



CenturyCollege

News Release

May 11, 2009

[Nancy Livingston](#)

Public Relations

651-779-3222

Fax 651-779-3470

[Century College](#)

3300 Century Avenue North

White Bear Lake, MN 55110

Yoga Helps the Disabled Transcend Trauma, Speaker Tells Century at Transformation Conference

Paralyzed at the age of 13 in a devastating car accident that killed his father and sister, Matthew Sanford told a Century College audience on April 22 that yoga and its power to awaken the connection between the mind and the body has helped him heal.

“Healing is an art,” said Sanford, who is now 43. “We have gotten lost in thinking it is just a science. Even though I am paralyzed, I cannot simply forget my lower body. I need to live in my whole body. What you can’t feel is as important as what you can control. Connecting your mind and your body is an act of transformation.”

The keynote speaker at the second annual Century College Campus Conference, which this year had the theme of “Transformation,” Sanford told audience members that his current work as a yoga instructor is part of his campaign to change rehabilitation methods so that people dealing with disability begin to think about their bodies in new ways.

“We want to think that extraordinary transformation isn’t accessible to us, but it is,” said Sanford. “If you listen and explore your paralysis, really great things happen.”

Sanford, who operates a yoga studio called Mind Body Solutions in Minnetonka, has written a book called *WAKING: a Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence* (Rodale 2006/paperback 2008). In 2007, *WAKING* received the Minnesota Book Award.

To demonstrate his point about the need to connect the mind and the body, Sanford asked the audience to be aware of different parts of their body. He had everyone take their shoes off to feel the floor. Then he had people slouch and straighten up in their chairs, paying attention to the changes in their breathing. Later, he asked people to stand with their legs wide apart, raising awareness of their inner thighs.

“Life is given to you,” Sanford said. “You get to decide what you can do with it. What I started to realize is, silence in paralysis isn’t just a loss, it is a sensation. Mind-body integration is both ordinary and profound.”

Sanford said his years of yoga have helped him feel the heart of the poses despite his limited access to physical movements. He can feel a pose’s inner workings, its focus. The principles of yoga work the same for a paralyzed person, though the outer expression looks different. Yoga allows the paralyzed person to gain presence, not on the outside, but on the inside.

Also at the Transformation conference, students participated in a number of other activities, including:

- A persuasive speech exposition called “Students for a Worthy Cause.” Students gave speeches about non-profit organizations such as Feed My Starving Children, Center for Victims of Torture, Animal Humane Society, Minnesota Teen Challenge and Second Harvest Heartland. The student speech that earned the most audience votes was by Ivan Johnston of White Bear Lake, who spoke about the American Cancer Society in the context of his sister-in-law, Hannah’s, battle with cancer.
- A lively poetry slam presented by student poetry slam teams.
- The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society presentation of the Golden Apple awards for outstanding instructor to professors Carol Randall (Spanish) and Carl Chung (philosophy).



Photo: Matthew Sanford at Century College