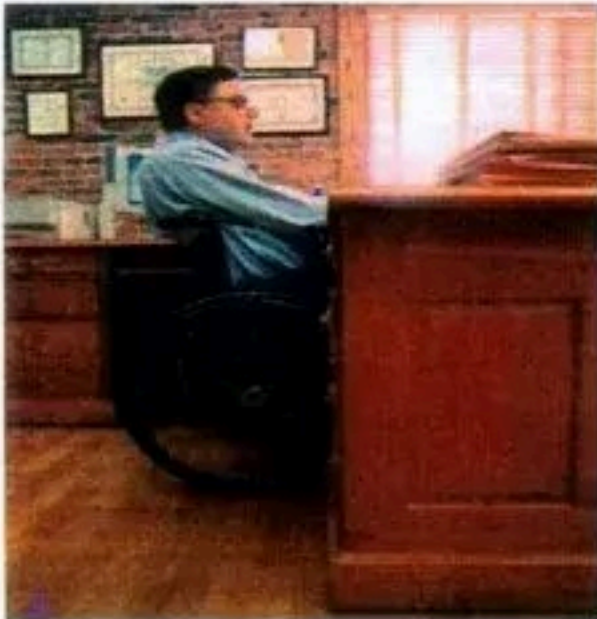


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Once accident victim, he now represents others in court.



By John Laidler
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Lynn- Getting dressed in the morning is a challenge. Climbing in and out of the car is a chore. Preparing a meal is complicated. The daily routine of life has not been easy for Michael F. Mahoney of Lynn, not since the July day 21 years ago when a diving accident left him without use of his legs and with only limited use of his arms. But Mahoney is not complaining. Far from it.

After several years of despair at having been rendered a quadriplegic, Mahoney determined not to let the disability stand in the way of anything he might want to do. And it hasn't.

For 14 years, until 1997, he ran a disc jockey business on the North Shore. Since then, he has plunged into the practice of law—with an impressive record to show for it.

A specialist in personal injury litigation, Mahoney has steadily been making a name for himself in that field. Last year alone, he grossed about \$3 million in judgments and settlements for his clients, including a settlement of more than \$750,000 for a Revere woman injured when struck by a car in a crosswalk. This year, he said he is on track to generate a similar sum. At his Lynnway office, he employs six people, including two lawyers.

That he has done it all with little use of his limbs is a source of admiration to Mahoney's friends and colleagues. Many say he has risen above his physical limitations to the point where they scarcely notice them.

"Within the first minute of knowing him, you don't even realize he's in a wheelchair," said Chelsea attorney Robert Mazow.

"When I'm with him, there's no wheelchair there," echoed Leo Wallace of Peabody, a longtime friend of Mahoney's.

Mahoney himself does not view his disability as a hindrance to his career. He relates anecdotes about judges who have scheduled hearings in his van because courthouses were not wheelchair accessible. And there are minor inconveniences, like needing help carrying his trial bags into court, or not being able to hold up a chart in the courtroom.

But he said, "The actual relating with the jury part and the actual trying of the case is not an issue."

"My practice is booming," Mahoney said. "It just so happens that I'm in a wheelchair."

Mahoney said that his disability has had at least one impact on him professionally.

"I can certainly identify with someone who has been involved with a catastrophic injury," he said. "If somebody's in a wheelchair, when I can share my experience, strength and hope, tell them what I've been through, you can almost see the laughter, the camaraderie...It's just a great connection."

Mahoney, who grew up in Somerville, Lynn and North Reading, recalls being a "wild" kid—particularly after his father died when he was 15. He attended Austin Prep High School and North Reading High School. He dropped out of the latter in his sophomore year, instead obtaining a G.E.D. in 1976.

After five years of "drinking beer and hitchhiking across the country," Mahoney says he took a hard look where his life was going in 1980 and decided to enroll at North Shore Community College. But one day that summer returning home from playing golf, Mahoney saw some people diving into the water from a railing at Red Rock off Lynn Shore Drive. Deciding to join them, Mahoney dove, but struck his head on an underwater rock. Someone pulled the motionless Mahoney from the water, but the force of the blow injured his spinal cord, causing the paralysis.

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