

'I've learned some major lessons,' says paralyzed adventurer

By Katie Roenigk
Staff Writer

Though he has been confined to a wheelchair since 1994 when a motorcycle accident left him paralyzed, Clay Egan says he does not feel handicapped.

"I've learned some major lessons about life and about myself," Egan told an assembly of Riverton High School students Friday. "I've learned things about true obstacles and what it really takes to succeed in life."

Egan said his paralysis presented a challenge for him, but the struggles he faced during his life before his accident "far outweighed" the difficulty of his current situation. When Egan was a teenager, he said his father was diagnosed with severe clinical depression and other emotional disorders that left him distant and unavailable.

"It was very devastating for me to see the man I loved and needed emotionally just falling apart right before my eyes," Egan said. "It was too complex for me to understand. All I really knew was I didn't have a dad."

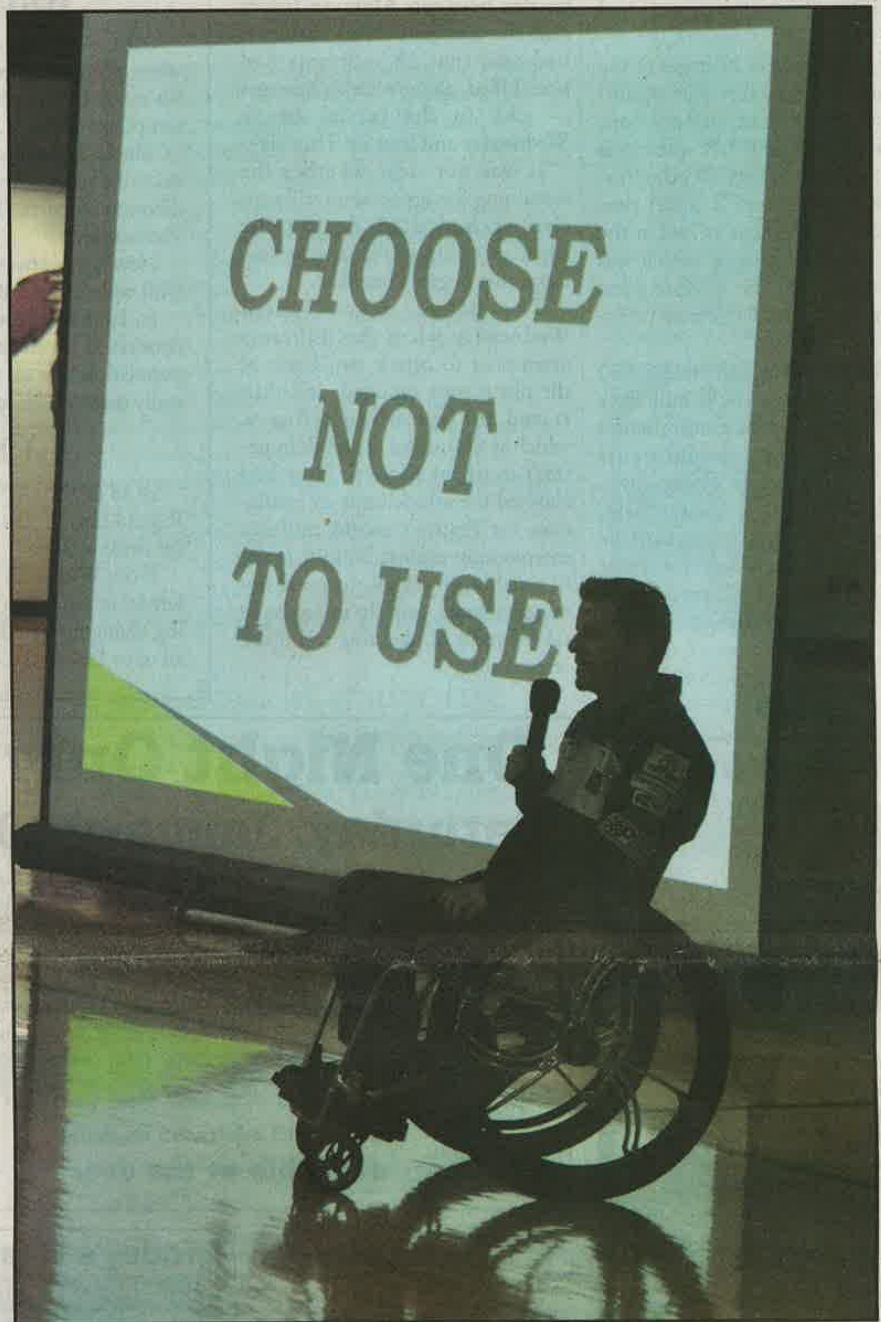
He spent many years working through the anger, blame and resentment he felt toward his dad. As a result, Egan struggled with drugs, and one day he said he contemplated taking his own life. It was then that he turned to family and friends for help.

"I got checked into a rehab center and was able to clear my thoughts and get clean," Egan said, encouraging his audience not to use alcohol or drugs.

Egan said the above experience, all of which took place before his accident, taught him to take personal responsibility for his own life instead of focusing on others' failings.

"If you go through life and point fingers and blame everyone for the wrongs in your life, you're simply a victim," he said. "Choose not to be a victim. Take ownership of your dreams and opportunities."

That attitude helped him stay mentally tough while recovering from his motorcycle accident. A year after the crash, he had resumed work on his general contracting license and had started his own construction company in Utah. He had returned to the world of hunting, fishing and extreme



Clay Egan, wheelchair-bound since an accident in 1994, spoke Friday to Riverton High School students. He competes as a rock crawler. Egan said "it's stupid" to become dependent on drugs and alcohol.

Photos by Wayne Nicholls

sports and joined a rugby team for people in wheelchairs. A couple of years ago, he became involved in rock crawling, a sport in which contestants attempt to drive up

and over a vertical wall.

"I was the only quadriplegic in the

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