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Fall was physicalization of mental state

By Sandy Cullen
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HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Like all of John Arndt's plays, "Winterstorm" involves a transition from one state of being to another.

But unlike his previous works, he says it is believable.

The difference, says Arndt, was a paralyzing accident he suffered at his home in Harrisburg and his subsequent journey toward recovery.

In April, Arndt fell 20 feet from a tree on the property he had just moved to a day before. He injured his spinal cord and was paralyzed from the waist down.

After two months at Elizabethtown Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, Arndt says he was told the paralysis was permanent.

Unwilling to accept the diagnosis, Arndt went to the Upledger Institute in Florida, one of many facilities which treated Sean Lavery, a New York City Ballet star who was left with one paralyzed leg after surgery to remove a tumor from his spinal cord.

Arndt's experience there helped his writing and changed his life "mentally, spiritually, as well as physically," he says.

He says he believes he will someday walk again, and that falling out of the tree was not just an accident.

"Emotionally, I was in a free-fall," he says. "Falling from the tree was a physicalization of that emotional state.

"I'm actually, in a way, thankful for the accident. It has really straightened me out."

"Winterstorm" is scheduled to be premiered in May by the Open Stage of Harrisburg. His play, "Antiquities," was produced off-Broadway by the Jean Cocteau Repertory. The company also presented a staged reading of another of his plays, "Natives."

Arndt says he has always strived for a "poetry of existence" in his writing, but does so even more since the accident.

"All of my plays deal with taking real people in real situations and transferring them into a poetic state of consciousness, or unconsciousness," he says.

The discovery of his own spirituality, Arndt says, has enabled him to make the transi-

tion in his plays from one state of being to another believable — something he was unable to do before the accident.

At Upledger, Arndt says he was told, "You'll move your leg before you leave here, and you'll climb a tree again if you so desire."

Before leaving the clinic, Arndt's legs did move, but the movement was involuntary. Then, two months after he returned home, Arndt says he began to get voluntary movement in his legs.

All of the muscles down to his knees are now working.