



Paul George (sophomore-fine arts and theatre design and technology) puts a weight around his leg to do some strength exercises. He lost his left ankle and foot after a motorcycle accident in August 2009. George was driving on Shortlidge Avenue on his Yamaha V Star 6500 when a gray Hyundai suddenly smashed into the left side of his motorcycle.

## Student perseveres through hardships of injury

By Greg Galiffa  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

He left the Penn State Activities Building after classes, preparing to get food. But by day's end, Penn State student Paul George was in a hospital bed, preparing for a life with a prosthetic leg.

On Aug. 26, 2009 — the third day of fall classes — George (sophomore-fine arts and theatre design and technology) was driving at a careful 20 mph on Shortlidge Avenue on his Yamaha V Star 6500 when a gray Hyundai suddenly smashed into the left side of his motorcycle.

George was thrown 20 feet through the air, landing on the opposite side of the road. His leg had been caught between the car's bumper and his motorcycle on impact.

Lying on the ground, George said he looked to his left and saw his shoe — but it wasn't where it was supposed to be. Surrounding the shoe and staining the grass was "red, skin-colored stuff."

Realizing he was looking at his partially dismembered left leg, George turned his head and stared straight up at the sky.

"My leg looked like ground beef with beige coloring," he said. "I knew it shouldn't be there. I knew I was going to be losing some of it."

After being airlifted to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, where he received multiple surgeries, George said he had about half of his left calf remaining. But after months of physical therapy and the help of a new prosthetic leg, George was eager to stand back up.

"It's made me want to live my life, to enjoy my day more," he said. "I try to make the day-to-day quality of life better. The accident may have been the best thing that ever happened to me."

Before the accident, George said he was less motivated and had a close-minded attitude toward life. Now, he is pushing himself to value what he's been given — a second chance.

Through all the pain and loss, George said the only moment when he questioned what would happen to him was the helicopter ride to the hospital.

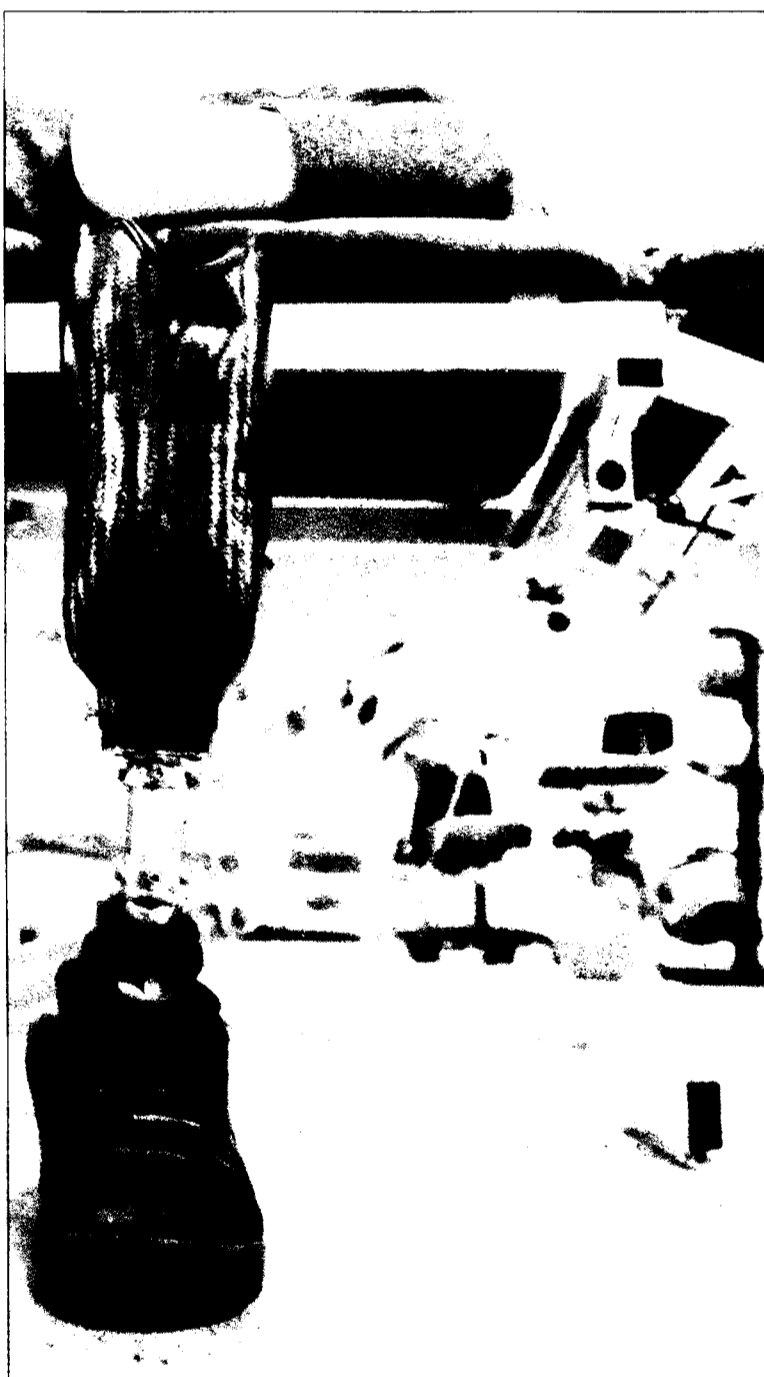
"I asked an EMT to hold my hand," he said. "Once I was flying alone, I thought, 'What if this is really bad — what if I die?'"

But George didn't bleed out. He didn't die. He recovered and started changing how he lived his life. That began by forgiving the woman driving the gray Hyundai.

"I don't hate the woman. I know it wasn't intentional," he said. "I would like to just talk with her and let her know it was an accident. I want to get to know her some."

Along with his desire to change, George said the support of his friends and family visiting him in the hospital helped him get through the accident.

And when they did visit, George said he didn't



George's prosthetic ankle sits next to a table as he does strength exercises. Five months have gone by since the accident.

went his family or friends to feel uncomfortable or sad about what happened to him. So to keep the mood light, he would crack jokes.

"I started making jokes about 'putting my best foot forward' or 'don't pull my leg.' Nurses would say 'I'll be right back,' and I said 'I'm not

To see video of an interview with Paul George describing the accident and how it has effected his life:  
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going anywhere." he said. "I knew I was pretty messed up, but I was alive. I can't change what happened to me, so I'll just go with it."

George's friend Andrew Lentz, also a Penn State student, recalled his fear when he heard about the accident.

But when Lentz (sophomore-information sciences and technology and security and risk analysis) finally saw George in the hospital, he said he was happy his friend could laugh about the situation.

"[Paul] was kind of being the jackass he always is," he said. "It was good to see he was still being himself."

While the accident did leave scars, it also strengthened their friendship, which began during their freshman year at State College Area High School.

"We're not even friends anymore. We're brothers now," Lentz said. "I don't know how he gets through it the way he does — but he does. I mean, there's nothing else to say. It's amazing."

Alli Warren, who has also been friends with George since high school, said she has seen a lot of motorcycle accidents in her five years as a firefighter. In George's case, he was "incredibly lucky," she said.

"He didn't let it stop him or anything," Warren said.

"He didn't get discouraged about life. He's just happy for a new beginning."

Five months have gone by since the accident, and now George is back to the old routine.

With the help of his new leg, he has begun walking toward a normal life of finding a new car, designing sets for his theatre classes and trying things he never would have before.

"I'm trying to get back into everything I can," he said. "I'm not trying to make it sound macho. It was really hard. It was harder than anything I can even describe to you," he said. "But for me, this is what I have to do. I'm going to kick its ass."

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**Q:** How has it been walking on your new prosthetic leg?

**A:** I've been walking a lot, probably more than I should. In the hospital, they would have me do exercises to work out my leg. If they said to do 10, I'd do 15 or 20. I figured my leg would heal and get better faster. I've been wearing the leg almost the entire day. It's gotten easier. It still hurts every step because it's not used to bearing the weight. It's not really easy, but I don't have any other option.

**Q:** What did your friends think of it?

**A:** Whenever I would see my friends, I could tell they were staring at my eyes. There was a big elephant in the room,

so I would make jokes about it. They would pause and have a look of horror on their face and then start laughing. It wasn't a big touchy thing. We could talk about it. My friends would also give me suggestions about what to do with the leg. Everyone says I should make it into a gun. I want to make a peg leg. Maybe I'll be a pirate for Halloween.

**Q:** Aside from your accident, how has this changed your life?

**A:** I've always been really shy, but since the accident, I love making people feel awkward. I love making their days more interesting. Like there was this time I was in Wal-Mart, and I could tell people were staring at me. So

I yelled, "Stop staring at me!" and everyone turned around. It's annoying but people are going to do it. So I had fun with it.

**Q:** What was your time like in the hospital?

**A:** I had problems in the [intensive care unit]. They were really gung-ho about people not getting bedsores so they wanted to roll me over every six hours and wash my back. And I didn't understand. I mean, I'm a college student, I've laid on my back for more than six hours before.

**Q:** Do you have any regrets about buying your motorcycle instead of a car?

**A:** I don't regret having a motorcycle. Some people do yoga, some people work out, some people have tea. The way I relax is my motorcycle.

**Q:** Other than your leg, you said you didn't



George's Yamaha V Star 6500 after a gray Hyundai suddenly smashed into the left side of it in August 2009. George was thrown 20 feet through the air, landing on the opposite side of the road.

have any other serious injuries from the accident. Why do you think that is?

**A:** I told my friends that I have a guardian angel and it was probably his first day on the job. When I got hit, he was probably not paying

attention to me but to all the pretty girls walking on the street. Once he saw I got hit, he was probably like, 'Aw man, Paul, sorry!' Then he made sure nothing else happened to me because he felt bad about the leg.