

**About Health TV with Jeanne Blake**  
**Travis Roy, Author, *Eleven Seconds***  
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JEANNE BLAKE: Welcome to *About Health* TV. I'm Jeanne Blake. We have a special guest today, someone I think you'll recognize. Travis Roy grew up on skates in Maine and dreamed of the Olympics and a career in professional hockey. That dream ended five years ago on the ice at Boston University, 11 seconds into his first college game. A freak accident drove Travis into the boards. He was paralyzed. The grace with which he handled his injury and his recovery has made him somewhat of a national hero, and we welcome Travis today to talk about life. Travis, welcome. Thank you for coming in today.

TRAVIS: Thanks for having me.

JEANNE BLAKE: We've wanted to have you on this program for a couple of years. It's really an honor to have you.

TRAVIS: As I say, it's nice to be here, and I enjoy doing these things, I really do.

JEANNE BLAKE: You don't much like being referred to as a national hero, do you?

TRAVIS: Not really. No, it just seems a little weird – I guess it's more just how the whole thing came about, breaking my neck, and how that can end up turning me into some sort of hero. It's just a little weird. I don't think of myself as a hero. I'm just sort of an average kid, college student. As I say, I've come a long way.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think that it is the way that you handled and the way that your family supported you that made everyone have such a respect for you and for your family. It's not just going into the boards and being left with your injury, it was really the dignity with which you handled it.

TRAVIS: I think that's, as you mention, I think that's the other side of this. I'm the one that everybody sees and stands in front of the camera, but it's just not me that's the hero, it's my family and friends, just the incredible support. And even to an extent, it's the community, certainly throughout Boston and New England and across the country, and around the world – I got mail from everywhere – but I certainly have a team of people that have made it so much easier than it could have been.

JEANNE BLAKE: We'll be talking about some of those people in a few minutes, but first of all, just tell us what you're doing now.

TRAVIS: I'm in my last semester at Boston University, and can't wait to get through with it. I'm ready to get done with it, but I'm sort of ready for the next step. I talk with people, and I guess that's natural. So that's going really well, and I'm just trying to figure out where to go from here.

JEANNE BLAKE: What are your thoughts about what you'll be doing?

TRAVIS: I'm thinking about getting into radio and doing either play-by-play or sports radio, talk radio. I have a foundation that I set up, and link into that some more, and do that maybe full time, or more than what I'm doing now. There's so many opportunities out there and so many people willing to open doors for me. I think it's great to have those connections, but I certainly want to be qualified in whatever I end up doing.

JEANNE BLAKE: I don't have any doubt, after reading your book, which I'm going to hold up right now: *Eleven Seconds: The Story of Tragedy, Courage, and Triumph*. Travis, you wrote this with Ed Swift, who's a senior writer at Sports Illustrated. It's a book that is incredibly honest and revealing, and I have to say that until I read the book, which was recently, and of course five years ago read about your injury and was touched, as everybody else does, but this was the first time that I really understood how much hockey was a part of your life.

TRAVIS: I was a physical person. I loved to hike, I loved to play sports. I really enjoyed the physical aspect of life. Hockey certainly capitalized on that, the sensations, the physical sensations of playing hockey was wonderful, and it certainly is – it's been five years, and I haven't even come close to replacing that. The loss of it has certainly been tough. But I never enjoyed anything more, as much as I enjoyed hockey.

JEANNE BLAKE: You and your dad had a real bond through that. Hockey was your dad's life, too.

TRAVIS: Sure. Well, he managed an ice rink up in Maine, right in my hometown, and we spent a lot of hours on the ice together, and they're a lot of my best memories, just he and I out there, working on my skills. But it was never work. I say work on my skills, it was just fun, it was a great time, having that time with my father. They were special moments, and certainly a lot of people don't get to share

that time with their fathers, and I realized how lucky I was to be able to do that. Certainly it was nice to see it pay off with a scholarship, and who knows what the future would have been after that.

JEANNE BLAKE: Also, this isn't something that developed as an adolescent. There's a picture of you in your book when you couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 years old with skates on.

TRAVIS: One of the funny things, just recently, the rink that I grew up on, they redid it and actually renamed it after me, which was quite an honor ... It's funny, I have a shirt, from when I first started going there, and it had the school's name, but the number on the back was 1/2. I wasn't even big enough to have the full number yet. So I definitely started when I was young, they said I could skate before I could walk. It wasn't anything I was pushed into, it was just fun, and I always enjoyed it, and they continued to provide, my parents provided me with opportunities to play on different travel teams to build on my career, so I'm awfully grateful to have had those opportunities.

JEANNE BLAKE: You said before that your dad and you had this special time, and how great for him, too, because I could tell by reading your book that this was not something that you were pushed into. There was a deep passion you had for this. And how great for your dad to have you love it that much.

TRAVIS: Absolutely. But again, and I say provide opportunities, but that's exactly what they did. If I wanted to go to the next step, they provided me with that. If I didn't want it, they would have said, "Great, you've had a great career." But certainly it was, obviously a competitive edge came out, and the challenges, I enjoyed those more than anything. The doubters – being from Maine, you think of it as cold, and I'm sure a big hockey state, and the University of Maine certainly has had good programs. There really are a very, very few players that actually make it to the Division I.

JEANNE BLAKE: Is that right?

TRAVIS: Right now I think there's two Maine players in Division I, and I was the first one, I think, in a long time to go out with a full scholarship like I did. Again, there are a lot of people that sort of questioned whether I could do it, and it was sort of fun to sign that letter of intent, play in that first game. I certainly proved to a lot of people that I had made it, that I had done ...

JEANNE BLAKE: You sure did. I almost hate to bring up the accident. You wrote the book about it, you're living it.

TRAVIS: It's a natural progression of questions, so that always comes up.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let me ask you, eleven seconds into the game, can you just recall for us the joy you felt – I think folks will understand – this sense of accomplishment you felt when your blades hit the ice that night?

TRAVIS: Hopefully down the road ... peak of my life at that point, certainly, and I still haven't gotten back there yet, but I don't know if I ever will. I dreamed about that for years, to play Division I hockey, and I had worked so hard in the preseason, I wanted to be in the lineup for that first game, and I see these men raising the national banner for the national NCAA championship that they won the year before. I couldn't have been any more excited, I'd never been so excited in my life. The national anthem, and raise the banners, and I'm an emotional person, I had to fight back tears. I knew I couldn't be crying out there on the ice as a hockey player for my first game, but it was emotional. As I say, I've never been so excited in my life.

JEANNE BLAKE: And you knew you were in trouble after you hit the boards, and you knew that your body wasn't moving.

TRAVIS: The process is really funny, certainly you're not subjected to it all that often in life, or never at all. When I hit the boards, I was lying there, and right away I knew something was seriously wrong. I couldn't move. And it's a funny injury, it's a catastrophic injury, you can't move – not only can you not move, you can't feel. So there's very little pain involved. My neck was a little sore, but it wasn't excruciating or anything like that. It was, to a certain degree, there was almost, I don't know if it's peacefulness, but as awkward as my body was lying, it didn't matter, because I didn't feel it. Mentally, what I was feeling was complete comfortableness. I couldn't tell if my feet were crossed up, or if my arm was underneath me, or something was pinched. It's really weird that way.

JEANNE BLAKE: What's it like, then, in the subsequent months, in facing the reality of all that you had lost, and the tremendous struggle, emotionally and physically, to get back to the level that you are today? What is it like to feel detached, physically, from the shoulders up? Is there a way you can describe that so those of us who –

TRAVIS: That's a tough question. Physically, I can't move, and I can't feel. Which is ironic, because it actually becomes a mental battle, trying to figure out how to cope with it. The day-to-day life.

But to put it in perspective – yeah, I can't feel from my shoulders down. I have a little bit of my bicep muscle, which allows me to move my right arm. But that's always been the challenge, trying to describe to somebody what it's like to be paralyzed. There's so many different aspects of it. I don't sweat any more, I don't have goosebumps any more, so that means I can't control my body temperature. If I'm out in the cold, my body temperature will literally drop. Normally it's 98.5, and it goes down to 96, sometimes to 95. But it takes me a little while to register that I'm cold, because when you're 98, when you get down to 97.5, not too bad. When you get down to 97 or 96.5, and all of a sudden you realize you're pretty cold and you have no system to warm your body up.

JEANNE BLAKE: Those are things people don't think about when they think about you living with this.

TRAVIS: Exactly. So you have to be really careful. And same when you're out in the sun, your temperature will just go up to 100, 101, 102. So you have to be careful. The other thing, I sit in my wheelchair all day, I can't feel that my bottom is probably a little, would like to get up and move around a little bit. So you have to be careful with skin sores and skin problems. There's just so many complications, it's just endless. Part of me is always thinking about these different things, making sure that I'm doing everything right, otherwise I don't want to spend any more time in the hospital and have any more complications than what I did have when I was in hospitals.

JEANNE BLAKE: And when something is wrong inside, you can't tell either.

TRAVIS: No. There's sort of a – they call it autonomic dysreflexia, which sometimes you'll get headaches, or you'll get a little dizzy, or sometimes you can perspire a little bit, but it's not natural, it's not when you're out in the sun, it's your body giving you some signals. But now the question is, what is my body trying to tell me? Did I run into the wall and break my foot? Are my toes broken? It could be a number of different things. Do I have an infection? So then you've got to try and figure out what's wrong. And over time, you start to figure out, do I need to go to the bathroom? Things like that, that are certainly personal, but it's an ongoing game sometimes. It's been four and a half years now and I've started to figure out all the different signs that my body does give me, which is good, but it takes a while to get to that point.

JEANNE BLAKE: Then the emotional challenge is, I'm sure, never ending. As I was reading your book – you wrote it, was it a year and a half after your injury?

TRAVIS: Just about a year after, a year and a half after my injury.

JEANNE BLAKE: How would you say that you've progressed from the time that you wrote the book – I mean, is it still a day-to-day challenge to accept it and to figure out mentally how to overcome things?

TRAVIS: This is my biggest challenge right now, is I'm not sure if I'll ever accept it, but maybe I need to come to what degree of acceptance. Maybe I need to accept it a little bit more than I have. I talk with people, and that's always my first question, How are you doing? Are you happy?

JEANNE BLAKE: You still ask people that?

TRAVIS: Other people in wheelchairs.

JEANNE BLAKE: You still ask people that.

TRAVIS: Yeah, because I see some and they are happy, and they've moved on. And I think the biggest difference I find right now between people who are happy – and a lot of them won't say they're as happy as they were before, but they're pretty close. Some of them are. But I think the biggest difference, what those people have found and what I haven't found yet, is they found something to be passionate about. Now, again, I was passionate about hockey. And I worry that I'll never find anything to replace that. So again, it's sort of the battle of trying to accept it. It's hard to accept it with the day-to-day activities: getting out of bed, it takes me almost two hours to bathe and get dressed. And those two hours you can't help but think about what's going on, having someone else brush your teeth, and throughout those two hours and throughout the day I'm always thinking, Is this really happening to me?

JEANNE BLAKE: You're still thinking that, Travis.

TRAVIS: Yeah, and it just doesn't make sense to me.

JEANNE BLAKE: There was one paragraph in the book, and it's the one that's on the bottom that I printed out for you, that I think you describe so beautifully what it's like for you to be on the ice. And as I said earlier, it wasn't until I read your book, *Eleven Seconds* that I understood that passion that you did have for hockey. It's beautiful, the sounds that you loved and the way that the ice looked. You absorbed that, even as a young child you loved that about it. And that second paragraph, I'm going to ask you to

read that excerpt from the book, because that, to me, describes the loss better than anything. And I understand, and I feel so badly for you that you live with that loss.

TRAVIS: Would you like me to start with the top –

JEANNE BLAKE: The second one. Because the first one describes Travis's passionate feelings about hockey through all of your senses –

TRAVIS: Right, being in the rink –

JEANNE BLAKE: Being in the rink ... But the second one is what described for me that sense of loss.

TRAVIS: Sure. This paragraph comes after getting off the ice and skating around on the rink by myself and having that time.

JEANNE BLAKE: Actually, that's important for you to say. Putting it in context for me. You'll be good at radio, by the way. This is when Travis would be on the rink in Maine, and when he would leave after – skating alone, which you did a lot of nights, and then you'd lock up the rink that you said your dad managed, and you'd be leaving –

TRAVIS: So this is 1:00 in the morning, 2:00. "Afterward, damp with sweat, I'd lock up and flip off the lights, then step out and look up to the night sky. You couldn't help it. There's nothing like the Maine sky on a winter night. The air so cold, the snow crunches and squeaks beneath your boots, the steam rising off your neck, the skeletons of maple trees silhouetted by more stars than one can count, or even believe. I loved it. I think of those nights often and would give anything to be able to retrieve them now." I certainly had a ... so clearly, and more than not, I think a lot of people never acknowledged them, or never took the time to look up at the sky, and I did that. Again, a lot of those things, when I had those moments, I took a few seconds to think about where I was in my life and what was going on around me. I think that was one of the fortunate things that I did, that did happen, whether it was maturity or whether it's just an awareness of – I remember how lucky I was then to have those times.

JEANNE BLAKE: That made me think about – actually, it was something else that you wrote in the book about the values that are ingrained in your being, growing up, and those are the values that will carry you through your life. And clearly, whether it's personality – I suspect it was something that

happened in your family that gave you an appreciation for the world around you, that as a kid, you could conceptualize that that was a gift. I don't want the interview to end without talking about your family, because you mentioned them early on too. What remarkable people. And you also. I mean, the Roy family, really remarkable people.

TRAVIS: I think that's where I have my biggest pride, is in my family and how they dealt with it. Not only how they dealt with it, but the values they instilled in me. Again, for me to recognize these things. That's certainly a tribute to them and what they made me aware of, and what they made me appreciate, and certainly hard work, and just sort of what I did. And I say this a lot, what I did have versus what I didn't have. And I think that's what's helped me out so much now, my frame of mind is still much the same way. I'm thankful for what I do have, the family that I can go to ... I have great friends. I have great insurance, which is major – we could spend hours talking about that. I have the right adaptive equipment. So I have so many good things going for me. But I could also sit here and say I'm in a wheelchair all day ... but that's just not how I choose to look at it. And it all goes back to my family, and extended family, my grandparents and cousins, because certainly they had a role in the upbringing of my parents. Certainly I come from a wonderful, loving, caring family, and I realize how lucky I am to have them.

JEANNE BLAKE: It's important in your ability to deal – even to sit here and to be as honest as you are with me about the fact that you're not where you want to be emotionally yet, on a level of acceptance. There seems to be – you've always had permission to deal with your emotions. You said that you're an emotional person, that you love to hug and you love to touch and you're tactile, but you cried readily, and your dad cried, we saw him –

TRAVIS: Absolutely. The media loved it. They love the crying.

JEANNE BLAKE: I hate to say I'm part of the media, but – I think, from where I'm coming from and the work that I currently do, to see a man – you made a comment before, "I'm a hockey player, how could I stand out there and cry?" but for us to be able to give boys permission to cry seems like an important message from you. Because it has helped you deal along the way.

TRAVIS: It certainly has. To express your emotions, I think that's what life is all about, love and feelings and friends, but when you talk about friends, it's the emotions you share with those friends, and to hide them, it's too big of a loss. I think the happy times, the sad times, the bonds that build off

emotions, and those shared emotions – I love to have a good cry every once in a while. I don't care what you say, you feel so much better after a good cry.

JEANNE BLAKE: You write in your book that to get beyond the pain you have to be able to deal with –

TRAVIS: Yeah. And again, and as I've said, I'm still trying to figure out that one a little bit, and the pain, and sometimes I suppress it for a little bit, and sometimes it comes back and I deal with it. And it's an ongoing battle, and I realize that. It's not going to solve itself ... in time it'll sort of sort itself out.

JEANNE BLAKE: Coach Parker at Boston University played, and I suspect still plays, an important part in your life, and you cried with him many nights. I had a feeling – you might have even said this, maybe I'm cheating here, but I concluded from things that you wrote about him that it was important to have another trusting adult that you could share those emotions with, so you sort of didn't burden your family, that you knew was going through their own sense of loss.

TRAVIS: It certainly was a great outlet for me to have somebody down here in Boston. There were other – my dad and I have very similar personalities, some things we don't even discuss, some parts we do talk about, and some of those things I didn't discuss with my father I sort of discussed with Coach Parker. I was fortunate to have that other person. We're going out to eat tomorrow night. And we have a great time with each other. Certainly, I think we've made each other better people.

JEANNE BLAKE: Travis, I'm glad to hear you say that you've got good friends. It doesn't surprise me one dot. But it was hard for your transition back to BU. A year after your injury you went back to BU, and you'd get on the elevator and people wouldn't even look at you. That was so hard for me to read that.

TRAVIS: It was really tough. Part of it was, I didn't know how to act myself in a wheelchair ... so I didn't know how to interact as well. Part of it was, I say my fault, but I think that's natural. And the other thing was, I think people have come a long way as far as how to act around people with disabilities and treating them equally. I think I've learned how to deal with that more, how to approach people, a smile and a hello and people are more than willing to open up and return it, and I think that helps quite a bit. So I've learned a lot in living with a disability and what it means. I think I've been able to do a lot of teaching as well, and opening people's minds. But yeah, I'm in a wheelchair and I can't move and I

can't feel, but the mind is the same and cognitively I think the same way, and friendships can still exist the same as how they were ... the same as whether I'm able-bodied or not.

JEANNE BLAKE: And your heart's the same, I can tell.

TRAVIS: The heart's the same, absolutely.

JEANNE BLAKE: Your family was the benefactor, or you were the benefactor of a lot of love and financial support after your accident. You've turned that around and have started a foundation that I want to talk about, and we'll put the address up, and hopefully people who see this will want to join you in your effort to make a difference. Let's just talk a little bit about your mission with that.

TRAVIS: Sure. It got the point where financially, it was unbelievable the support I had, and I wanted return the support I had. So I started a foundation, the Travis Roy Foundation. It has two main goals. One is to help with spinal cord research. We raise money through events, golf tournaments, and people come to us with ideas and we say, Sure, go ahead and run with it ... So half the money goes to spinal cord research, which is all looking very promising. Maybe one day I'll be out of this chair and walking, it's sort of a matter of time, and more so money. And then the other side of it is the adaptive equipment side of it. It's amazing, the adaptive equipment out there and the technologies, amazing computers and wheelchairs and vans. So we give out matching grants to individuals that need help buying wheelchairs to get out and get around, or a van so they can get to work, or a computer. It's exciting to be able to help people out. As I said, people have seen what I've been able to do with the right technology, and it's great to provide opportunities for other people.

JEANNE BLAKE: Right, and enhance the quality of their life to the degree that you can.

TRAVIS: Exactly.

JEANNE BLAKE: Good for you. I'm sorry that this half-hour's up already. Can you believe it?

TRAVIS: It was a quick half-hour. As I say, I can't thank you enough, and especially the people out there that have helped me ... one day soon enough I'll get out of this wheelchair –

JEANNE BLAKE: I'd love to have you come back –

TRAVIS: That would be very nice.

JEANNE BLAKE: My hope for you is that you find your passion, and I suspect that you will.

TRAVIS: Thanks.

JEANNE BLAKE: You seem to approach life with your arms and eyes and heart wide open, and we all wish you the very, very best.

TRAVIS: Thank you.

JEANNE BLAKE: I'm going to give you the address for the Travis Roy Foundation. How can you not write a check to this young man's foundation? The Travis Roy Foundation, c/o Palmer and Dodge, 1 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108. And as we said, the foundation supports spinal cord injury research, and also enhances the quality of life of those who are living with spinal cord injury, right Travis?

TRAVIS: Yeah, it's been great. Spinal cord injury research, as you said, as well as helping people buy adaptive equipment or whatnot. And as I said, the Palmer and Dodge company's done a lot for us, so I'll give them a little plug as well.

JEANNE BLAKE: Very good. Thank you again for being with us, we do wish you all the best.

TRAVIS: Thank you so much. I had a great time today.

JEANNE BLAKE: Good. All right, Travis. And we want to thank you for joining us on this special edition of *About Health* TV. I'm Jeanne Blake, and we'll see you next time.

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