

“I’m living proof that there’s always reason to hope!”

Noelle McNeil was a happy, carefree college student when a tragic accident put her in a coma with just a 1% chance of ever recovering. But today, thanks to her determination and spirit, Noelle’s living proof that the “impossible” is indeed possible!

Sitting in her hospital room with her parents and older brother gathered around her, Noelle McNeil could see the overwhelming relief in their eyes. And the 20-year-old Little Silver, New Jersey, college student knew they desperately wanted her to feel thankful, too.

“The doctors said it’s a miracle you came out of your coma,” they told her.

But their words only brought her sadness and sorrow.

I didn’t wake up! Noelle’s heart shouted.

This girl in the wheelchair, with a feeding tube . . . isn’t me.

And this new Noelle who doctors were saying would never walk or be able to do anything for herself again . . . I don’t want to be her! Noelle thought, terrified.

Six weeks earlier, Noelle had been living a fun-filled, exciting life. She had lots of friends, a modeling agency interested in her and was a star on her college equestrian team.

Then, while participating in a horse show, she was approaching a jump when her horse suddenly began bucking wildly.

Noelle was thrown from his back and slammed headfirst onto the ground, so hard that her helmet shattered!

Unconscious and barely clinging to life, Noelle was airlifted to a nearby hospital, and when her family arrived, they were met with dire news: Noelle had suffered a severe, traumatic brain injury and was in a coma.

The damage was so extensive, “I’m sorry, but it’s unlikely she’ll

ever recover,” the doctors said gently.

“No! Don’t say that,” Noelle’s mother cried. Sitting at her daughter’s bedside, she fiercely promised, “We’re not giving up on you, baby.”

Someone from her family stayed with Noelle 24 hours a day. Holding her hand, stroking her cheek, telling her they loved her. And to their joy—and the doctors’ amazement—just a week later, Noelle’s eyes fluttered open. For another week she floated in and out of consciousness, and then, to everyone’s astonishment, she spoke. What she said was even more incredible: “I saw Uncle Joe.”

Her family gasped—because Joe, her father’s brother, had died two years earlier.

“I was with him,” Noelle insisted, telling her family that she’d gone to Heaven. “It was beautiful and peaceful, but there was still so much I wanted to do. So I asked to come back.”

Yet now, Noelle was devastated to discover she was unable to eat, go to the bathroom, even comb her hair by herself.

“I’ve changed my mind. I want to die!” she wept.

But once again, her family rallied around her. “You’re not a quitter,” they told her.

Just as they’d hoped, their words tapped into the drive that had made Noelle a strong athlete. Her strength and courage surged up and took hold again.

With fierce determination, she vowed, “I will get my life back.”

Fighting for life

Noelle was transferred to a rehab facility, and eight hours a day, therapists worked with her, lifting and bending her arms and legs. And at night and on weekends, her family took over.

With each passing week, Noelle grew stronger. After two months, she was able to stand.

Her legs shook, and she only stayed on her feet for 15 seconds. But Noelle beamed: “I did it!”

Every day, she stood for longer periods. And soon, Noelle was declaring, “I want to walk!”

Her therapist agreed to let her start working on the treadmill. A harness held her up but as her legs moved, Noelle wept with joy.

Some days, though, when her body screamed in agony and fear dampened her spirits, tears of frustration poured down her face.

“Enough of that,” her mom would say, and she’d steal Noelle away to go shopping or to have her nails done.

The outings made Noelle feel normal. Hopeful. Like herself again. And she’d return to therapy more determined than ever.

After four and a half months, she’d made so much progress, doctors said she could go home and continue rehab as an outpatient.

“I can’t believe how far you’ve come!” they marveled, noting that only 1% of people with her type of injury make any real recovery.

“Well,” Noelle proclaimed, “you haven’t seen anything yet!”

“Noelle’s back!”

Day after day, week after week, Noelle pushed herself. And just four months after going home,



“I hope my story inspires others to fight no matter what life throws at them,” says Noelle.

she banished her wheelchair to the garage!

Her mental strides were just as astounding. She had to relearn how to read. Write. Think. But with hard work and help from therapists and her family, her memory and focus slowly began to return. So much so that two years after the accident, she returned to college. And at the end of her first semester, Noelle logged on to the university’s website to check her grades to read: *Noelle McNeil, grade point average 4.0*. She was . . . perfect!

“I’m back!” she cheered.

Today, two years later, Noelle—who’s turned the journal she kept during her recovery into an inspirational book—is about to graduate and plans to become a motivational speaker.

“Tragedy can happen to any of us at any time. It’s what you do with the tragedy that determines who you are,” Noelle says. “It’s tempting to just give up. But I am living proof there’s always reason to hope and believe in miracles!”

—Kathy Fitzpatrick

Did you know?
Miracles do happen! Read about new ones every day—and share your own—at [MiracleStories.com!](http://MiracleStories.com)



Access your inner strength!

Have a mantra
Studies show repeating an uplifting phrase (find one on the pages of *Woman’s World!*) helps instill a can-do attitude!

Lean on loved ones
Having her family beside her helped Noelle recover. And even a quick chat with a friend can give you the resolve to keep going!

Noelle found the determination to fight despite the odds. Here’s how you can get through anything, too:

Give yourself an “A+”
Before bed, review your successes of the day, no matter how small. Experts say it’ll prime you with confidence to get through the next day!

Believe
“I know Heaven exists,” Noelle says. Whatever you believe in, having faith that there’s something greater inspires you to feel instantly stronger!

Photos: Judy Ramirez-Carvey/StreetflyStudios.com; PinkPig/iStockphoto.

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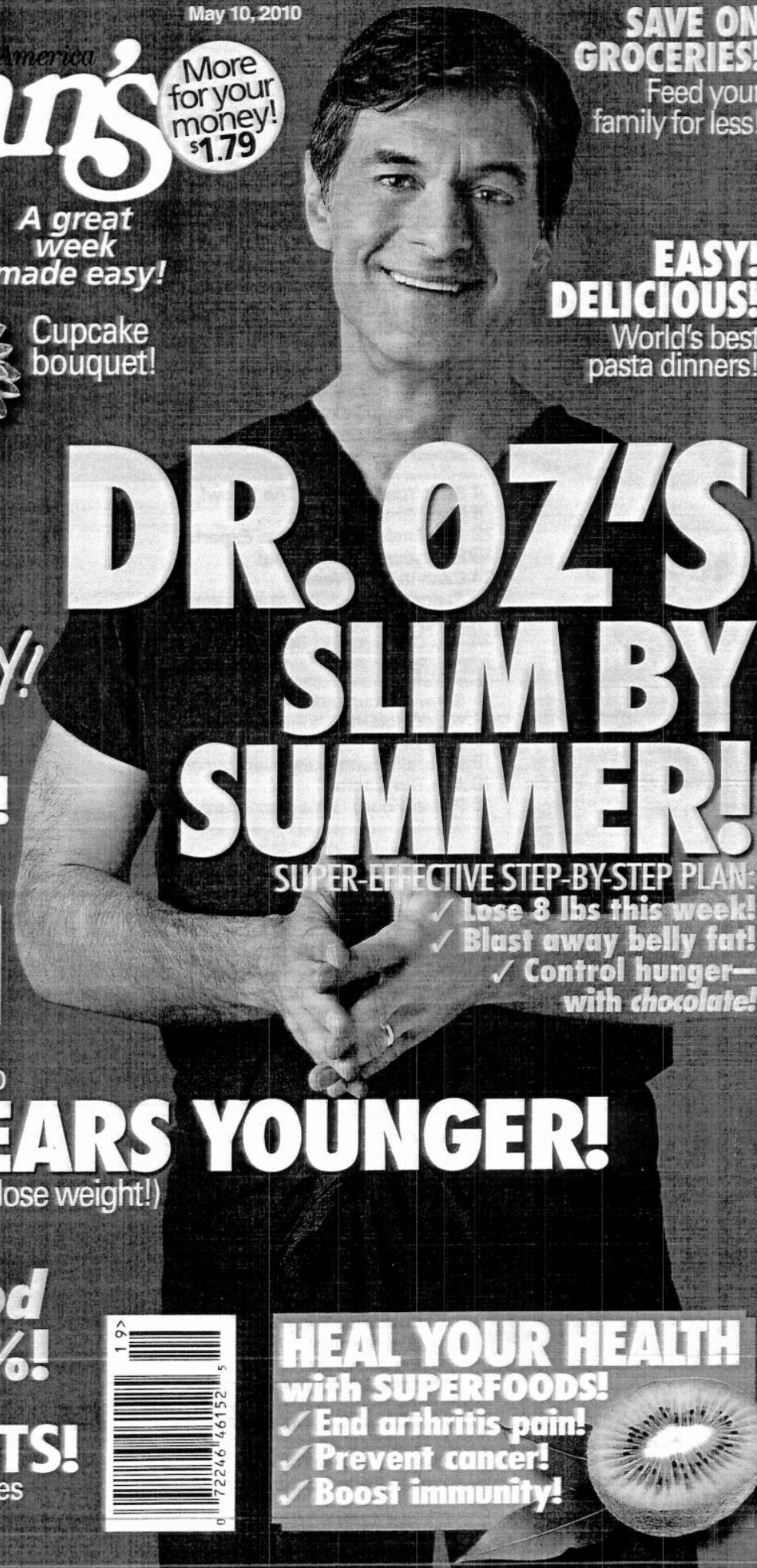
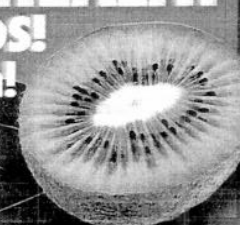
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