“Life is full of adventures; I’ve just had more than my share of them,” quips Bruce Walz. In 1985, at the age of 25, Walz was carving his way through switchbacks in the Arizona mountains when something on his motorcycle went astray, locking up the rear wheel and causing him to lose control. He was thrown into a guardrail. As he puts it, “the guardrail retaliated by causing two vertebrae in my neck to break, which left me paralyzed from the shoulders down.” Walz’s doctors told his family to prepare for a funeral while he was in the ICU, but he fought off double pneumonia, multiple infections, a fever that spiked to 109 degrees, and spinal cord swelling that came within millimeters of reaching his brainstem and ending his life. Within six months he was breathing without a ventilator and eventually he was able to return home.

Home computers were still in their infancy at the time, but Walz’s stepfather set him up with an IBM PC and one of the earliest forms of speech recognition software. “The software was very primitive at the time, but it helped me out in ways that words can never explain,” Walz recalls. However, he adds, “you can’t even compare that with today’s Dragon NaturallySpeaking; it’s apples and oranges.”

Before his accident, Walz was an automotive technician with a keen eye for vehicle performance and an insatiable appetite to learn more about his chosen field. Today, thanks to Dragon, Walz is able to maintain a wide variety of projects, including a supercharged 1996 Ford Windstar that he promises will be “more full of excitement than you could ever imagine packed into a minivan” when it’s finished.

“He first began using Dragon in June 2008. He says that he was a little apprehensive at first because of his mid-80s experience with speech recognition software, but he quickly discovered that “Dragon was light years ahead of my first voice dictation program.” He recalls: “Dragon began to change my life. Its accuracy rate is unbelievably perfect considering how low I talk, volume-wise.” Walz relies on the Microsoft Office suite (Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint) for emails, letters, and more, while he uses CoffeeCup Software’s utilities, along with Adobe Photoshop, for designing and maintaining the pages for his two web sites. He says: “Cool little programs like Sticky Notes help me remember the necessary tasks I need to do throughout the day, and posting to Twitter or Facebook is as simple as saying a few words.”

He adds: “When it comes to moving the mouse, I leave it up to Dragon’s mouse commands because they’re so simple and they work so well in every program I use. Regardless of what I’m doing on the computer, Dragon simplifies each and every task to the point where I think anyone could pick up Dragon and become a pro with it in a matter of days.” Walz recently obtained a wireless Bluetooth headset, which he says has freed him from being “handcuffed to the computer; it allows me to move around freely without worrying about running out of cord or having a stationary microphone that can pick up other sounds. It’s nearly as life-changing as Dragon was, and combining the two creates one of the most powerful tools I’ve ever had.”