

Cody Unser, born into the legendary Unser racing dynasty, has forged a legacy of her own that extends far beyond the racetrack. A powerful advocate for people with disabilities, her life's work is a testament to her resilience, vision, and unwavering dedication to helping others.

A Life-Changing Moment

On February 5, 1999, at the age of 11, Cody Unser's life was changed forever. While playing basketball, she was suddenly and completely paralyzed from the waist down due to transverse myelitis, a rare autoimmune condition. This lack of knowledge and awareness about her condition inspired her to take action.

One year later, Unser founded the **Cody Unser First Step Foundation**, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness, fostering medical collaboration, and developing quality-of-life programs for individuals living with paralysis. Her vision has always been rooted in a powerful belief in **integration, inclusion, and the extraordinary capabilities of people with disabilities.**

Pioneering a Path to Healing

Through her foundation's flagship programs, **Cody's Great SCUBA Adventures and Operation Deep Down**, Unser pioneered the first conventional SCUBA-Medical study with Johns Hopkins Medicine. This groundbreaking research explored the neurological and psychological effects of scuba diving on paralysis, gaining the attention needed for future studies.

Unser's work has made her a leading advocate for the disability community. She travels the country delivering keynote speeches, attending medical symposia, and partnering with organizations like the **Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation** and the **Paralyzed Veterans of America**. She became a close confidante of the late Christopher Reeve, learning the intricacies of fundraising and advocacy. Following his passing, Unser emerged as a prominent voice for stem cell research, advocating for the advancements that could one day restore mobility.

A certified peer mentor, Unser's personal journey has inspired countless individuals. Her courage and tireless efforts have earned her numerous accolades, including the **Red Cross Hero Award** and the **President Gerald Ford "People Helping People" Award**. In 2016, she made history as the first woman with a disability to be inducted into the **Women's Divers Hall of Fame** for her work connecting scuba diving with therapeutic benefits for people with disabilities. Cody Unser's life is a powerful story of turning a personal tragedy into a lifelong mission of hope, healing, and advocacy.