of coma. The first is deep coma, in which the patient's involuntary functions operate at their lowest level, often with the assistance of life-support machines. This is sometimes known as the vegetative state. The second type is semi-coma, in which the patient occasionally exhibits signs of movement, often in response to mental activity, not directed at or in response to external stimuli. The third type of coma, known as the alert coma, is characterized by the patient's dulled ability to comprehend his or her situation.

The testimony of the patient is helpful in formulating the taxonomy of coma states. The closest analogy to coma that the average person can use as a reference point for understanding this phenomenon is sleep. In the deep coma, there is nothing happening in the patient's brain that can be called consciousness. No mental images or apprehensions characterize this state of limbo, as the patient is on the brink between life and death. The vital functions are operating at an extremely subdued level, making it almost impossible for the brain to perform the higher functions necessary for basic awareness. Some patients report experiences of a quasi-mystical nature during the deep coma. In some cases, the patient can comprehend the passage of time and he or she often confuses the sequence of their own mental processes. Naji's memory of coma was complete darkness.

The will to recover is crucial and the patient must be encouraged out of depression and into hope. This can be done best by the patient's family who may be extremely traumatized by a relative's near fatal injury. A professional therapist can help the family come to terms with their collective tragedy while making suggestions for combining prescribed medicine with rehabilitation. Apathy and resignation are the greatest enemies to recovery. Therefore, it is very important to convince the patient that recovery is possible. The more attention the family shows the patient, the more he or she will feel obligated to improve. The family gives the patient a sense of purpose over and above mere individual improvement. Personal desire is often not enough of a motivating factor because the patient often feels that his or her life is already over. Grief caused by the patient's plight affirms his or her sense of relevance to others.

The recovery period is long and slow. Morale is crucial and hope is essential. In addition to physical therapy, the patient must often undergo cognitive training. Damaged frontal lobes complicate the normal cognitive functions. Consequently, other regions of the brain have to be filled with the relevant synaptic network to replace those that have been lost. As long as the suffering individual and his or her family and friends stubbornly believe in recovery, it can happen. The human will is beyond the realm of rational explanation. Throughout the ordeal of both accident and coma, the Cherfans remained positive and optimistic that Naji's will and the will of those who loved him would overcome death.

By the time Dr. Hanley waved the money in front of his eyes, Naji was emerging from the unconscious state which had protected him from the physical trauma he suffered because of the accident. This condition had also insulated him against the outside world. His two months of immobility allowed his body to rest and begin to recover from the shock of injury. Naji woke up blind, mute and paralyzed. He didn't know why he was in the hospital. However, he did remember money owed to him by a friend on the day of the accident. Later, he commented that he was born twice, once as a baby and then as a teenager. An enormous task lay before him: re-learning all the basic skills of life. He pondered whether it was a miracle or a curse that he had been called back from death. Through the first months after waking up, he only heard his father's words: Patience is a virtue; there is time for everything and fear not! He had no choice but to listen and try. So he did...

When Naji woke up, his first thoughts were of recovery and returning to his life as a teenager. Those closest to him had remained by his side during the weeks in coma. Although he couldn't understand what they were saying, his family and friends continued communicating with him by reading and speaking out loud. They believed they could convince Naji's damaged brain to respond and recover.

George Cherfan's influence on Naji was more important than ever and his presence and energy would determine the beginning and continuation of his son's therapy. Naji remembers his father's calm, positive attitude as they discussed the next stages of recovery. These included therapy in hospitals in Athens, and later a move to Germany in order to continue extensive work at Jugenwerk Rehabilitation Center in Gailingen.

The following is the recommendation from the center and Naji's daily schedule for rehabilitation, as written by the neurologist Dr. A. Voss:

Naji Cherfan should have a regular daily program starting in the morning with a break during lunch time for about two hours. Goals are the training of cognitive and motoric deficits and treatment of the behavioral problems.

The program should consist of cognitive and motoric exercises. 9:00-9:45 am. Training of gait and postural reactions. Beginning with stretching the tendons of the legs especially those of the feet. Treadmill training over 15 minutes and then jumping with one or both feet. Training to stand on one leg. 10:00-10:45 am

Cognitive training: The best would be to repeat the lessons of the last school year, to read newspapers and to report the main points at lunch time. By reporting the coordination of breathing and speaking should be trained. 11:00-11:45 am

Training of the left hand and arm. There are some photocopies given to you by the occupational therapist and some material to use for this purpose. Mrs. Pilgermann showed you the exercises with the material and without material. The single finger movements can be trained by working with computers or playing electric piano. The left hand should be used in normal daily activities as eating with fork and knife, making some shakes, clean windows and so on.

12:00-14:00 pm

Break

14:00-15:00

Go for a walk through the town. Correct your gait during walking. Try to walk fluently and with rhythm. Let the left arm hang down. Find out by yourself, which is the right speed for you. Coming at home do some exercises in changing the position of your body. From sitting to standing, from laying to sitting and standing. Try to relax your left arm and let down.

15:15-16:00 pm

Cognitive training as in the morning.

Three times a week it would be good for you to go to swim in the afternoon. Swimming trains your muscles and smoothens them and makes the movements more fluent. In the afternoon it would be good to have three times a week the possibility to get in contact with the neurologist or with the psychotherapist to speak about the rehabilitation process and to develop coping strategies.

Dear Naji,

I know that a program like this one demands a lot of power and engagement from you. But I think that you have the energy and the possibility to do this. After a certain time you will see the good results of your own doing. It is your responsibility for yourself that will bring you the success. On weekends you can repose and meet friends. I think one night you can come home later than normally. For example: Saturday night. You can sleep longer on Sunday. But within the week the best would be for you to go to bed between ten and eleven o'clock pm.

Yours , Dr. Voss

Prior to the accident, Naji never thought much about the value of time or the virtue of patience. He thought even less about their practical implications. Suddenly, he had an entirely new concept of what patience was and how it applied to his situation. Time also took on a new meaning and value. He had lost nearly two months of his life lying motionless in a coma while the rest of the world continued to spin in a cycle of growth, discovery and movement. When he finally woke up, he was still motionless. Now he had to deal with the loss of vision, speech, mobility and memory.

This energetic eighteen year old was in shock and confusion over what had happened and why it happened to him. Feeling like a stranger in his own body, he sent mental directions to all parts of his physical structure, but nothing responded. Although he heard voices and detected movement around him, he felt invisible. In a physical sense, he was there for everyone to see and touch, but he could not join in their company. Many times he felt captive, floating between life and death, heaven and hell. While he had emotional responses to the activities around him, he could not act on or communicate these feelings. Naji, who lacked patience and discipline, was suddenly forced to reconsider everything related to work and time. Fortunately, his ability to think, reason and remember was not permanently damaged. After recovering from the amnesia, his memory returned quickly. Soon he was remembering phone numbers of friends and odd, unrelated incidents.

While the functioning of his brain seemed normal and less debilitated, other damage had occurred which severely affected his physical skill. When he woke up, the doctors had little hope that he would ever see, talk or move again. Naji Cherfan had other ideas and his family was determined that he would be fully recovered. This combination of wills set the tone for Naji's journey from coma to rehabilitation. After one month, Naji's blindness improved to a blurry vision. Slowly he began making sounds. When he finally spoke, his first sentence was "Get me the hell out of here". Naji's direct way of communicating his opinions and desires had remained part of his personality.

In spite of the positive moments surrounding his emergence from coma and his steady recovery, he remained disabled in very critical ways.

His left arm from shoulder to fingers was useless and couldn't be lowered. The hand was curled into a closed position and helpless. The double and blurred vision had been corrected and the blinking movement in his right eye had nearly disappeared, but he needed glasses for reading. Even though Naji's legs did not function normally, he began to move slowly and steadily. Future goals were to regain his balance and become physically active. This was a realistic target considering that Naji Cherfan sat in a wheel chair for forty days and one day announced "To hell with this, I'm gonna fly". Shortly after this statement, he stood up and walked. Naji also experienced a severe injury to his trachea which required him to breathe through a tracheotomy tube during the coma and for some weeks after waking. The accident left Naji with a mind that functioned close to the same level as before and a body that functioned well below what was required in order to be engaged in an active teenage life.

As he lay in the hospital in Athens, he began to understand and assess his situation. He could not believe what had happened to him nor could he comprehend the path that lay ahead. In his mind he saw that everything he had achieved over 17 years of living had been wiped out in one slight movement of a motorbike. He began to realize the value of his father's words when he cautioned him about speed and wearing a helmet. Finally he understood, that the future depended on his ability to relearn everything he had known before and also on his desire to discover new things.

Naji's father encouraged him by saying "If you want something you can achieve it" and for once, Naji listened. First was the miracle of his coming back from death. Second would be a successful rehabilitation and the return to a productive life. Naji set his sights toward becoming physically active and continuing his studies. He had love and support from family and friends as well as the best therapy available. He began working to accomplish his goals.

After regaining his speech and movement, he and his parents moved to Germany where he worked very intensely with therapists in a rehabilitation center in Gailingen. The change in lifestyles from Greece to Germany was difficult for Naji because the system in the rehabilitation center was restrictive and required self discipline from all patients. Naji was accustomed to large amounts of personal freedom and he had great diffi-

culty adapting to the daily program required as a result of the accident. His life before was full of cars, girls, parties, discos and late nights. Now his days included occupational, speech and physical therapy plus neuropsychology. He was advised to swim, read newspapers and report on what he read during his lunch break.

During his stay in Germany, Naji was unhappy and depressed. He had difficulty falling asleep and was upset at being separated from his friends and activities. Many nights he would lay awake for hours asking himself "why did this happen to me?" He thought about his friends in Greece, Canada and around the world, driving cars and bikes, going to school and out for coffee. When he finally slept, he woke up to another day of therapy which started at 7:00 am and finished at 5:00 pm. He felt deeply the loss of his teenage life that included friends and school.

Naji did cognitive therapy in order to retain memory and increase comprehension. He was placed in a class for remedial English but when he was tested in math, his skills remained higher and more complete. Fortunately, his natural ability and comprehensional memory with digits were not damaged and remained strong. During therapy in Germany, Naji was encouraged by a family friend who inspired him with great words and some laughter. After this experience, Naji said to a friend that life is a big circle and you never knew what was going to happen. He concluded that it was best to live in the moment and plan for the things you want to do. By living and working in the present, his future was being determined with each step he took toward becoming whole.

Naji changed in many ways throughout the months of therapy. Although he grew wiser emotionally and intellectually, he still reacted immaturely whenever bored. Daily therapy forced him to develop a new sense of self discipline. A successful outcome was connected to the amount of effort and work he put forth. This concept was unfamiliar to Naji. If he didn't practice movement, he couldn't walk. If he didn't practice circling his jaw, whistling, spitting and chewing gum, he couldn't talk. Mornings and afternoons were spent doing many small tasks that would aid his return to normal and necessary skills. Anyone who knew Naji before his accident could only respect and admire him for maintaining both his colorful personality and his good humor during hours and months of therapy in Germany and Greece.

Naji was convinced that a return to his previous life was possible. He fantasized about being well and prayed for another miracle, believing one day he would wake up perfect. Some days he imagined having brain surgery where the doctors could go in and repair everything that was damaged. He would be able to use his left arm and his legs would run instead of walking slowly from side to side in a swinging motion. He could taste the sea and feel the air on his face. Moving at high speed, suddenly he would wake up and realize that he was travelling only in his dreams. His reality was a mind that remembered perfection and a body that could not obey. Now the desire for what he considered normal had to be based on his present condition, not his past abilities. Naji considered his life in ten years and formulated an idea of perfection. For him, perfection required cooperation, motivation and positive influence.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, he slowly began to develop a new philosophy about life. He recognized that life is a constant cycle of give and take and it is the participation in life that makes it worthwhile. He questioned the purpose of living and man's role from birth to death. Keeping his good humor, he became more thoughtful about certain issues. As a result of intensive therapy, Naji Cherfan challenged his mind and body in a way he would have never considered before the injury.

Naji returned to Greece on June 14th, 1997. He had not been in his own room or house for almost ten months and was in a state of anticipation/anxiety. Before the accident, he was speeding through the streets in cars and on motorbikes. Now, someone drove him everywhere he needed to go and he required help for almost all his movements. Still, Naji had achieved an enormous amount of progress. Doctors and friends were amazed and happy at the sight of him walking, talking and making jokes. Everyone encouraged him in his struggle to return to a functional life and they tried to be understanding of the difficulties he faced.

Before the accident, Naji was self-absorbed and demanding. Now he became moody and temperamental. This was evident when he was very tired and had not slept enough. Rest was an important factor in Naji's recovery because his brain and body simply could not function at their previous levels. His temper was short and his behavior was similar to a young boy's. Emotionally immature before the injury, now his behavior

was even less consistent and controlled. He shouted at people over small incidents and demanded immediate attention from those around him.

Throughout this period of adjustment, Naji's friends were respectful and considerate of his moods and limitations. His male friends took him out and treated him like everyone else. His mood swings did not affect his ability to be honest or speak his opinion. Diplomatic when he wanted something, his talent for communication remained. He was charming and convincing when he had something to gain. This was the Naji that returned from Germany, walking slowly but with determination. No one close to Naji had ever experienced what he was going through. They were proud of what he had accomplished and told him he should be proud of himself. Still, frustration and anger were emotions he experienced daily and he often wondered if he was blessed or cursed to be alive in this condition.

Although Naji was demanding, friends and family accepted and nurtured him during those first months back in Athens. He wanted to be treated normally and continued to live like a freshman in college. His doctors advised him to sleep early and go out only once a week. However, Naji couldn't discipline himself and stayed out late more often than he should. Later he admitted that this behavior delayed his recovery. During the first weeks after emerging from coma, Naji felt he lived between two worlds. He imagined himself as a ghost that hovered outside his body, seeing and hearing but not moving. It was like being the invisible man. Once he had an out of body experience where he floated between two dimensions. For a while he existed in no man's land where he saw and felt but could not respond to people and things around him. He was confused, frustrated and frightened. One moment he was riding through the light and the wind. Two months later he woke up with no memory, no movement and no understanding of what happened or why it happened to him.

As time passed, Naji felt that he was physically reborn on the day he came out of coma. Just as an infant starts from zero to walk and talk, Naji also faced the enormous task of re-training his body to do things that had been automatic and effortless for 17 years. He struggled to understand that everything he had taken for granted, walking, running, driving, even laughing, was suddenly impossible in his present condition. In his darkest moments he panicked at what lay ahead. Everything he wanted to do

required a tremendous effort. Therapy demanded discipline and patience, two qualities he had not yet developed. Even though he was afraid he would not return to his previous physical condition, his attitude towards therapy was finding the easiest and quickest way to recovery. Finally, the fear he felt was stronger than his inherent laziness. He committed himself to doing whatever it would take to be well.

After making great progress, he was at the stage where future goals for recovery were realistic and attainable. He was now walking on his own. His speech returned and although his voice lacked some color and inflection, he was understood when he spoke. For Naji, these were big accomplishments. No longer helpless, he could communicate his feelings and desires. As in the beginning of therapy, his intellectual condition was superior to his physical condition. In his mind he felt the same as always and this encouraged him to work toward doing all the things he had done before.

Unfortunately, this thought pattern created a delusion about what he was actually capable of doing. He lived with unrealistic expectations and did not accept that he was handicapped. In retrospect, Naji believes that if he had remained in Germany and continued the gruelling schedule of therapy prescribed by the doctors, he would have recovered faster and more completely. Instead, he chose to return to Athens where he resumed his life in a body that functioned well below its previous condition. Everyone still believed he would become a strong, athletic teenager again. Naji continued to wait for another miracle that would restore his body and mind to perfection. He had woken up from coma. Now he wanted to wake up and be healed completely.

Entering university in September of 1997, he took an English course just to reacquaint himself with the requirements of attending school. It wasn't difficult, just boring. However, the hard work of therapy gave him a new sense of self discipline and this helped him to persist in working more on his own. In his excitement at being back with friends and returning to an active life, Naji overlooked some realities concerning his condition. Sometimes he felt so much like his old self that he forgot his limitations. His disabilities shocked and frustrated him until he calmed down and looked at everything from another perspective. He had made incredible progress in just one year and he had the possibility for moving much fur-

ther ahead in the months to come. However, he had not accepted the fact that everything concerning his future was dependent on him and his ability to focus energy and effort. Being surrounded by love and care was not enough to make him completely well.

Attending his brother's wedding in Lebanon during July 1997 was a big step for Naji and helped prepare him for his re-entry into a world where constant movement and communication were taken for granted. The successful outcome of his previous year of therapy was two events: the wedding and Naji's return to university. However, in the fall of 1997, he found himself in a familiar life with a new body that did not always respond to his directions.

During therapy he learned that his nerves were blocked so he needed to send instructions to his hand and leg through the brain. Now he was faced with the challenge of using his brain in a unique way, by mentally ordering movements and functions that were previously automatic. Naji Cherfan was about to use his computer skills and fast thinking to play the most competitive and demanding game he had ever attempted. His only weapons were courage, determination, discipline and patience. Some of these weapons, he already possessed. Some he would have to find along the way. He took a deep breath and heard his father's voice. "Patience is a virtue, there is time for everything and fear not". After waking up from coma and spending a year in therapy, he accepted that these words would be the biggest weapons in the battle to regain his normal life.

Because of Naji's successful therapy in Germany and his reentry into university, George Cherfan felt it was time to have his son's condition evaluated. This would determine the best way of continuing his progress. On October 25, 1997 Naji was seen at the Oliver Zangwill Center for Neuropsychological Rehabilitation in England. The purpose of this appointment was to carry out a brief assessment of his neuropsychological functioning, to identify his rehabilitation needs and to address the question of whether attendance at the Oliver Zangwill Center Program would be of significant benefit to him.

Dr. Jonathan Edwards obtained information through discussion with Naji and his father. He began by asking Naji details concerning the accident and injury. They discussed his therapy in Germany and the doctor learned that Naji was now receiving therapy at home in Athens. An occu-

pational therapist worked on his upper limb functioning and a physical therapist worked on his general functioning. Najji was also swimming as a part of therapy and his main physical concern was the loss of function in his left arm. The arm would not relax and stayed in a raised position with the hand curled into a fist. The physical appearance of this arm made him uncomfortable. Because of the many different stages in the rehabilitation of his left arm, Najji came up with simple visual analogies to describe the way his arm looked as it was healing. He labeled the stages in the following way:

1. The claw
2. The fish hook
3. The gulf club
4. The spider web
5. The boxing glove.

His right leg continued to give him problems with movement that was slow and clumsy. He had trouble standing up easily and had to rock back and forth in order to rise from a sitting position. Although he could do these things on his own, he still needed occasional assistance and this was a source of frustration. In spite of his physical problems, Najji felt that his cognitive functioning was normal. He told the doctor that his memory and concentration were excellent and he understood things that were happening around him. When the doctor questioned him about his goals, Najji replied that he wanted to improve the physical functioning in his arm, leg and balance. His other goal was to make a successful return to college.

Najji was tested in many areas including general intellectual abilities, memory, attention, concentration and speed of information processing, perception, language and executive functioning. He had not enjoyed neuropsychological testing in the past, but he was cooperative with this assessment which was quite intense and detailed. The evaluation concluded that he had made a remarkable recovery in just one year considering the extent of his injuries. The doctor considered his progress miraculous and gave him a very positive indication for continued improvement. Still, Najji was left with physical difficulties that involved his left arm, right leg and balance. Although Najji felt he had no cognitive difficulties, the neuropsychological testing disagreed and indicated there could be problems related to speed of information processing and memory. This was

extremely common after brain injury and it would have been unusual for him to have shown no impairment in these areas.

Naji stated to the doctor that his rehabilitation needs should be concentrated on a physical recovery. It was clear that he would continue working on the functioning of his arm and leg. He maintained that his mind was the same as before and only his body had changed. The doctor suggested that Naji's cognitive abilities be judged and tested in a realistic environment that would demand certain ways of functioning. Starting back to school was a positive and appropriate course of action. While Naji felt that he was doing well, Dr. Evans recommended that he gradually increase his academic demands and have access to a person with whom he could discuss progress, anticipate areas of difficulty and review problems as they might come up. The doctor said that it was common behavior after a brain injury for people to rush back into a high level of activity. This could result in a lack of success that would be hard to accept. He suggested that Naji try to build up gradually, rather than attempt everything at once. He also suggested that Naji do sessions with a psychologist familiar with impairments related to brain injury.

Problems with irritability and anger were common after head injury and they were more frequent with familiar people. This was evident by the way Naji shouted and lost control when things didn't go his way. He also lost his temper when he could not do things quickly enough or when people disagreed with him. These temper tantrums were antagonized by problems with attention, concentration, and in particular, fatigue. As a result of the brain injury, Naji became tired more easily. On days when he stayed out late and lost hours of sleep, he was moody and functioned at a low level. His speech and physical reflexes also became slower. Quick to lose his temper with family members, he rarely fought with his friends and fellow students.

Naji was advised to develop a set of strategies that dealt with anger and irritation. It was also suggested that he learn some type of relaxation technique or a way of removing himself from a situation just before becoming aggressive. Naji's method for dealing with this lack of control was to take three deep breaths or to hit his fist firmly, but not violently, against a solid surface such as a table or his leg. This would center his emotions before he continued the conversation or activity. By doing this,

he learned to cope with a situation rather than finding the way to eliminate the real impairment. However, it did make a significant difference in his ability to function. As with all of Naji's rehabilitation, these situations required him to recognize that he had a problem and then show the willingness to deal with it.

The outcome of Naji's assessment in England revealed that he would progress better in a familiar environment and that his attendance at the Oliver Zangwill Center would be inappropriate. At this time, he was advised to continue with his private therapists and to make gradual demands on himself both intellectually and academically. Dr. Evans suggested that Naji begin cognitive therapy with someone who could help him understand his difficulties through a sense of awareness and better communication skills. When Mr. Cherfan asked about the benefit of computer games/programs for Naji's recovery, he was told that the games and programs could illustrate an individual's strengths and weaknesses. However, the extent to which they could improve attention and functioning was scientifically unclear and did not generalize easily to more everyday situations. Naji had already begun playing chess on the computer. He also had access to internet and email which gave him the ability to communicate with friends from around the world. His computer was provided with interesting programs that challenged his mind.

The evaluation of Naji's neurological condition was considered beneficial for the next stage of his development and therapy. Considering where he had been after the accident, Naji's present condition showed much progress. The choice to continue therapy in Athens was welcomed and approved by Naji who wanted to remain near friends and school. He was aware that independence and freedom would come as the product of his own perseverance and discipline. He looked again at where he had been, where he was and where he wanted to be. Finding support from family, friends and therapists, he considered the possibility of becoming physically active and accepted the reality of what this would require from him. He knew that he could only depend on himself. The more he depended on others, the less he would progress. Through his therapy sessions he found he had strength but not always harmony. It was the knowledge of his potential that inspired him to change his philosophy about life. His lack of discipline made it difficult to maintain this new philosophy and

to do the work in order to instigate a change in behavior and thinking. In spite of himself, Naji Cherfan began to evolve slowly.

In Athens, Naji worked privately with a physiotherapist named Vassilis Borotis who became his favorite therapist because he was outgoing and made exercise fun. Daily sessions involved five to eight hours of walking, swimming, going to the gym and traditional physiotherapy in which Vassilis would stretch and manipulate Naji's arms and legs. Their relationship developed as a result of mutual respect and understanding. Working together, they improved Naji's physical condition until he increased his endurance and was walking five kilometers a day in 1998. This activity required perseverance and proved to be the best exercise for his condition as they continued to develop and stabilize his body.

This progress encouraged Naji and gave him the motivation to work harder. Although he found such long hours of tedious therapy boring and exhausting, he knew that the result would be positive and put him closer to his goal of regaining what had been lost. Patience didn't ask to be developed. It demanded his attention. Persistence became a habit because he had to try repeatedly to do certain things that had never required thought or effort.

In early 1998, Naji Cherfan went to class two mornings a week and had a continuous schedule of rehabilitation that included physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and communication skills. He practiced walking and breathing from the center of his body. Showing great improvement, Naji moved in and out of rooms, houses and cars. As his voice regained some of its old color and expression, his mind filled with new thoughts about life and its purpose. Naji celebrated his 19th birthday in November 1998 with a big party attended by friends and family. He considered himself to be 80% recovered at this stage of his therapy. The last 20% would be the most difficult to achieve. In his dark moments, surrounded by the demons of fear and ego, he wondered if he would find the courage to go to the limits of this journey. During this difficult period, he accepted God's will for his life and all the lessons that were to come. Some weeks later after more therapy, counseling and a growing social life with friends, Naji was preparing to touch a dream that he had been seeing for months. He began to understand the value and possibility of life as he prepared to fly to Canada.

On March 3, 1999 Naji went to live with his brother Maher and his wife Maria, who was expecting their first child. He was excited about living in Montreal, being near his brother and good friends. Anticipating the arrival of a baby in the family, he enjoyed the thought of becoming an uncle. Both his brothers had recently married and he saw their happiness and contentment. In his more reflective moments, Naji thought about marriage and a family. However, at this stage of his life he knew that he had many years of hard work ahead of him before contemplating the responsibilities of family life. Happy to be in Canada, he quickly assimilated into the household of his brother. While pursuing his dream of acting, he remained involved in the best physio and occupational therapy he could find. Before leaving Athens, he had some very beneficial sessions with an excellent therapist. The work done with this man gave him a renewed vow of patience and perseverance. Naji arrived in Canada with a positive attitude and a sense of anticipation at the possibilities for his life.

He and his father searched for a place to study drama, believing that an atmosphere with focus on the individual would be the best for his education and development. After attending drama classes for two sessions, he concluded that acting is part of life and studying it would ruin everything. After finding another college, he enrolled in international marketing.

When Naji emerged from coma, he felt he had been suspended in a state of purgatory. When he looked up the definition of purgatory, it was defined as a place or condition of suffering. He no longer suffered in the same way, but he was not completely happy. In spite of the fact that he had recovered to 80% of his normal condition, he was still very limited physically. This caused him to be limited emotionally and he struggled to find happiness again. Maybe the love and prayers he received from friends and family would create another miracle. It was the issue of purpose that tormented him most and drove him to question why he was alive and what he was meant to do.

The following is an email he wrote to his family in Athens:

"When I am away from people I miss them more and I realize how much I love them. If you keep on asking "why and why", you and only you will find the answer. The question you always ask is who am I? You find this

answer by elimination. “I’m not a body, so what am I? I’m not a soul, so what am I?” I had to stop taking things for granted, especially my family. If I use my illness to get something, especially from the ones who love me, at one point they will get fed up and just ignore me. I have to consider myself a normal person and not handicapped. I also think that illusion is the ignorance of reality. It’s the confusion of the mind that takes the illusion for reality. My illusion of perfection gave me the incentive for working harder. Illusion is what people take for life. The key word to life is consciousness or awareness. Awareness of who we are... who we really are. I said that you had to watch your thoughts and observe them and if you weren’t able to observe your thoughts directly, observe in what you say or do. When you say you feel good and you do feel good, it means your thoughts are under control. I know I needed to relax and not be controlled by my thoughts. This is called self mastering. I have a lot of frustration and nobody knows what I’m going through. People and doctors gave me no hope at one time, but I give myself a shorter period of time for full recovery. I know I’m not accepting the fact that I’m not the same old Najj”.

In the beginning of his stay in Canada, Najj dealt with “the same old things”, all kinds of therapy and living a life of virtual patience. He was tired of going to different rehabilitation centers. Although he could handle the daily therapy, the thought of neuropsychology made him angry. He believed that he didn’t need any help mentally. When he finally agreed to see a neuropsychologist in Montreal, he realized the benefits of speaking with someone about his concerns and fears. Najj discovered that his old pattern of not appreciating things was negative and destructive to his development. Painfully aware of what he must do to change, he simply could not find the discipline to do it. The desire for independence was an incentive for continuing therapy and he looked forward to one day living on his own. Thinking about how quickly time passes, he was concerned with being physically whole in order to become emotionally happy.

It was during this time that Naji also decided to concentrate on his health. He quit smoking and began eating more nutritional meals. He had shown this type of determination before when he dieted and worked out at the gym during high school. Now he had a similar target in which the outcome was dependent upon his new-found ability to concentrate and use self-discipline. Critical and sometimes judgmental, he now realized that judging others results in judgment of oneself. He did everything on his own and felt he accomplished things because he had a stronger sense of self worth. His idea of achievement was based on his internal qualities rather than on external possessions. By allowing his mind to relax in order to concentrate, he created a virtual reality. This reality combined the fact of his disability with the fantasy of his recovery.

With great anticipation, Naji made plans to visit Athens during July 1999. His arrival was full of old friends, old activities and old memories. These memories confused and saddened him. He had dreamed of returning completely normal, but as passionately as he believed this, the facts were cold and hard. He was much better and visibly improved, but he was not the old Naji or even the one he hoped to be. At least, not yet. He kept a journal during these weeks in Greece and one day he wrote "I want to be better than the Naji that I once was. If not physically, definitely wiser. I learned so much from this accident. One technique to become almost like before is to focus and concentrate in order to grow stronger".

Naji was excited about returning to his life in Athens but his excitement changed steadily into emotional confusion. He had too many conflicts between his past and present reality. People, places and situations from his life before were pressing him and the feelings were overwhelming. He floated between what he remembered he could do and what he could actually do. The trip did not bring him the pleasure, comfort or satisfaction he needed.

During this trip, he wrote in his journal: "In August 1999, I reached about 85% healthier. Forget about it. I'm gonna go all the way. When you do something, do it right. Just do it, just do it. I said to give myself one more year and just watch me. I started to appreciate life, have value for things and finally stopped taking people for granted. I woke up one day and realized that I was put on this earth and saved many times to be part of this world for a reason. In the past, I always said life has come to an end

and it's over man. Now I say, life has just begun". He believed these words, and became a new person. One day he woke up and realized that money is not as important as good health or the value of life. This discovery contrasted with the teenager of before whose belief system revolved around "desire and acquire". This philosophy gave him mental stability and a new appreciation for people and things around him. His organizational skills improved, and he kept an agenda in which he recorded his daily program.

While recovering, Naji Cherfan considered himself a miracle in the making. After undergoing intensive therapy in Greece, Germany and Canada, he began achieving the goals he set for himself so long ago. Realizing what he had accomplished through therapy and personal effort, this courageous teenager moved forward and lived with his disability. "You just consider yourself normal and say forget it man. It was only a two second accident. You don't need intensive therapy or serious help anymore. The best therapy is attending college and living a normal life like everyone else. Forget the past. I have the chance to make it like most of my friends. I can walk, think and most of all I'm conscious. Honestly. I don't mind. It could have been worse. Life is my therapy".

Three years before Naji could not have imagined saying those words. Life may not be fair, but it always gives the opportunity for growth and learning. He wrote in his journal the following words : "Picture yourself two years from now and consider yourself normal, unless a very important handicap privilege is needed". During some of his darker moments, he would go to the mountain to breathe for a while. Then he would say to himself "Never, never, never let people feel sorry for you unless you like this feeling. Always have your pride and dignity". During these moments he considered other people less fortunate than himself and realized that he had the ability to make himself happier. He began appreciating what he had and where he was in his life.

These were new thoughts for Naji, as he was accustomed to moving through life with a sense of carelessness. He expressed these ideas both verbally and in writing. Physically and spiritually changed, he visualized that one day he would wake up perfect. Day by day, movement by movement, he saw progress. He realized that recovery depended on time, patience and very hard work. Praying for another miracle, he insisted that he could

do anything. His greatest fear was that he wouldn't recover, so he played games with his subconscious mind to convince himself that one day he would be perfect in the eyes of others. He discovered that fooling himself like this actually worked. By believing so strongly from his heart, Naji learned about the fine line between reality and fantasy and the connection between concentration and result. He had finally stumbled upon the power of focus and its benefit to physical and emotional accomplishment. He realized this during a session of physiotherapy in Montreal when his therapist Frank told him that he had to integrate into society. He advised Naji to live in reality instead of hiding somewhere, waiting for another miracle to happen. At this moment Naji faced his present situation with the truth and not an illusion. Looking in the mirror, he saw a young man just a few weeks from his 20th birthday. Instead of walking with difficulty, he now moved in a smoother, more balanced way. His vision, memory and concentration were greatly improved. School was going well and he was motivated by his classes and therapy. Communication with friends through telephone and internet was a source of comfort and strength.

Although he had trouble concentrating when tired, Naji's mental abilities remained strong after the accident. He was not aware of how powerful the mind could be until he became more serious and said to himself "Man you got to challenge yourself big time and consider everything possible". This idea motivated Naji to function normally in a body that refused to listen and couldn't remember what it did before his brain injury. His mind remembered physical freedom and urged his arms and legs to go there. They followed his command, but with limitation. Thought wills the physical and emotional structure to stretch and be challenged. Slowly, Naji learned that the mind is a double edged sword. One side is the enemy while the other is the saviour. Naji sent this fax to a friend in Athens:

"One day in school, I couldn't focus on the problem being explained in class. Then I started asking myself, why am I having such trouble focusing? An idea came to me. It's a tension in the mind. WOW!!!. If the mind can have tension and we know that everything comes from the mind, then I see that the tension in my body comes from my mind. GREAT! I Get it? I relax my

mind; my body relaxes. Simple. So simple, it seems to be too easy. OK, how does it work? How can I relax my mind? Focusing on too many things creates tension. Solution. Focus on one thing at a time”.

As a result of "lots of therapy and lectures from people who love and support him", Naji threw away his judgmental attitude. Maturity convinced him that "he couldn't leave and he couldn't get out". Naji does his own therapy by concentrating and using self-discipline. Slowly, he is gaining an understanding and appreciation of the meaning of respect for himself and others.

Being with Naji Cherfan is a stimulating experience. His communication is direct and even though his behavior is sometimes self-centered, he has a unique charm. Naji continues to develop his mind and experiment with expansive thoughts. He has discovered a wealth of blessings that make his life satisfying and full of opportunities. One day he went down the stairs leading to the family apartment in Montreal. As he went deeper into the darkness, he realized how small his thoughts had been until now. Something "clicked" between his mind and his heart until he could no longer deny a purpose for his life. He had to think big, to go beyond what his ego wanted or what his patterns told him to do. He said out loud "It's only me, myself and I". This time he believed his words. He understood that he had the qualities for success and all the blessings that family, friends and love could provide. Happy just because it was summertime, he was grateful to his therapists and doctors for helping him get to this brilliant new space where things made sense. He laughed inside and said "just watch me fly".

Throughout the years of his therapy, Naji kept a journal and wanted to write a book about his experience. In 1998, he began editing his journals and put this ahead of all other activities. This process took him closer to his goal of writing a book that would describe the events leading to the accident, his coma, therapy and recovery. "I know so many others that have had similar cases, even worse, but none of them actually spoke about it. I did it just to let it out and let everyone know what I went through. Most of all, I want to help all those out there in the same position that I was in. The things in this book are very personal, but I just had to let it out and express the way I feel". Finally, he finished the book in his head

and dedicated it to the therapists who taught him to walk and the one who taught him to breathe and speak from the center of his body. At last he understood his father's words: "Patience is a virtue, there is time for everything and fear not".

A state of reality is one based on fact or truth. When a person lives in reality, then the conditions surrounding him are practical, honest and genuine. These conditions are not always comfortable or pleasant, but discomfort demands attention and forces awareness. When a situation becomes painful enough, one is forced to drop the veil of illusion that so mercifully shades us from all we wish to forget. Naji Cherfan wrote these words to his family in Athens. "You know life for me has become one of virtual reality. But you know what? Reality bites". These words were the result of a bad mood brought on by fatigue. His mood swings were a continual reminder of how much his life had changed since the accident. Whenever he was sad or depressed he thought to himself, "so what, everyone has feelings like this". He was acknowledging the existence of others and understanding, that in many ways, he was just like everyone else. He began feeling that "each of us has his own closeness with God". A thoughtful young man was emerging from the determination needed to handle the conditions of his life. He struggled to contain frustration but had a habit of picking fights to release the tension trapped in his body and mind. He wrote that "It just needed to be let out on someone". By swimming, breathing and meditating he controlled his moodiness.

As Naji Cherfan matured, he took the lessons life handed out and worked with them in order to grow. He found a part of himself that had a renewed vision of life. Even when moody and tired, he was still happy. Naji said to himself that time is space cut into little pieces and wrote in his journal: "Time is the moment of the mind, from past to future and future to past, passing by the present. Who cares about writing (or not writing) a book about life when you are so busy writing your own life. Why do we worry so much about life when it is happening. Life is like a game. The more good you do to others, the better you get and the more you win. Focus and don't be distracted. If I'm not happy, I say I'm gonna be happy. How is happy now? Happy is feeling good. Feeling good, good, good. So good, that I'm super fine, fine, fine. Now I have the right mind. I want to be better than the Naji I was before. Today is a new day. We have some-

thing to do. I'm gonna be so friendly and cool to people. Everybody's gonna love me cause I love them. That's the way life has become for me. Everybody's happy. I'm gonna smile at them. If you're not happy and you have a problem with me, then don't make a big deal out of it".

Naji has reached a state where the less he has to work on in his recovery, the more challenging it becomes. While his physical condition continues to improve, he also works on his character and shows positive changes in attitude and behavior. His father's words, patience is a virtue, there is time for everything and fear not have become part of Naji's daily existence. George Cherfan provides a source of strength and encouragement for his son and Naji has begun to appreciate more than ever his father's example of wisdom and courage.

Slowly but steadily, Naji Cherfan moves toward recovery and the promise of a life which has purpose and meaning. He discovered the will to live completely, while meeting the challenge of disability. His experience has motivated him in his desire to be a role model for the handicapped. By sharing his story with disabled young people, Naji Cherfan considers himself "a miracle in the making", and believes there might be other miracles out there waiting to happen. Courage and perseverance are the requirements for recovery, along with time and prayer. A life of virtual patience has slowly become one of virtual reality.

On June 8, 1999 Naji Cherfan wrote these words and faxed them to a friend in Greece: "While in Canada I came to realize there wasn't much wrong with me. So what if my left hand and my right leg are not 100%. After all, nobody's perfect. I am very lucky. Some people don't have any legs or arms. I have to accept things and improve on myself as much as possible, be happy with myself first as I am and then do my best to improve. There will be no limitations to what my mind can achieve". Ten years after the brain injury which stole his sight, speech and ability to move, this young man is making his dreams come true. He has learned that patience is a virtue and he's putting it to good use. The journey from accident-to-coma-to-therapy-to-a normal life continues for Naji Cherfan.

"They can because they think they can"

Virgil

Chapter III (1999-2006) Virtual Notes

1. Denial. I was living and am still partly living in denial. I have finally come to realize that I needed to accept some facts in life. Nobody is perfect. This is a fact that I didn't accept. Maybe I am just realizing how deep and painful it was, getting over my accident. Would I have been able to be the person I am without it? Time. The time for me has come to put aside denial and start adapting to my life.

2. I learned to build correct principles and go by them and that if you believe in something, you must know why you believe.

3. Strong will and faith guided me throughout my recovery.

4. I need to protect myself from some of my thoughts. When I was a kid, I used an analogy on getting a positive by multiplying two negatives. Now I understand that if I respond positively to something negative, I will create positive energy.

5. Only those who have had a traumatic experience similar to mine can understand what I'm going through.

6. A problem I face after nine years of therapy and hard work is letting my obsessive thoughts control me. Although I have accomplished so much, I need to understand that there's much more to achieve. Each experience gives me a key to open a different door to all areas of my life. These keys are to be used carefully, not abused. We all have the potential to go forward with love. I was encouraged to have high self esteem and I learned that maturity comes through experience.

7. We make such a big deal out of ourselves and the things we have. It's not always a bright sunny day. Sometimes we need to imitate nature. No one is perfect.

8. We'll always have misunderstandings. I have a positive attitude and look at the bright side of life by loving, working and playing.

9. In this life, we are born with nothing and when we die, we leave with nothing. We manage our own space and how we decide to live this life.

10. People come into your life for a reason. If people are meant to be together, true love unites them and God blesses them.

11. Fear not. Close the door to the current of fear and put it behind you.

12. When we pray sincerely, only true faith can stamp the mind, heart and soul. I learned to "pray for what you want and work for what you need".

13. I feel so much better when I help someone and then see a smile on their face.

14. I don't allow people's opinions to influence my feelings. Maybe people think they know you. In the end, only you know who you are and what you need. It's not so much about opening the mind, but about expanding the heart.

15. Everything I experience happens to show and teach me patience. Patience is true love and absolute beauty.

16. We all have a sixth sense. I realized that some times I can see and feel many hidden messages.

17. Being independent, taking care of myself and believing that I'm able to do whatever I put my mind to really helps me grow.

18. Only God can give and take life. He breathed into us and gave us the ability to be creative. God never gets away from us. Human beings get away from God.

19. When the human wants something, he thinks of it. The thought becomes liquid. The liquid goes to the cells. If you think of moving the finger in your left hand, then the liquid goes to the cells that are in charge of that area. If the cells in that area are injured or traumatized, then they take the message from the liquid, but read it wrong, so when they send the message to the finger the command is incorrect. It's not the mistake of the finger or thought. The problem is in the cells that are responsible for taking the thought to the finger. There is a functional chain between the thought, cell and finger. If there is a problem with any link of the chain, everything will be affected.

20. Experience taught me that if I imagined the movement to any part of my body, eventually I would do it. Perseverance, concentration and discipline were the requirements for this effort. The individual suffering from a brain injury must find the way to focus on whatever part of the body has been affected by the injury.

21. The body is a shell, just a house. Your body doesn't define who you are. If somebody tells you, you're limited, that's their own perception of your body. However it's not you. Somebody can convince you that your body is who you are. In that case, the limitations of your body become who you are.

22. The two worst words ever created are "I can't". God doesn't listen to your words; he listens to your heart. With perseverance your mind can achieve whatever your heart desires. Virgil once said "They can because, they think they can".

Some of the hardest things:

1. If it is really hard for me to be walking on the street and then trying to open a door, someone else will just open it for me. That is very nice of them, but then I feel and say to myself, sometimes out loud, What???? I speak six languages and you think I can't open the door. I have finally come to understand that people see only what they want to see.

2. Many times I even measured myself according to the evaluation of others. By trying to meet the expectations of others, I would always begin from zero. Letting too many people evaluate me and going to all these different centers was the hardest thing I experienced. By always seeking a shortcut to recovery, I cheated myself. I felt that someone, somewhere would provide me with the instant gratification key. Patience was my best bet. It sounds like it's so easy to say. Ok, it is easy, but I learned that anything at first should be done slowly and carefully.

3. I've also come to realize what I'm here for. We're not brought into this earth and then we just leave. No!! This accident showed me that I survived in order to tell others about my experience. Each one of us suffers differently, in order to learn about life and people. This is growth and evolution of the soul. Meeting the needs of others is something that this experience has made me think about.

4. A continuous drop of water can pierce a hole in a rock. This inspired me to keep on trying and never give up.

5. Getting too attached to something needs detachment.

6. Our conception of normal is relevant to the individual. Normal is however the individual defines it.

EPILOGUE

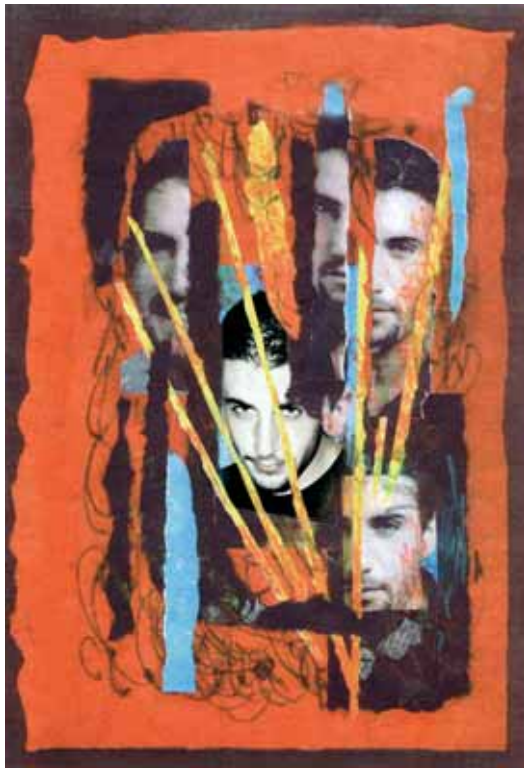
From 1999 to 2001, Naji and his father traveled to therapy centers in Arizona, Texas and Florida. In each city, they found good doctors and people who contributed to Naji's recovery and progress. Finally, he moved to Florida where he had many close friends. He studied multi-media at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale and then returned to Greece where he enrolled in BCA (Business College of Athens) and graduated with an associate's degree in E-Business. For the past three years, he has worked in the family business in administration and public relations. Over the years of his recovery, he has continued to write and edit his writings. His journey is one of determination, courage and change. His most recent thoughts are summarized in the last pages of this book. These are the words of a man who took one traumatic experience and transformed it into a way of life. Naji Cherfan was 17 when he had the "two second experience" that forced him to review everything that he had ever known and learned. On November 20, 2005 he turned 27. This decade of his life is revealed in "virtual notes".

To the reader:

Thank you for your interest in my story as I re-lived this event.

“Victory belongs to the most persevering”

Napoleon



Virtual Patience

At the age of seventeen, Naji Cherfan suffered a brain injury that put him into a coma. When he woke up, he was unable to move, speak or see. He believes that this gave him the experience of being a baby twice. However, the second time he was conscious and had to mature in a more difficult way. From the moment Naji could speak again, he had a great need to express his story in order to understand what happened and why. The act of writing down the thoughts and emotions he experienced helped him become the person he is today.