



FREE SPIRIT

MESSAGES



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... An Uplifting Wind Beneath Your Wings To Carry You Through These Challenging Times!

SEPTEMBER 2012

"PORTRAIT IN COURAGE"

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PORTRAIT IN COURAGE

I was on my final homeward loop through the urban forest when a most unlikely vision stopped me in my tracks. Blinking several times to confirm what *I thought I saw* filled me with wonder. There, in the cool shade beneath an ancient Juniper, a middle-aged man reclined far back in his wheelchair, gazing toward the clear azure sky.

I scanned the surrounding area, expecting to find a caretaker nearby but there was no one else around.

"Good morning!" I called into the shadows. "How are you doing today?"

The man's eyes moved toward the sound of my voice, a crooked smile lighting his handsome face. I stepped closer then, explaining that I came to the forest almost every morning to pray. With enormous effort, he slowly formed the words "*I... do...too...*" and thus began my very special friendship with Randy.

Life had dealt Randy a very harsh hand at birth— severe cerebral palsy. To date he has spent 56 years in walkers, hospital beds and wheelchairs, unable to control little more than subtle movements of his left hand, eyes, chin & mouth (with which he artfully "drives" his customized wheelchair & all manner of other technological devices.) Randy's world might have been exceedingly restricted and small, but his HUGE, unfathomably courageous spirit simply wouldn't allow it!

Spring came and went this year, and it was well into summer before I finally saw Randy again. He was pale and unusually thin, not his typically buoyant and upbeat self. As we hugged, I noticed a feeding tube dangling from his shirtless belly.

"Oh, I'm so relieved to see you my friend— I was getting very worried about you!"

My fears were unfortunately well-founded. Randy told me that he'd aspirated and nearly died a few months before. That's why he'd been reliant on this *dang* feeding tube for eleven long weeks— until his swallowing is trustworthy again.

Major medical issues are nothing new for Randy. In just the couple of years we've known each other, he's undergone two major kidney surgeries, a total right hip-joint removal (without replacement), and two near-death aspiration events, just to name a few bumps in his often rocky road. Though he's contended with a lifetime of severe chronic pain from the ceaseless muscle spasms of palsy, Randy still thanks God many times each day for the privilege of being alive.

Deeply impressed by Randy's indomitable spirit, I asked if I could drop by his home sometime, meet with his caregiver and interview them both for this story. He was utterly delighted by the prospect, and I soon discovered why.

You see, that mischievous twinkle in Randy's eye does indeed mean something. And since Randy is a man of *few words*, he was most eager to have one of his caregivers, Roy (a cowboy musician), flesh-out some of the more colorful details for me.

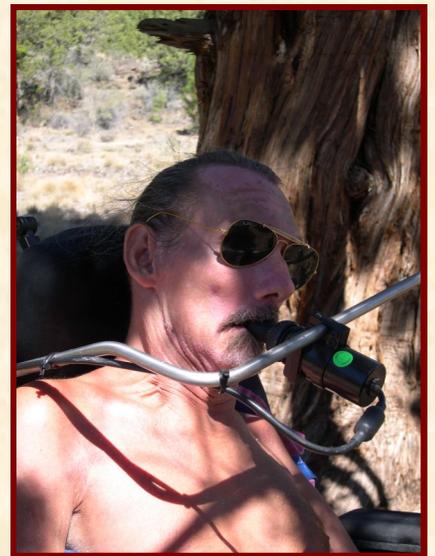
Just witnessing the easy, good-humored banter between these two characters was worth the price of admission! Nobody cut anybody an ounce of slack the entire time I was there.

I learned that Randy deeply treasures his privacy and independence, and simply won't allow Roy to accompany him on his frequent jaunts to the urban forest. In this same vein, Randy insists on sending his several rotating caregivers home after 15 hours of daily service, because he *likes* to spend 9 hours at night alone. There's a call button by his bed in case of emergency, the only concession he's willing to make.

Furthermore, I discovered that Randy is a rabid Seattle Seahawk's fan-- in fact, the team has sent him tons of Seahawk memorabilia and is currently working on a plan to get Randy to Seattle to attend a game. In the meantime, he'll spend the upcoming football season glued to his TV.

Two of Randy's favorite rifles are mounted on the wall of his dining room— he hasn't gone shooting in a while, but this could change at any moment, trust me!

Randy operating his "joystick" →



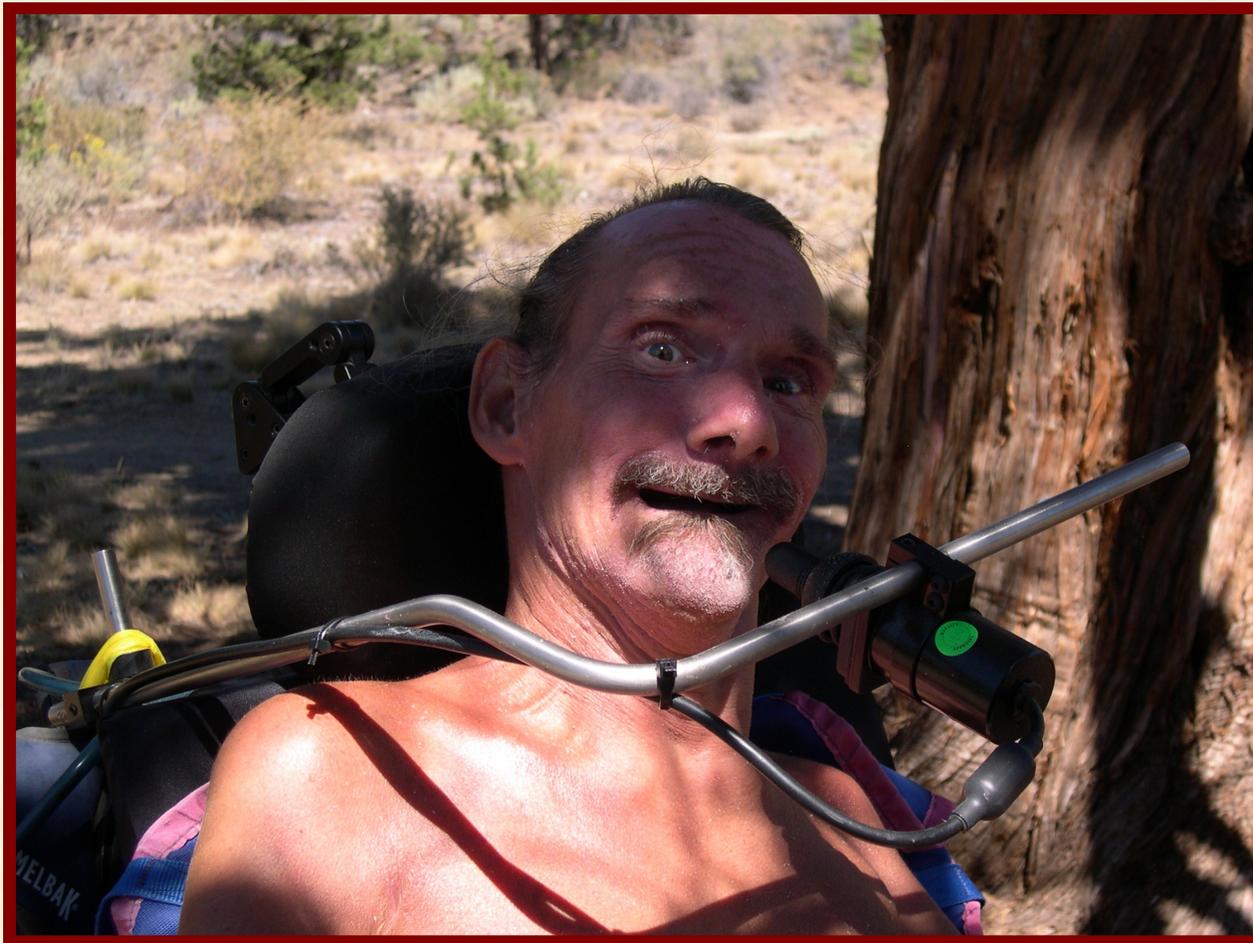
Oh, yes... and he loves *classic* cars, especially a shiny black 1966 Ford Shelby Mustang GT! He asked Roy to point out the "Shelby" insignia mounted on the back of his \$30,000 wheelchair. Yep, it was right there plain as day, though I'd never noticed it before.

"Tell her about that *other wheelchair!*" Randy insisted, eyes dancing.

By the broad grin spreading across Roy's face now, this tale was going to be a real doozy. A few years back when Randy lived in the Portland area, he'd souped-up his old wheelchair to go **47 MILES PER HOUR**, racing it regularly at the Woodburn drag-strip. Good God!-- this man was totally *terror on wheels!*

But I didn't know the half of it yet. Randy's speedway antics weren't always confined to the drag-strip. He occasionally took his "hotrod" out for a spin on city streets.

"I *scared* people," he admitted with naughty glee. And he *lived* to tell about it!



As a youngster, Randy held a newspaper route. Later he was employed as a computer data entry specialist. Sure, he gets blue once in a while, just like everyone else... but he hasn't spent much time sitting around feeling sorry for himself.

He attributes his remarkably resilient spirit to the patient, loving parents who raised him, his proud Native American "Kootenai" heritage (his father's lineage), his devout Seventh Day Adventist faith, a strong personal relationship with God, and plenty of good home-cooked meals (from old family recipes, of course!)

Randy is living proof that *"when the going gets tough, the tough get going."*

SOMETIMES AT 47 MPH !!



May this humble offering inspire
The Extraordinary Being
You *already* are...

Many Blessings,
Teryl "T" Johansson

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