

## From Streets to Strength: The Path to Purpose



**“All I saw was flames coming from the barrel of the gun, and by that time, I had been hit.”**

Wendell Manigault Jr. was just 16 years old when his friend shot him in the left side of his neck, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down. Wendell remembers telling his friend to put down the pistol as he was getting ready to make a phone call. “Quit playing with the pistol,” he said. Wendell’s friend never responded, and as he went to make a call, was shot.

Immediately following his injury, Wendell remembers blacking out for 15 seconds, when he came to, he was lying on the floor with his friend towering over him. “I didn’t mean to,” he recalled his friend saying repeatedly. But Wendell didn’t know what was happening. All he knew was he could not move.

Before the injury, Wendell balanced high school with a job at Cactus Car Wash, enjoying the typical teenage life. Wendell enjoyed spending time with his family, and friends, playing basketball, and chasing girls around, but he also had a side hobby.

“The street life,” he said. “I made a poor decision. I was selling drugs.” But Wendell’s life was changed in an instant when a gunshot reshaped his future.

Wendell blamed himself after his injury. He recalled being told by his parents, “...to be mindful of the company you keep.” He chose to disregard that wisdom, as a result, “This is where I am.” Wendell was never raised to live the street life, but it’s the street life that took his ability to walk, among the many little things in life most people take for granted.

Wendell reflected on the simpler things the street life had stolen from him, “Daily, I think about life prior to my injury. The opportunities that I had like going to work, to get up and go as I please, take a vacation, ride a bike, the simpler things in life.” All these things had been taken from Wendell, and he had a difficult time accepting his new circumstances.

For two long years, Wendell struggled to accept his new reality. But once most of his friends and family faded away, he began to face the truth and process what had happened to him. “Either you can wallow in self-pity or carry on with your life,” he shared.



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Despite his struggle to accept his new reality, Wendell gradually began to find hope and support. The resources and services provided through the Head and Spinal Cord Injury (HASCI) waiver played a crucial role in his transition. The HASCI waiver paid for home health aides to provide care in the comfort of Wendell's home, as well as incontinence and other medical supplies. "It's a big help, not only for myself but my loved ones," he said. These resources allowed Wendell to transition comfortably combined with his efforts to get back in the community.

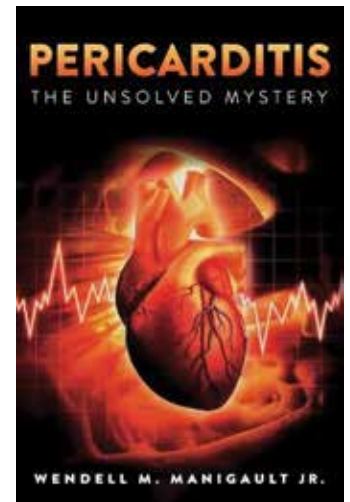
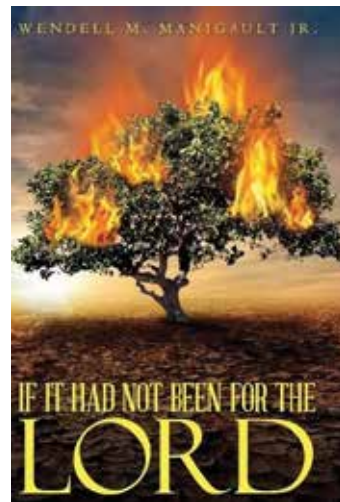
Wendell was able to carry on with his life through prayer and reading the Bible, he also put himself back out there by attending different events and going to church. As for his loved ones, it was a major adjustment accepting Wendell's injury.

Wendell explains his sister had a difficult time accepting his injury. He said, "She took it very hard. There were times when she would walk past my room and not speak to me at all, and I couldn't understand why." To this day, it's hard for her, but she's trying her best, he noted.

Today, it has been 22 years since Wendell was injured, 22 years since the doctor told him he had three to five years left to live. Wendell credits accepting his circumstances by understanding his situation is out of his control, and to leave it in God's hands. It's been 22 years since his injury, but this is not the same Wendell he was 22 years ago.

"My perspective on life is totally different. Everything that I was taught as an adolescent, I'm living by now. The things I didn't take heed to, I now take heed to the wisdom that was given to me. Not only do I take heed of, but I also share that wisdom with people I encounter," he said.

What's some of that wisdom he shares? "Stay in school, get an education, make something out of yourself. Be mindful of the company you keep because everyone you think is your friend isn't your friend. He also shared wisdom for other people with a spinal cord injury, "Prayer, without God, we are nothing. With God, we can do all things."



Wendell now lives by these words, often guest-speaking at churches and other community events. In 2019, Wendell and his mother became authors, writing *If It Had Not Been for the Lord*, detailing his life before and after his injury which coincides with his mother's book, *The Seed of My Womb*, Wendell's injury from his mother's perspective, and *Pericarditis: The Unsolved Mystery*.

Other than writing another book, Wendell aspires to continue his public speaking appearances on a global scale and hopes to see his books gain popularity. With two books on sale on Amazon and his numerous public speaking appearances, I asked if he considers himself a success story despite his injury. "Yes, I am. By the grace of God, my story is a success. I am a success," he said with confidence.

Wendell shares his story with the world, he continues to remind us that resilience isn't just about surviving—it's about finding purpose in our pain.

