

SKIN-CARE
MOGUL
FRANCESCO
CLARK

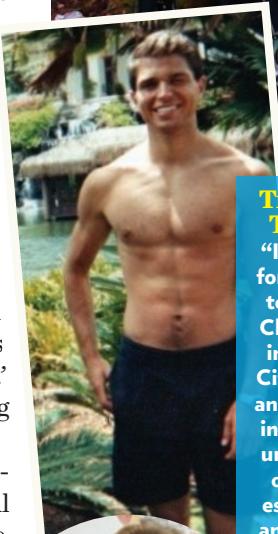
'Vanity Saved My Life'

PARALYZED FROM THE NECK DOWN AT AGE 24, THE CLARK'S BOTANICALS FOUNDER TURNED HIS TRAGEDY INTO SUCCESS WITH A BREAKTHROUGH LINE OF NATURAL BEAUTY PRODUCTS

By KAITLYN FREY

Francesco Clark was 24 years old and celebrating Memorial Day weekend with friends when his whole world changed. On June 1, 2002, he dived head-first into a swimming pool and crashed into the bottom with his chin. The next thing he remembers, he was paralyzed from the neck down. "The bone in my spine shattered into shards, cutting into my nerves," says Clark, then a fashion assistant at *Harper's Bazaar*. "I remember the surgeon telling my dad, 'He will never breathe, talk or move his arms [on his own]—and forget about his legs.' They relegated me to a life of watching soap operas from a bed."

But Clark had other ideas. While learning to cope with the myriad of physical challenges he was suddenly facing, the Bronxville, N.Y., native came up with the idea of a homeopathic skin-care line to treat some of the skin complications from his paralysis. "My injury was so high up on my spine that I lost the ability to sweat," says Clark, now 40. "As a result, my body couldn't release itself of toxins. Some parts of my skin had rosacea; other areas were gray and sullen." Launched in 2009, his Clark's Botanicals skin-care line is now sold on QVC and in retail outlets nationwide and boasts celebrity fans like



Tragedy to Triumph

"I'm grateful for where I am today," says Clark (above, in New York City in March, and inset, left, in 2002). His unique blend of jasmine, essential oils and botanical extracts has earned him a loyal celebrity following, including Meryl Streep (left) and Kate Bosworth.



Julianne Moore, Olivia Munn and Kaley Cuoco. "I never had any intention of it becoming a thing!" says Clark, who created the jasmine-based formulas with his dad, Dr. Harold Clark, an internist specializing in homeopathic medicine. "It was so much more to me than making a product."

In fact, he credits developing the line with helping save his life after his devastating injury. Deeply depressed for the first three years after the accident, "if I saw even a reflection of myself and the shadow of the wheelchair, I would burst into tears." But developing his products gave him a new mission. "I had to own up to what happened and move forward somehow," he says. "It feels like I've connected the dots from my injury to my life in beauty to finding meaning again. People call skin-care superfluous," he adds. "But it helped me regain purpose in my life." ●