

The Big Read

Let's keep rolling: A story of laughter and opportunity

In 1998, when he was 15, **James Bedding's** life changed forever. Recently, the 43-year-old told his story publicly for the first time when he spoke at an event held at accessible hotel Maison des Landes for National Inclusion Week. Here, Mr Bedding shares, in his words, how he has not let being paralysed from the shoulders down dampen his passion for business, travel, friendship and grasping every opportunity...

TODAY, I want to take you through my journey – from my early life before my spinal injury, through rehabilitation, education, entrepreneurship, travel and eventually to my role in the community.

I've tried to keep this story light, honest and real. There's humour, heart and a healthy dose of stubbornness – because sometimes that's exactly what it takes to carve your own path.

The adventures begin

I grew up in Jersey and was one of those kids who was always on the move. Skiing, skateboarding, mountain biking, surfing – anything fast, fun and preferably dangerous.

Life was full of friends, fun and scraped knees. I didn't realise it at the time, but that sense of freedom and movement would be something I'd later learn to rediscover – just in a very different way.

My accident

In 1998, when I was just 15, my life changed in an instant. It was the first day of the summer holidays.

My mum suggested we go surfing together that day – but I was headstrong, like most teenagers, and wanted to go out with my mates instead. Goes to show... sometimes you really should listen to your mum.

We were down at the Albert Pier in St Helier, skateboarding and messing around. Unfortunately, the tide was out – and I ran off the edge of the pier, falling straight onto the muddy, sandy concrete floor below.

The fall caused a severe spinal cord injury, leaving me paralysed from the shoulders down.

I woke up four days later in Jersey's Intensive Care Unit, coming out of a coma. I was on a ventilator, unable to move, with



■ James Bedding has run a number of businesses and is a licensed drone pilot

my head in traction. But I remember the love and support – my family and friends were all around me.

After nearly two months in intensive care, I was flown to Salisbury Spinal Unit, where I spent close to a year in rehabilitation.

Doctors told me I'd need a ventilator for life. But day by day, breath by breath, I fought to prove them wrong – and, eventually, I began to breathe on my own again.

I still had no idea what my future would look like – but for the first time, I started to believe I could have one.

Rebuilding my life

Rehab wasn't just about rebuilding my body – it was emotional, mental and completely identity-shaking.

At the Salisbury Spinal Unit I had to come to terms with a whole new reality. One of the biggest challenges was learning to ask for help without feeling like I was giving something up.

But there were also moments of real joy. I shared a room with four other paraplegic lads, and, honestly, the banter was top-tier. We laughed, we wound each other up, and we pulled each other through the tough days. That camaraderie made a huge difference.

The occupational therapy department introduced me to a head-mouse system – a small silver reflective dot placed on my forehead I could use to control a computer cursor. I also had a little tube: sip for left-click, puff for right-click.

With that setup, I wrote my very first message to my granny. It was only a single sentence, but, in that moment, I realised that technology was going to be a lifeline. It wasn't just a gadget – it was freedom.

Then came the game-changer: an electric wheelchair with chin control. The first time I got in it, I felt like I had my freedom back. Straight out of the OT department, I was zooming around the hospital – corridors, wards, you name it. I was off.

That wheelchair gave me independence, movement and confidence. After spending so long stuck in bed or needing help to move, it was incredible to feel like I was

in control again, even if it was just with my chin.

Reclaiming control

When I came back to Jersey, I spent time living at Overdale and then at Cheshire Homes. But I wanted more than just care. I wanted control over my life.

With incredible support from my parents, I was able to move into a fully adapted flat, designed specifically for my independence.

And one of the biggest shifts? Having the ability to choose my own carers. That might sound simple, but, for me, it was life changing. It meant I could live on my own terms – make my own decisions, build relationships and shape a life that worked for me.

Returning to college

Once I was back in the world, I set myself a clear goal: to return to education. I went back to Highlands College to finish my GCSEs. It wasn't easy – juggling access needs, adapting to the learning environment and building my confidence again. But I did it. And that experience gave me the belief that I could move forward.

After that, I landed my first proper job – at Jersey Post as a project support officer. I used my adapted computer setup to work in the office and I got involved in all kinds of things: organising internal events, helping with product launches and working on the company newsletter.

It was a supportive environment and a great foundation for everything that came next. It showed me I could work, contribute and be part of a team – all on my own terms.

Sauces and start-ups

Once I'd proven to myself that I could work, I started thinking "what if I could build something of my own?"

My first venture was called Funky Pepper: selling extremely hot chilli sauces



■ Mr Bedding suffered a severe spinal cord injury, which left him paralysed from the shoulders down

that I imported from the United States. I ran everything through my Funky Pepper website and it was a proper hustle.

I was also exploring other fun ideas – one of which was a site called Funky Condom, which, as the name suggests, did exactly what it says on the tin. You've got to try things, right?

These days, my main focus is Vaporizer Hut – which started as an online store and has now grown into a physical shop in Jersey. We specialise in helping people who are prescribed medical cannabis, showing them how to use medical-grade

vaporizers effectively and safely.

In fact, I was the first person in Jersey to be prescribed medical cannabis back in 2020 – and it's had a huge impact on my life. It helps with pain, spasms, sleep and my overall wellbeing. Today, there are over 6,000 people in Jersey accessing medical cannabis – that's a significant part of our community.

Another one of my passions, which started as a hobby but has become a business, is Quad Photography. Yes, that's right – I fly drones using my mouth.

I mount the controller to my electric

wheelchair next to my chin control and use a stylus pen to control the joysticks. I even earned my commercial drone pilot's licence.

I remember travelling to Oxford to sit the exam; I was in a classroom with about 12 others, and I could tell people were thinking, "Is he in the right room?"

That is, until I pulled out my drone setup, showed them my laptop and explained how I fly. You should've seen their faces – it was priceless.

I passed the written exam and even aced the practical field test, flying completely independently.

Every business I've built, from chilli sauces to cannabis education to aerial photography, reflects something I care deeply about: freedom, creativity and helping others gain knowledge and confidence.

Living life to the full

I've always had a good social life. In my 20s I was out with friends all the time: going to parties, clubs, and, yes, partying very hard. Late nights, loud music and a lot of laughs – it was all part of growing up.

Having a disability didn't mean any of that had to stop. I was still living, loving and enjoying life, just like anyone else.

I've had some great relationships over the years – like anyone, full of ups and downs. And here's the truth: having a disability doesn't mean you don't want to be loved or that you can't give love.

In fact, I think it can make a relationship stronger – because it requires patience, communication and a deep level of understanding from both sides.

And remember: there's always a way around things.

Travel has also played a huge part in my life. I've cruised the Med, explored Las Vegas, visited New York, LA, France, Spain... the list goes on.

Travelling with a disability definitely comes with challenges – but it's absolutely worth it. Every adventure has taught me something – whether it's patience, problem-solving, or just how to charm airline staff into upgrading your seat.

Community work and inclusion

In recent years, I've become more focused on giving back. I'm a trustee for Enable Jersey and Maison des Landes, an accessible hotel here in Jersey that's doing

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amazing work to support people with disabilities.

I also advise on accessibility – because the truth is people often don't know what's needed until someone shows them.

For me, inclusion isn't just about ramps and automatic doors – it's about mindset, respect, and giving people the power to make their own choices.

What I've learned

If there's one message I'd like to leave you with, it's this: inclusion gives people the space to thrive.

With the right tools, the right support, and the right attitude from others, we can do so much more than people might imagine.

Yes, my life has had its challenges – but it's also been full of creativity, independence, laughter and purpose.

I also want to take a moment to thank my family and friends, especially my parents, who have supported me every step of the way. I honestly couldn't ask for better.

Let's keep on rolling and moving forward.



■ Mr Bedding said his friends and family, especially his parents, Anne and John, pictured, had been a constant source of support