



was in my mouth, filling my nose and my eyes. And I couldn't breathe. I broke to the surface and gasped, before going back under and blacking out.

When I came to, I was still in the freezing, sludgy river. I couldn't feel anything below my neck. I couldn't move. "Oh God, I'm drowning," I thought, before blacking out again.

The next time I woke up, I was being dragged out of the water by my friend Sandi. "I can't feel anything," I told her. "I can't feel below my neck. I don't want to die. I really don't want to die." She tried to calm me down, but I could see how petrified she was.

There was chaos on the bank of the river, so at first I didn't notice my dad standing in the flashing lights of a fire engine and an ambulance. My friends were there too and I saw some of them were crying. Everything was a blur as I was rushed to Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro. Sandi came in the ambulance with me while my dad followed behind in the car, calling my mum on the way.

I don't remember much about that first night in hospital, but I do remember the terrifying 45-minute air ambulance flight to Plymouth Hospital the next morning where my surgery would take place. I was rushed into a room where my mum, dad and Nelly met me. "You have broken your neck

and back," a surgeon told us. "I'm sorry to say you will never feel anything below your neck again. What we can do is stabilise your neck so things don't turn even more serious."

Even more serious? What could be more serious than not feeling anything below my neck? It was at that moment we realised this was a life or death situation. My mum started crying. I couldn't process what I'd been told. I'd always been really active, playing netball and surfing every week. It was like he was talking about someone else.

"I'll understand if you want to leave me," I told Nelly. "You don't have to deal with this."

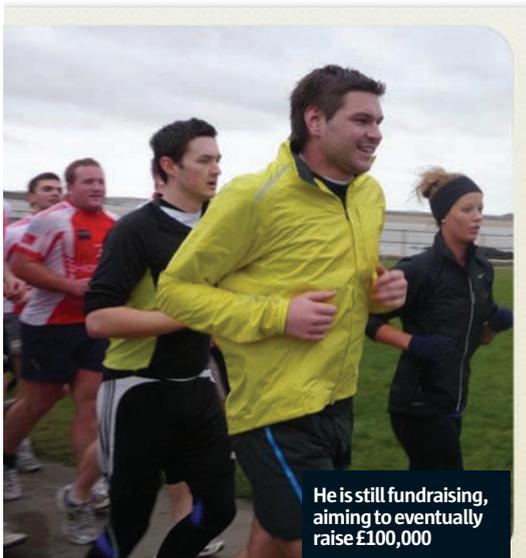
"Don't be so stupid," he said. "We're in this together." And he meant it.

Nelly didn't leave my side from that moment. He quit his job as a college teaching assistant in Devon and stayed with me through my six months of intensive rehabilitation. He scoffed whenever I said: "You can leave anytime, you know," and he was with me when I finally got to go home in May 2012. He moved in with me and my parents to become my full-time carer. By this time I'd come to terms with the fact that I'd had to give up university and I'd also accepted the seemingly impossible – that Nelly was here to stay.

We're the same age and had been dating for three years at the time of my accident, after meeting at university. We were put together in halls and while we instantly got on, it wasn't until our second year we decided to take our friendship to the next level. We were always together and now I needed 24-hour care, he was there every step of the way.

Luckily, my bedroom at home was already on the ground floor so we didn't have to adapt the house at all. Someone comes to help me eat and get dressed in the morning. Then I'll do two hours of physio with Nelly in the special gym at a nearby industrial park we had built with funds raised by my friends when I was in hospital. After my physio, Nelly takes me out. We do normal stuff – go for walks (he'll push me in my chair), or drive around and catch up with friends. He treats me like a princess, making me endless cups of tea and watching TV with me. We laugh just as much as we ever did – in fact, we're closer than before.

My main focus now is physio. I saw gradual changes within a few months after the accident when I started being able to tense muscles in my left arm and even lift it up. Then, in late summer 2012, I moved my right arm properly for the first time. It was emotionally overwhelming. By moving both arms



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I'd achieved something I'd been told was impossible. And it was all down to Nelly working with me every day, keeping me motivated and believing in me.

I've gone from strength to strength since. Every week I find myself doing something new and I can now put my make-up on myself, which is a huge deal. If someone puts the pencils or brushes in my left hand, I can put blusher and eyeshadow on myself.

This year, on 6 October, Nelly proposed to me in the woods near my house. He took me to the place I first visited when I left hospital, got down on one knee and presented me with a beautiful heart-shaped diamond ring. I wept as I said yes. Rather than tear us apart, my accident brought us closer together. We hope to get married in July 2015 in a laid-back ceremony. One day I'd like children, as I'm physically able to but I'd like to wait until I'm stronger.

I want to raise awareness and help other quadriplegics to stay hopeful, because Nelly's been my rock and helped me. He even did the seven marathons in seven days challenge to raise money for me and Spinal Research. I know I'm very lucky to have him. He's made all my Christmas wishes come true."

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