



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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SPINAL CORD INJURIES

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FOUR SEASONS TO INDEPENDENCE

A little over a year ago, 22 year old Jeremy Koehn was doing what an estimated 70,000 people were doing on opening weekend of shotgun season in Iowa – hunting. However, the day turned out to be far different for him than it was for all but a few other hunters. On that winter day in 2002, he was accidentally shot. He sustained a spinal cord injury, which resulted in paraplegia.

Jeremy spent a couple weeks at the hospital in Iowa City and was visited by several members of his favorite Hawkeye teams (bearing autographed gifts of encouragement) before moving to rehab in Waterloo for several more challenging weeks. While he was in Waterloo, he was

introduced to Tony Wernimont from Easter Seals and Marcy Thomas (former ISU Extension specialist) who came with ideas and encouragement of their own. They started exploring housing options with Jeremy's family and soon completed a major remodeling project developed by Mary Years, ISU Extension housing specialist. Jeremy says this remodeling made his living arrangements, especially showering, much easier.

By summer, Tony and others had given the family's lawnmower a face-lift of sorts; it was the first of many projects. After a long, uneventful summer, Jeremy got a truck and had it modified enabling him to get out on the road again! Additionally, in time for fall, a lift was added to the combine to make it comfortable and easy for him to operate during harvest. Coming soon: a new modified tractor for the upcoming spring planting!

Jeremy's stoic remark, "I never thought I would be so independent," indicates his biggest accomplishment and disappointment in the same breath. His physical limitations still frustrate him, but he has overcome so many obstacles to make seemingly unreachable achievements.

Jeremy is still striving to stay active and in good physical shape. He is participating in a study being done at the University Hospitals

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in Iowa City which is designed to help keep his leg muscles strong. He works out on an easy glider/standing machine. Moreover, Jeremy follows medical research around the world as he optimistically waits for advancements in spinal cord injury research. (EH)

RESOURCES

The National Spinal Cord Injury Association is dedicated to helping individuals cope with the results of spinal cord injury and disease. They offer nationwide chapters and support groups along with a wide range of resources. The NSCIA can be contacted through a toll-free help line at 1-800-962-9629 or online at www.spinalcord.org/

The Spinal Cord Injury Information Network is a website that lists resources related to spinal cord injuries, including family and relationships, equipment, employment, and sexuality issues. The site also provides statistics about spinal cord injuries. Visit www.spinalcord.uab.edu/

WheelchairNet is a virtual community (exists only in "cyber space") for people who are interested in wheelchair technology. In WheelchairNet, people can ask questions, get and give answers, meet and teach each other, link to information about wheelchair products and services, learn about and participate in wheelchair research projects, and much more. WheelchairNet is sponsored by the RERC (Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center) on Wheeled Mobility at the University of Pittsburgh and is available at www.wheelchairnet.org

ABOUT TRANSPORTATION

One of the highlights for Jeremy Koehn was getting a truck that he could drive after spending most of the summer around his family's farm or being chauffeured places because of his injury. I could really identify

with that by thinking back to the feeling of freedom I had with my first car and the feeling of isolation I still experience when my car is "out of order."

Carmen Schacht decided to offer her perspectives on independence, isolation, and transportation for her column this month and as part of a series. She will continue the topic of transportation, problems she had, her second van, and some of the fears we all have next month. (EH)

CARM'S COMMENTS

When each of us are forced to come to a head with a disability, we face many challenges, especially if the disability is a debilitating one in which we cannot do things "like we always did before."

My first challenge after my disability came when I could not drive because my feet did not move fast enough to move from the gas pedal to the brake. Through the Courage Center of Minneapolis, I went to a clinic for assessment and training to drive with hand controls. After that, hand controls were installed in our mini-van and I was able to drive again. This solved my driving woes for five years before my legs got weaker and I was no longer able to get into our mini van, let alone drive.

I was pretty much limited to my wheelchair or an electric scooter in addition to being confined to the house due to the weakness and difficulty of getting into the mini van. My friends and family decided to do a fundraiser to help us purchase a handicapped-accessible van so I could be mobile again. Everett saw a flyer put out by several used car dealers, we went to look at a van, talked to the people at a place that did van conversions, and they approved it.

Next, I went back to the clinic where another evaluation was done so that we

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would know what kind of conversions were needed. This evaluator used the scooter I already had (for traveling outside of my home) during his evaluation. He said I needed a full size van with a 4" lowered floor, hand controls, a 6-way adjustable seat, a lift big enough for the scooter, remote doors, and electric windows. The van was purchased, the conversions made, and I was independent again! I had always been quite a "goer." I will never be able to thank everyone involved enough.

There are mini vans, full size vans, pickups, even some cars can be converted for use by people with disabilities, depending on the evaluations that are done by experts in this field. A person can drive from a wheelchair, transfer to special seats, or have lifts and many things customized for their individual disability. Much of what a person can do to adapt depends on personal preference and the severity of the disability. (CS)

YOUR TAXES AND THE EARNED INCOME CREDIT

The Earned Income Credit (EIC) is a special tax benefit for working families earning low or moderate incomes. The aim is to help workers claim all the tax credits they've earned! Workers who qualify can get back some or all of the federal income tax that was taken out of their pay during the year. They may also get cash back from the IRS. Check the income qualifications to see if you might qualify:

- Workers with two or more qualifying children and family income of up to \$33,692 (\$34,692 if married) may qualify for up to \$4,204.

- Workers with only one qualifying child and family income of up to \$29,666 (\$30,666 if married) may qualify for up to \$2,547.

- Workers with no children living with them in 2003 and earned income of less than \$11,230, AND between the ages of 25 and 64 may qualify for up to \$382.

Qualifying children must have lived with the worker for more than half of the year, be under age 19, or under age 24 if they are full-time students. **Totally and permanently disabled children of any age may also qualify.**

When filing taxes, use Form 1040 or 1040A and attach Schedule EIC. You will need to provide a correct name and Social Security for each child.

Through the Advance EIC, workers can get part of their EIC in their paychecks throughout the year. Advance payments are not taxable income. The advance payment procedure has built-in protections against overpayment. If you qualify and you choose advance payment, you can get about half of the EIC amount during the year and the rest as a refund when you file a tax return.

Check with your tax preparer to see if you qualify for the EIC and two additional tax credits, the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Credit. For workers who qualify, the CTC increased from \$600 to \$1,000 in 2003. The Child and Dependent Care Credit increased from \$2,400 to \$3,000 in 2003 (up to \$6,000 for two or more children). Eligible families receive a tax credit worth between 20 and 35 percent of dependent care expenses.

For more information about any of these tax credits, contact the IRS at 1-800-TAX-1040 or at www.irs.gov

The Earned Income Credit has a tremendous impact in dollars returned to residents in the state of Iowa. For tax year 2002, 164,968 families and individuals in Iowa received \$258,944,000 in Earned Income Credit.

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That's money in wallets and dollars back in the Iowa economy. (SM)

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NEWSLETTER THOUGHTS

Planting Your Garden will be the theme of the April 2004 newsletter. Please call or email me with your ideas for gardening stories or activities. I would be happy to write your remarks, suggestions, and experiences for others to learn from or be encouraged by in the upcoming Chit Chat Newsletter! My phone number is 515-294-8522 or send me an email at ehaafke@iastate.edu. (EH)

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Rural Solutions Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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