The author of this selection, actor Christopher Reeve, lost the use of this arms and legs as the result of a horseback-riding accident in 1995. He was best known for his role as Superman in several movies from the 1970s and 1980s. The following selection is from his autobiography, “Still Me.”

At about this time I had to decide if I was well enough to attend the annual fund-raising dinner of The Creative Coalition, scheduled for the seventeenth of October. As one of the founders and recent co-president, I felt a strong obligation to attend, especially because as far back as January I had asked my close friend Robin Williams to be one of the two honorees of the evening. The Creative Coalition was founded in 1989 by Ron Silver, Susan Sarandon, myself, and a number of other celebrities to bring certain issues before the public to try to effect change. We were in the unique position of having access to the media as well as to key players in Washington. Our focus was mainly on the National Endowment for the Arts, homelessness, the environment, and campaign finance reform. Robin was to be honored for his appearances on HBO with Billy Crystal and Whoopi Goldberg for Comic Relief, which had raised millions of dollars to help the homeless. After consulting with Dr. Kirshblum and making special arrangements for Patty and Juice to come with me, I told the board of TCC that I would attend and present Robin his award.

No sooner had I agreed than it dawned on me how challenging this short trip to the Hotel Pierre was going to be. It would be the first time I would be seen or heard in public. I wondered if I would be able to address the audience or if I would be too nervous to speak at all. Would I spasm? Would I have a pop-off? I also knew that getting in and out of the hotel would require well-coordinated security, because the press and photographers would be extremely aggressive in their efforts to get the first pictures of me since the accident.

Dana and I talked it over and decided that the psychological advantage of keeping a long-standing commitment outweighed the risks of just getting through the evening. Robin put his own security people at our disposal. We rented a van from a local company, Dana dusted off my tuxedo, and on the afternoon of the seventeenth I finished therapy early and braced myself to go out into the unknown.

I vividly remember the drive into the city. For nearly four months I had been cruising the halls of Kessler in my wheelchair at three miles per hour. Driving into the city at fifty-five mph

---

1 **access**: the power to reach; to make use of; to get past barriers
2 **National Endowment for the Arts**: An independent agency of the federal government that gives grants for projects, large and small, to promote excellence, diversity and growth in the arts. It was established in 1965.
3 **pop-off**: a term to describe when a patient's breathing tube becomes disconnected.
4 **Dana**: wife to Christopher Reeve
5 **Kessler**: the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, the place where Reeve learned skills to manage his disability.
was an overwhelming experience. All the other cars seemed so close. Everything was rushing by. As we hit the bumps and potholes on the way in, my neck froze with tension and my body spasmed uncontrollably while I sat strapped in the back of the van, able to see only taillights and license plates and the painted lines on the pavement below us. As we pulled up to the side entrance of the Pierre, Juice and Neil Stutzer, who we hired to help us with the logistics\(^6\) and accessibility, taped sheets over the windows to protect us from the photographers. There were hundreds of them, straining at the police barricades that had been set up to give us room to park. The block had been sealed off, and mounted police patrolled the street. A special canopy had been constructed that reached from the side door of the hotel to the roof of our van. Once that was in place I was lowered to the ground and quickly pushed into the building.

We made our way through the kitchen to the service elevator. As I went by, the kitchen workers stood respectfully against the wall and applauded. I was in something of a daze, but I managed to nod and thank them. Soon I found myself in a suite on the nineteenth floor, where I was transferred into a hospital bed to rest and get my bearings. I had made it this far, but the whole experience had been much more intense than I had anticipated, and the evening was still ahead of me.

Soon it was time to get back in the chair and make all the final adjustments before joining a special reception of friends and honored guests. I wheeled into the suite’s living room to find my friends and colleagues from TCC as well as Barbara Walters and Mayor Giuliani, Robin and Marsha, and a sea of other faces, all waiting to greet me and wish me well. For a split second I wished a genie could make me disappear. Somehow I made it through the reception, occasionally doing weight shifts in my chair while Patty discreetly emptied my leg bag and checked my blood pressure. Finally the guests went down to dinner, and I was left alone with Dana to recover. She hugged me but didn’t need to ask how I was doing; she could tell that even though I was white as a sheet, I was happy to be out in the world again.

We watched the evening’s entertainment on a closed-circuit TV until it was time for me to prepare to go onstage. A special ramp had been built from near the kitchen entrance to the stage of the grand ballroom. Black drapes had been hung to shield me from the audience until it was time for me to go. At last, the moment came. I heard Susan Sarandon introducing me from the podium, and suddenly Juice was pushing me up the ramp and onto the stage. As I was turned into position, I looked out to see seven hundred people on their feet cheering. The ovation went on for more than five minutes. Once again I had mixed feelings—of gratitude, excitement, and the desire to disappear. At last the applause died down, and the audience lapsed into an intense silence. A blind person walking into the room probably would not have been able to tell that anyone was there. In a moment of panic I realized that I hadn’t prepared any remarks. All my attention had been focused on the practicalities of the evening. Luckily, a thought popped into my head, and I went with it. I said, “Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I’ll tell you the real reason I’m here tonight.” (A long pause, as I waited for the ventilator to give me my next breath.) "When I was a senior at Princeton Day School (another pause for breath), my English teacher George Packard once asked a student, Why weren’t you

\(^6\) **logistics:** the management, planning, and carrying out of details in an operation of a project
here yesterday?" (Another pause as I tried to form my thoughts.) "And the student replied, 'Sir, I wasn't feeling very well'." (Now I knew where I was going.) "And George Packard replied, 'The only excuse for nonattendance is quadruple amputation.'" I could feel the audience holding their breath. "'In which case, they can still bring you in a basket.' So I thought I'd better show up." A huge laugh and applause. I'd made it.

The rest was easy. I introduced Juice as Glenn Miller, talked about how much I'd missed everyone at TCC, talked about Robin and his accomplishments, then brought him up onstage. For the next twenty minutes he and I bounced off each other. He took the curse off the wheelchair, going around behind it and pretending to adjust all the controls, referring to my breathing tube as a stylish new necktie, and suggesting that I use the chair for a tractor pull. He told the audience that I had to be careful with the sip-and-puff control; if I blew too hard into the tube, I might pop a wheelie and blast off into the audience. The evening was transformed into a celebration of friendship and endurance. A large group of people, many of whom were strangers, were suddenly drawn together into a unit that felt almost like family.

Christopher Reeve died on October 10, 2004 from a heart attack. His wife, Dana, died of lung cancer on March 6, 2006.

Christopher Reeve – Biomedical Research speech

This speech was delivered by Christopher Reeve on August 26, 1996.

Over the last few years, we've heard a lot about something called family values. And like many of you, I've struggled to figure out what that means. But since my accident, I've found a definition that seems to make sense. I think it means that we're all family, that we all have value. And if that's true, if America really is a family, then we have to recognize that many members of our family are hurting.

Just to take one aspect of it, one in five of us have some kind of disability. You may have an aunt with Parkinson's disease. A neighbor with a spinal cord injury. A brother with AIDS. And if we're really committed to this idea of family we have got to do something about it.

First of all, our nation cannot tolerate discrimination of any kind. That's why the Americans with Disabilities Act\(^7\) is so important and must be honored everywhere. It is a civil rights law that is tearing down barriers both in architecture and in attitude. Its purpose is to give the disabled access not only to buildings but to every opportunity in society. I strongly believe our nation must give its full support to the caregivers who are helping people with disabilities live independent lives.

Sure, we have got to balance the budget. And we will.

We have to be extremely careful with every dollar that we spend. But we also have got to take care of our family -- and not slash programs people need. We should be enabling, healing, curing.

One of the smartest things we can do about disability is invest in research that will protect us from disease and lead to cures. This country already has a long history of doing just that. When we put our minds to a problem, we can usually find solutions. But our scientists can do more. And we've got to give them the chance.

That means more funding for research. Right now, for example, about 250,000 Americans have a spinal cord injury. Our government spends about $8.7 billion a year just maintaining these members of our family. But we spend only $40 million a year on research that

---

\(^{7}\) **Americans with Disabilities Act**: A federal civil rights law enacted in 1990 that protects citizens with mental or physical disabilities from discrimination in employment or in accessing public accommodations.
would actually improve the quality of their lives, get them off public assistance, or even cure them.

We have got to be smarter, do better. Because the money we invest in research today is going to determine the quality of life of members of our family tomorrow.

During my rehabilitation, I met a young man named Gregory Patterson. When he was innocently driving through Newark, N.J., a stray bullet from a gang shooting went through his car window... right into his neck and severed his spinal cord. Five years ago, he might have died. Today, because of research, he's alive.

But merely being alive is not enough. We have a moral and an economic responsibility to ease his suffering and prevent others from experiencing such pain. And to do that we don't need to raise taxes. We just need to raise our expectations.

America has a tradition many nations probably envy: we frequently achieve the impossible. That's part of our national character. That's what got us from one coast to another. That's what got us the largest economy in the world. That's what got us to the moon.

On the wall of my room when I was in rehab was a picture of the space shuttle blasting off, autographed by every astronaut now at NASA. On the top of the picture it says, "We found nothing is impossible." That should be our motto. Not a Democratic motto, not a Republican motto. But an American motto. Because this is not something one party can do alone. It's something that we as a nation must do together.

So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable. If we can conquer outer space, we should be able to conquer inner space, too: the frontier of the brain, the central nervous system and all the afflictions of the body that destroy many lives and rob our country of so much potential.

Research can provide hope for people who suffer from Alzheimer's. We've already discovered the gene that causes it. Research can provide hope for people like Muhammad Ali and the Rev. Billy Graham who suffer from Parkinson's. Research can provide hope for the millions of Americans such as Kirk Douglas who suffer from stroke. We can ease the pain of people such as Elizabeth Glaser, whom we lost to AIDS. And now that we know that nerves in the spinal cord can regenerate, we are on the way to getting millions of people around the world such as me up and out of our wheelchairs.

Fifty-six years ago, FDR dedicated new buildings for the National Institutes of Health. He said that "the defense this nation seeks, involves a great deal more than building airplanes, ships, guns, and bombs. We cannot be a strong nation unless we are a healthy nation." He could have said that today.

President Roosevelt showed us that a man who could barely lift himself out of a wheelchair could still lift a nation out of despair. And I believe -- and so does this administration -- in the most important principle FDR taught us: America does not let its needy citizens fend for themselves. America is stronger when all of us take care of all of us. Giving new life to that ideal is the challenge before us tonight.

Thank you very much.

---

8 rehabilitation: the process of being restored to good health or useful like through training or therapy.
9 sever: to become separated; to be cut off from the whole
10 affliction: a condition of pain or suffering
11 FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was the 32\textsuperscript{nd} president of the United States. He was stricken with polio as an adult and eventually was confined to a wheelchair during his presidency.
Fill in the Box

In his autobiography and his speech, Christopher Reeve reveals many things about his personality, his physical condition, and his beliefs. Complete the web below by writing words or phrases in the six boxes to describe Christopher Reeve. Include information from both his autobiography and his speech in your web.

Multiple Choice

1. _____ The Creative Coalition was founded in order to
   a. increase public awareness of social issues and effect change.
   b. bring more people into careers in the arts.
   c. honor people for their special achievements in the arts.
   d. increase support among lawmakers for funding of the arts.

2. _____ Robin Williams was being honored at the dinner for his
   a. comedy routines.
   b. assistance to promising young actors.
   c. efforts in raising funds for the homeless.
   d. contributions to the National Endowment for the Arts.
3. _____ Christopher Reeve’s main reason for attending the dinner was to
   a. entertain his friends.
   b. keep a long-standing commitment.
   c. get away from the rehabilitation center.
   d. receive an award.

4. _____ Reeve’s speech focuses mainly on persuading people to support
   a. a balanced budget.
   b. family values.
   c. higher taxes to aid the disabled.
   d. scientific research.

5. _____ When Christopher Reeve went to a fundraising dinner honoring Robin Williams, he
   needed extra security because
   a. he and Williams were supporting a very controversial issue.
   b. it was the first time he had been out in public since his accident.
   c. he wanted to keep his plans a secret.
   d. his latest movie had been wildly popular.

6. _____ As he prepared to go to the fundraising dinner, Reeve was especially worried about
   a. what he would say.
   b. whether his friends would still recognize him.
   c. how much money they would be able to raise for the Creative Coalition.
   d. whether he had the physical strength and stamina to get through the evening.

7. _____ Reeve was in a wheelchair as a result of
   a. polio.
   b. a spinal cord injury.
   c. multiple sclerosis.
   d. a gunshot wound.

8. _____ In his speech, Reeve urged his listeners to
   a. provide funding for scientists who do medical research.
   b. pay more attention to the needs of people in their own families.
   c. think seriously about raising their taxes for a worthy cause.
   d. support gun control so that gang shootings would be less likely.

9. _____ In his speech, Reeve’s primary focus for people with disabilities was on improving
   their
   a. quality of daily care.
   b. economic standard of living.
   c. access to opportunities in society.
   d. survival rates.

10. _____ A person in charge of logistics for an event is responsible for
    a. entertaining.
    b. managing details.
    c. giving money.

11. _____ Having access to something allows you to
    a. use it.
    b. control it.
    c. change it.

12. _____ A person’s affliction is
    a. an opinion.
    b. a cause of suffering.
    c. a way of speaking.

13. _____ To sever a nerve is to
    a. mend it.
    b. examine it.
    c. cut it.
14. _____ A patient in rehabilitation is in a state of  
   a. shock. b. confusion. c. recovery.

**Critical Thinking**

15. Christopher Reeve starred as the hero Superman in the movies. Who do you think is more of a hero, Superman or Christopher Reeve? Why? Think about Superman’s remarkable powers compared to Reeve’s courage and determination.

16. What is the meaning of the title *Still Me*? Consider Reeve’s disability, and Reeve’s attitude toward his disability.

17. Christopher Reeve and other people with disabilities prefer to be described as disabled rather than handicapped. Look up the word handicap in a dictionary. Do you agree that handicapped is not an appropriate description of Reeve’s condition? Why?

18. When Reeve tells the story about his high school English teacher, the people in the audience laugh and applaud. Why do you think they laugh? How do you think they are really feeling?