

I fell on a dance floor, broke my neck and my life changed forever

Martin Codrye tells **Celine Naughton** how he's searching for a miracle cure to help him walk again

Since breaking his neck in a freak accident four years ago, 36-year-old Martin Codrye is dedicating his life to finding a cure for paralysis.

Before the moment that changed his life, Martin had the world at his feet. A Wall Street high-flyer from Bray, Co Wicklow, he had been snapped up to work with Goldman Sachs, then Merrill Lynch in New York. He played rugby for the Village Lions club in New York and his enviable lifestyle allowed him to indulge his love of sports, including trips to some of the finest ski resorts in the world.

"What I have now is a shadow of my former life, which was pretty cool," he says. "I loved playing rugby, skiing, mountain biking and all those adrenaline-type pursuits."

Inspired by the 'can do' philosophy of his adopted town, he had set up his own business in live mobile video. It had begun to crack the US and he had plans to make it global. With 10 years' experience in the heart of the world's financial capital and contacts that would make a dragon weep, he was set to become one of the most celebrated of this country's diaspora.

He may still be celebrated, but for very different reasons. The turning point for Martin came four years ago at a friend's wedding, when he fell on the dance floor, head first. In seconds, his neck was broken. As an ambulance rushed him to the Mater Hospital, two of his vertebrae were already crushed. He wasn't in pain. When your neck is broken, you don't feel pain. You don't feel anything.

"Well, my head hurt like hell, but apart from that I felt nothing," says Martin, "yet it didn't occur to me then how serious it was. It wasn't like I'd come off a high building or had a car crash at speed. It was just a little slip on a dance floor. I'd be fine."

He spent the first 10 days on a life-support machine, unable to breathe for himself. "It's a strange feeling, being



What friends are for: Martin with Rosanna Davison at the Martin Codrye Challenge Cycle

Money is key in 'war on paralysis'

Martin has a wide circle of friends who, along with his family, support him by organising a variety of fundraising events to ensure he has all the assistance that he needs to pursue his goal.

Upcoming events include a cycling challenge on Saturday, July 7, on Bray seaford and a flower workshop on Sunday, July 15, at Dogwood, Kilmurray, Kilmacanogue, Co Wicklow. "We're always looking for volunteers to help with our

fundraising projects," says Martin.

"I would welcome contact from anybody who believes they can help in the war on paralysis."

For further information, visit www.martincodrye.com or to make a donation visit www.mycharity.ie/charity/themartincodryefund or by lodgment to the fund account. Account name: The Martin Codrye Fund Trustee's Account. Sort Code: 933481. Account Number: 24940058.

conscious but unable to speak or breathe. I remember trying to use eye movements to ask my father to put on my iPod so I could listen to my music."

It was a devastating time for all the family, his mum, dad and younger brother and sister. "When something like this happens, it affects everybody you hold dear," he says. MRI scans and other tests showed the damage was irreversible. Martin was paralysed from the shoulders down. In an instant, the one-time entrepreneur and sports enthusiast had become wheelchair bound and relying on carers to tend to his physical needs.

He flinches at the word 'carers'. "I don't need anybody to care for me," he says. "I need people to do the things I physically can't do for myself. I call them personal assistants."

Slowly, over the following weeks, he learned to breathe unaided. On September 24, the day he was due to return

to New York, he was transferred to the National Rehabilitation Hospital for further treatment and months of rehab.

He now lives in a bungalow in Co Wicklow, with two personal assistants on hand round-the-clock to tend to his needs.

There are lots of things I can't do," he says, sipping coffee from a straw on a table with a massive picture of Audrey Hepburn on the wall behind. On another wall is a large print of a New York street scene, a reminder of the city he loves for all its energy, culture and hard ambition.

It's true that there are lots of things he can't do. He can't get in or out of bed by himself, he can't make tea and, until he gets a new, specially adapted wheelchair, he can't drive a car. But he can use a computer and a mobile phone — and he is determined that

he will be a key player in finding a cure for paralysis.

With an honours degree in engineering from UCD, an intense knowledge of modern technology and his first-hand experience at the coalface of economic trading, Martin doesn't see this as a pipedream but as his most important challenge to date.

Like the late actor Christopher Reeve, who wrote a book called *Nothing is Impossible* after becoming paralysed in a fall from a horse, Martin is determined that a cure for spinal cord injuries will be found.

"My personal goal is to be able to move my thumb," he says. "That would give me a huge amount of flexibility, but I really believe that once we make a connection with a digit like a thumb, we can use that technology to reconnect the brain to damaged nerves which will allow people to walk again."

Since his accident he has studied the latest research in spinal cord injuries and has been to conferences all over the world, most recently in China and Canada, speaking directly to the world's leading scientists in the field.

"It has to be down to people like me to own this problem, do the research and become as knowledgeable as the scientists," he says.

It is a testament to his indomitable spirit that Martin perseveres in his goal, even in times of adversity. The latest trip to the conference in Canada proved a challenge when he cut his leg and it became infected.

"When you're paralysed, you are vulnerable to skin infections and pressure sores because there isn't enough circulation," he says. However, even though his leg started swelling, Martin was determined to make a



Willing and able: Martin Codrye is determined to become a key player in the search for a cure for paralysis. Photo by Dave Meehan

meeting he had arranged with particular scientists.

"This trip was planned for six months — I wasn't about to let anything get in the way," he says. The meeting was a success — he is confident it will help pave the way for important research — but straight afterwards he was rushed to hospital in Vancouver where he spent five days in the ER with cellulitis.

Even when he returned home it took time to build up

his energy levels, but soon he was able to resume his daily routine. Modern technology, which was always second nature to Martin, has proved a lifeline.

Every day he collaborates with like-minded individuals through conference calls and the internet. His networking has garnered him support from friends and personal contacts worldwide.

"It's not an easy journey," he says. "We need great amounts of money and political will

along with hundreds of scientists working on a global level on the most promising research. It will take decades, but it can be done. The problem is not a scientific one. It's getting the motivation of all the players in the chain to make it happen."

Martin quotes billionaire investor and philanthropist Warren Buffett who coined the phrase 'skin in the game,' a term used to describe people having a personal stake in an investment or project.

"Without skin in the game, you don't have the motivation to take the risks required," says Martin.

"I have the education to understand this stuff. I have an entrepreneurial and questioning background, I know how money works and I am in a unique position to make a difference, so how can I not dedicate a significant portion of my energy and resources to finding a solution to this problem?"

In praise of the yummy mummy

Cherie Blair's comments about women have made her seem painfully out of touch, writes **Cristina Odone**

On my way to the office, when I was working full-time, I used to pass a corner cafe whose tables spilled on to the pavement. I'd hear snatches of conversation that hinted at another world: of massages, Pilates classes and skiing — but above all, of time spent with the children.

The voices rang in my head as I slogged at my nine-to-five. All I wanted to do was run back home to my five-month-old baby, but could I risk our family finances by giving up my job and going freelance?

I suspect that Cherie Blair, who, by sheer hard work and determination, has overcome a difficult and under-privileged childhood to become a successful barrister, finds the yummy mummy as irritating as I did.

But her attack on their "dangerous" lifestyle last week sounds worse than sour grapes; it sounds censorious — and out of touch. The truth

is, most women would rather be a yummy mummy than a Cherie Blair.

Mrs Blair despairs of young women who say: "Why can't I just marry a rich husband and retire?" What she finds particularly galling, I presume, is that such girls have the potential to be lawyers and CEOs.

Yet their view is widespread and the highly educated stay-at-home is an international phenomenon. A recent survey of Harvard Business School graduates found that 31pc of the women from the classes of 1981, 1985 and 1991 who answered the survey worked only part-time or on contract and another 31pc did not work at all.

Alpha-feminists want to be free to do as they please — shine professionally, stick two fingers up at marriage, whatever; but they quash other women's freedom of



Let them be: Cherie Blair

choice. There is one way and it's their way.

In reality, not quite. Most mothers today work. Many love what they do and are fulfilled by their job but many others watch those clock hands at work move s-l-o-w-l-y towards closing time and then they rush off to real life — with their families.

Their dreams are not pinned on the corner office but rather on the pastel nursery.

Cherie may round on mothers who "put all their effort into their children" but most women aim to do precisely that. Perhaps that explains why young women lag behind men once they have a child.

It also explains why most women want to be like Jools Oliver or Tana Ramsay, both of whom are proud of their stay-at-home lifestyle.

Alpha-feminists reject that choice as defeatism. This is unfair; not all work is exciting and remunerative, and not all stay-at-homes spend their day at yoga or Starbucks.

Many crucial, if unpaid, jobs are carried out by so-called yummy mummies: they volunteer to help children with special needs and organise the school book fair.

Their nails may have just been polished and their foreheads Botoxed, but these mothers are stepping into a long tradition that women's increasing employment risks snuffing out.

Tamsin Kelly, who edits a parenting website, deplores the vicious, unsisterly mummy wars. "Unlike Cherie Blair's generation," she says, "we no longer need to be cast in the role of stay-at-home or working, both casting

aspersions on each other."

Such pigeonholing helps no one — as Cherie Blair should have known when she weighed in with her attack on stay-at-homes.

There are too many professional women who regret that they did not spend enough time with their children and too many children of professional women who resent their mothers' work ethic for Cherie and other alpha-feminists to persuade us that theirs is the right way. It works for some, but should not be imposed on all.

Let mothers be — at home, or at work. There will always be ambitious professionals, men and women, who reach for the stars.

That's fine, as long as they allow the rest of us on the ground to bump along as we choose, hankering for that sunny spot where the yummy mummies lounge.



Mum's the word: Jools Oliver is proud of putting her children first