

'OVERCOMING ADVERSITY: TWO STORIES TO INSPIRE YOU'

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The male and female forums, known as "Men Speak..." and "Visionary Women", respectfully, are Registered Student Organizations at Bermuda College. Students sign up to be a part of the Forums and are given academic credit for their participation. One of the tasks of the Forum members are to put on monthly *forums* where invited speakers attend the college to talk about issues that are important and/or inspirational to the students.

The March 2006 Forum was unique in that it was the first time the males and female Forum members combined to put on an event. Everything about the Forum was collaborative, from the organization leading up to the day, to the day itself, when both males and females took roles to ensure its smooth running.

The tone of the Forum was set right from the start when short videos of the guest speakers were shown to the audience. In these videos, designed to represent introductions of the guests, both spoke openly about the accidents that led to their disabilities: **Jeremy Drover** was injured in a 'freak' trampoline accident and has been confined to a wheelchair since 2000; **Garita Coddington** lost her foot in a bike accident and wears a prosthetic. For Ms. Coddington, it was the first time she had publicly spoken about her accident.

The Forum was facilitated by one of its members who expertly guided the guests through their stories and in the end, a number of clear messages were left with the audience. Jeremy Drover was the epitome of tenaciousness and optimism as he spoke about his chances of walking again as a result of his recent stem cell operation. Such was the extent of his motivation that he has continued to undergo physiotherapy over the last six years since his accident as he has always believed that he would walk again. He remarked, "...I wanted my limbs to be ready for the day when I would be able to walk again...they needed to stay strong." He told the audience that the ground-breaking operation had already enabled him to regain some use of his legs. Of his experiences since the accident, he summed it up in one statement. He said, "I am a bigger man today sitting down than I ever was standing up".

Garita Coddington's message was different though equally powerful. She spoke about the stigma of having a disability and how differently people, and friends, treated her as a result of her accident. Some did so because they did not know how to behave towards her. Some are not her friends to this day. It was a result of those experiences that she challenged the audience to think about how they interacted with people who may have a disability and encouraged everyone to treat them with dignity, respect and fairness.

The forum was both inspirational and thought-provoking. We were all reminded of how valuable life is, how quickly things can change, and how important it is to nurture the relationships we have. Both guest speakers have gone on to lead meaningful and engaging lives and were able to imbue this zest for life to those in the audience.

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