

REHAB CASE STUDY

Eden's Journey: Empowered by Perseverance, Support, Technology and Purpose

WRITTEN BY: Eden Schroeder and Jessica Presperin Pedersen

Eden Schroeder, co-author, is also subject of this article. She began swimming competitively at 8 years old and continued through high school, before entering her freshman year at Florida State University. During a weekend trip with friends in Naples, Florida, her life changed in an instant when she unknowingly dove into a shallow sandbar. She sustained a C5 spinal cord injury and was paralyzed from the chest down.

After two weeks in the intensive care unit, Eden transferred to Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia, where she spent six months in intensive rehabilitation. The early stages of recovery were daunting, but her determination carried her through what she describes as the hardest year of her life.

A major turning point came when Eden moved in with her physical therapist, Heather, and Heather's husband, Austin. With their support, she continued therapy while completing her Bachelor of Arts in psychology at Georgia State, also in Atlanta. She attended classes remotely because navigating ramps, curbs and unfamiliar walkways in a manual wheelchair made campus travel difficult.



Eden Schroeder and Chippy, her trained canine companion.

Eden later earned her driver's license using hand controls and now uses a modified van for transportation. She transfers from her chair to the driver's seat. Chippy is her trained canine companion, who assists her throughout the day.

Eden knew a power wheelchair would give her greater independence; however, it prevented her from driving with friends and getting into homes. Navigating ramps and long distances using her manual wheelchair were still significant barriers. Eden worried about losing control on downhill slopes

and often avoided unfamiliar environments, putting her in a position where she was dependent on others being with her on most outings. Almost five years after her injury, Eden gained increased independence when she paired an Empulse M90 power-assist system with her QUICKIE Nitrum chair. The setup helped her climb ramps, control descents more safely and travel independently with greater confidence.

With increased confidence, freedom and the ability to navigate the ramp into her van and transfer to the driver's seat

independently, Eden has been able to focus on her long-term goals. She is currently in her second semester of a doctoral program in clinical psychology at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where she hopes to support others navigating life after spinal cord injury.

Eden enjoys many adaptive sports, including hand cycling and skiing, but swimming remains her greatest passion. She competes in the S1 classification, which is reserved for athletes with the most significant physical impairments. There are only two female S1 swimmers in the world. To compete in the 2028 Paralympics, she must qualify to make the team alongside S2 and S3 swimmers, as there is currently no S1 team competition. She continues training with the Shepherd Sharks as she works toward that goal.

Eden also shares her experiences, both the challenges and the victories, on her TikTok account, hotwheel2.0, where thousands follow her journey.

Through resilience, determination and the unwavering support of her

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Eden at the pool with her coach, Nick LAST NAME

community, Eden continues to transform adversity into opportunity. In the water — her “happy place” — she finds freedom and a powerful reminder of everything she has overcome and everything she is still pursuing.

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Eden Schroeder, right, with Heather and Austin.



CONTACT THE AUTHOR

Eden may be reached at
EDENSCHROEDER02@GMAIL.COM

Eden Schroeder, BA, is currently enrolled in the clinical psychology graduate program at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. She lives with friends and remains active in outdoor activities, cycling, skiing and training for local and national swimming meets. She also serves as a peer mentor at Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia, where she shares her experiences with newly injured patients and demonstrates effective strategies for re-engaging in daily life. Schroeder is preparing for her upcoming internships, allowing her to integrate her clinical psychology knowledge into practice.



CONTACT THE AUTHOR

Jessica may be reached at
JESSICA.PEDERSEN@SUNMED.COM

Jessica Presperin Pedersen, OTD, MBA, ATP/SMS, FAOTA, is an occupational therapist with close to 50 years of experience specializing in complex rehab. She has contributed to the industry through clinical service delivery, presentations, publications and advocacy and was one of the founders of iNRRTS, serving as its first secretary. Pedersen is the director of clinical education for Sunrise Medical.



Erica Walling, PT Sunrise Medical, with Eden Schroeder and Jessica Presperin Pedersen.