

Colin Javens

Quadriplegic, 26, Hereford

People tend not to look at me – straight in the eye – as they used to. I dived off a harbour wall on the Isle of Wight six years ago. But the murky water turned out to be only knee-deep. So everywhere below a spine bone known as C5, which disintegrated, is paralysed.

I love the smell of cowshit. My later childhood was on a farm in Hereford and I was often covered in the stuff. Happy, playful days.

I'm almost as optimistic as I was before the accident. I wonder if I've got something missing in my brain, causing me to feel not so sad about the whole thing.

I recently drove all the way from the UK to Kenya with a support team as passengers. It was a dream of mine before the accident. It took 164 days and I somehow set off from Stoke Mandeville without the doctor on board. But he caught up in a car, lights flashing.

I can't move anything below my shoulders except, luckily, I've wrist extension in one hand, which means that when I try to pull my hand up, my first finger and thumb move together. This makes all the difference; not least being able to go on the net.

The only benefits of being wheelchair-bound are not having to queue for the toilet and aggressive people not seeing me as a threat.

I'm more aware of how infuriated people are if things don't go right for them. I've learnt real patience; that there's a lot of time in this world that others don't recognise.

When you travel in Sudan, from Wadi Halfa to Dongola, and cross the Nile, western-influenced clothing, plastic and litter appear and a sense of people's contentment visibly decreases.

My next idea is to fly a micro-life.

I doubt Stoke Mandeville would exist if it weren't for Jimmy Savile. He came round with his knuckle-duster jewellery when I was in intensive care and took my mother's hand and looked at me and said, 'Oh hello, is this your sister?'

For the past six years I haven't had one day away from people. Six hours at most – and that's in Beryl, my specially adapted Land Rover. Driving alone is my only real independence.

My early childhood was in Kenya and my father was shot dead during a raid on his office there, when I was one year old. I can only imagine him through my older brother.

I have no bowel control and have spent as much as four hours on the toilet. Getting from my bed to the shower on a ceiling tracking hoist can take 15, 16... 20 minutes, but it's worth it. Under a shower all problems seem to wash away.

I drove a full circuit of Australia, 27,000km solo, the year before agricultural college. It was fantastic, but I collided with a kangaroo and had to put it out of its misery. Don't ask. I improvised.

Since my body's been unable to regulate its own temperature, and unable to shiver, the best weather for me has been a perfect summer's day. In England, it can never get too hot for me.

I met a spinally injured woman in Tanzania who had never seen a doctor or left her house, which has no electricity, for 20 years. She's full of guilt at being looked after by her daughter. It made me feel incredibly lucky to live in the western world.

It's hoped that the olfactory ensheathing cell that surrounds a nerve in the nose has the potential to one day help fix a damaged spinal cord. But there's no spinal research funding by the UK government, so I want to raise £100,000 towards it.

At least I had 20 years of a damn good time.

Interview John Hind Photograph Sophia Evans

The Colin Javens Spinal Injury Trust accepts donations at Unit 8a, Bramley Business Centre, Station Road, Bramley, Guildford GU5 0AZ (01483 898 840; www.drivinghome.co.uk)

Getting from bed to the shower on a ceiling hoist can take 15 minutes, but it's worth it. Under a shower, all problems seem to wash away

