

April 5, 2005 – October 19, 2005
Pool Therapy, First Semester at Ramapo College and First Visit to Project Walk

April 5, 2005

Thank you to everyone who donated stuff for Paul's yard sale. My truck was filled when I drove up to NY State on Friday, and it was great to unload everything into their garage. Paul and his family were so appreciative of all the stuff, and so am I. So thank you to everyone who did donate something. If you are interested in Paul's progress, you can check out his website at www.paulspath.com. They will be keeping updates on the track of the Portugal Procedure, as well, if anyone is interested. Thank you again!

Love always, Ari

Hello everyone! This is a "two-for" email.....

I hope you are enjoying the extra long days. Spring is finally here and now it feels like it! I have attached the info on the benefit golf outing at Newton Country Club that Cindy mentioned in her previous email

Please open the attachments... even if you do not golf, the dinner is sure to be fantastic. I have been to outings at Newton before and they do a wonderful job. Please contact Ralph or Lucille at (973) 697-2789, if you have any questions, would like to donate a prize, or anything else relating to the golf outing and dinner on June 14th.

Best regards,

Medora

April 13 2005,

Hi everyone! Well, I can hardly remember what I wrote last, but I do know that Ari went to Rochester with a car full of treasures for our friend Paul's upcoming garage sale. They were very appreciative, so I extend my thanks to all of you who contributed. It was a good thing she didn't ask too far ahead; she wouldn't have been able to fit everything! But she had a great trip and it was good for her to see Paul and his family.

Everything lately seems rather uneventful next to the latest, greatest news from Darren - after his right leg and foot spasms, then the spasm subsides, he is able to move his foot a little bit from side to side or move his leg a bit upwards. Is that incredible news, or what??!! We don't know if it is only happening because of the spasm, and would not happen otherwise, but posts on a SCI forum we frequent say it could be a pre-cursor to recovering some or all function of that particular muscle. So that sounds like good news to me! Even the slightest movement could represent healing, and as long as there is healing, there could be recovery. And that is our prayers being answered.

So what else could I write that could even come close to being important? We have been very busy, but I won't bore you with all of the details of our day to day schedule this past week and a half or so.....

But, Darren has now looked at both Montclair State University and Ramapo College. He is getting close to making a decision, which is good, as the deadline is May 1st, only 2 weeks away! As soon as the check has been mailed, I will let you know what his decision is. In the meantime, he is looking at taking a class or 2 online this summer, just to keep his brain working.

Therapy at Kessler is now only twice a week, and we have started going in the pool. First, we tried the pool at Cedar Crest, a lovely facility with very accommodating personnel, but the depth is shallow - only 5 feet - and Darren wants to do exercises that require him to float vertically in the water. Since he is over 6' tall, he needs a deeper pool! So we will be trying the YMCA in Mountain Lakes this week, and we look forward to that suiting his needs a bit better. We'll let you know!

We are very appreciative of a wonderful group of women, headed by Liz Schecter, who teamed up to run/walk a marathon this past Sunday, raising funds for Darren. They had a beautiful day, and came to see us afterward. I was so glad to see them all walking, after such a grueling event! What a terrific bunch of ladies, and I thank you all for your efforts. Giving that much of yourselves, to raise funds for someone else, is truly a gift. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I am writing this on the eve of my birthday. Unlike some of my closest friends, I still like celebrating my birthday! I try not to count the years, so much, as the memories and the gifts (the non-material ones) I have received the previous year. While I don't yet know the meaning of the gift I received on July 23rd last year, I do know that I have my wonderful, precious son that I can hug, kiss, laugh and cry with every single day. Having all of us together is the most precious of all gifts that a person could hope for. So as I look to the year ahead, I am thankful, hopeful and optimistic that there are brighter days to come. Bring on the candles and the cake! I know what my wish will be!

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

April 27, 2005

Hello everyone, I finally committed to myself that today would indeed be the day I wrote a long-overdue update. Where does the time go??? Sometimes I think that I'll just write a quick paragraph, just to get some news out, but then time slips away, and a week and more goes by. The I think - uh-oh - its REALLY time to write now!!!

So here are the highlights: left toe, Ramapo, driving and pool time.

Now that I have your attention - are there any 11th grade/HS junior parents reading this that could help with a last-minute fill in for the Snack Shack tomorrow - Thursday, April 28? PLEASE let me know, as I don't have anyone!

Back to the good stuff - I don't think I reported previously that Darren is sometimes able to move the big toe on his left foot. He can't always move it, or move it at will like his right toes, but it does move, and that is such good news. More healing, more recovery, and that is always positive in my eyes. He can also sometimes move his right foot from side to side, just a bit, but nevertheless - movement! More good

news. At least once a day, I try to remind Darren on how important it is to be positive, and how powerful the mind can be. We have read about a doctor in London who works with SCI patients and others, concentrating on the mind-body-soul connection and the results are incredible. So the power is there, its just learning how to harness it.

I mailed a check to Ramapo College yesterday as an acceptance deposit for the Fall semester. I think Darren is happy that he made the decision, and so am I! Their Office of Special Services put him in touch with another student there who is also in a wheelchair, and after having that conversation, I think it helped Darren make up his mind. So he is excited about the whole process of choosing classes, going to school, etc. It will be such a big step for him, and a good one, too. Over the summer, he'll be taking 2 more classes online through UMass, that he'll be able to transfer the credits - College Writing and Environmental Studies. Taking them online will give him the flexibility of doing the work when he can, and taking advantage of the nicer weather to get in as much pool time as possible. We are looking for a physical therapist with pool experience, so if anyone knows of someone who might be qualified and/or interested, please pass this information along to him or her, or let me know and I can make contact.

Darren's first driving evaluation will be Tuesday, May 3rd, and then he'll have several more before taking his driving test with the Driving Rehab program at Kessler and the DMV. Hopefully, it will be about 4 sessions, but could be more depending on what his needs are. He is, of course, very excited about getting behind the wheel again. It spells INDEPENDENCE!!! (For me, too!)

The Mountain Lakes Y is working out well, although we had to skip a session this week because I hurt my back and did not want to chance it, transferring him in and out of the water. But we'll go on Saturday, and I've recruited Arianne to help, which should be good for her knee, too! Which is healing up nicely, by the way. Darren is always anxious to do more in the pool than he did the previous time, trying new exercises and skills. He really feels good in the water and enjoys the time.

So I am nursing my hurt back, taking it easy and doing gentle stretches throughout the day. I've noticed a big improvement from yesterday to today, so I am optimistic that in a few days I'll be back to normal. I certainly hope so!

To all our Jewish friends - Happy Passover! We were very happy to be invited to our first Seder this past Saturday at the Gordon's, and we all thoroughly enjoyed the rituals, the readings and of course, the food. It was a wonderful experience. So to all of you - enjoy your holiday.

Well, enough for now, as I have written a lot, once again!

As always, I appreciate your e-mails, calls, letters and cards, and am ever grateful for the wonderful circle of friends and support that surrounds us. Your prayers, thoughts and concern are still what keeps me going, and I couldn't do it without all of you. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

With love,

Cynthia

May 11, 2005

Hello to all!

Three important notes:

1- Quick reminder that if you want to golf and/ or have dinner at Newton ----- four-somes and sponsorships are due now.

Planning is in full swing—pun intended!!!!

Fun is also intended, so don't worry if you're not a "tiger".

See attached, complete and mail ASAP.

2- The Run for Recovery will take place rain or shine, come to the KHS track this Saturday morning (you can run or walk) and join us in support of Darren.

3- MOST IMPORTANT--- See below for Darren's email that I have forwarded regarding stem cell research, click on the links!!!

AND TAKE ACTION

Best regards,

Medora

-----Original Message-----

From: Darren Templeton [mailto:puckzman16@yahoo.com]

Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2005 10:42 AM

To: medorar@millennium-tech.com

Subject: Vote in NJ

I was thinking that it would be a good idea to send these links out to "the list" of contacts, I think they're important.

<http://carecure.atinfopop.com/4/OpenTopic?a=tpc&s=4754088921&f=3854088921&m=355107736>

<http://www.kintera.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=dkLQK8MNIpG&b=492637&action=2085&template=x.ascx>

Thanks,

Darren

May 15, 2005

The time is flying by, and we are all very happy that warmer weather has arrived – finally!

Darren has had three driving sessions so far. At first, he said he was harder than he thought it would be, then it has gotten progressively easier. Each time, minor adjustments are made, and he is able to do more and more. If he is successful at parallel parking, he might go for his driving test sometime this week. Hopefully, his vehicle on order will arrive on schedule (the end of June), driving controls will be installed and he'll be on the road this summer. At least that's the plan!

We have been going the pool at the Mountain Lakes Y twice a week for the past several weeks, and that is going well. The staff and fellow patrons are very helpful, and the pool sessions are going well. It's just me and Darren, following an exercise routine and trying different swimming strokes. He works really hard, as usual, and is exhausted after our 45-50 minutes are up. We are really looking forward to using our own pool, which should be open and ready by the beginning of June.

Darren also continues to work with a personal trainer twice a week, and focuses on balance and upper body strengthening. I can see improvements as Darren does everyday things for himself. They are getting easier and quicker. He is even able to push up on his wheelchair wheels, lifting his butt several inches off of his cushion. That shows how much his arms and triceps are improving.

This past weekend, the Kinnelon High School Ambassador's Club hosted a "Run for Recovery" for Darren's benefit. The weather fully cooperated (it was a gorgeous day) and many friends and community people came out to walk or run on Darren's behalf. We are very appreciative of everyone's involvement, as volunteers, walkers, runners and sponsors. Thank you for all of your support.

As a lot of Darren's friends are arriving home from college, Darren has just completed his first online college course. He was very happy to report today that in checking his grades, he got an A in his Philosophy course – yea!! He was a little nervous, but did think that he did well. He was happy that he did even better than he expected. In one week, he starts 2 more online courses – college writing and history. He has been very diligent in making sure that Ramapo will accept the credits and registered and bought the required books all on his own. This is great preparation for the fall, when he expects to take 4 classes while commuting to Ramapo. Another part of the process of getting to where he wants to go.

As I celebrated Mother's Day last weekend, I took the time to express my thanks to God to still have both my children to love and love me back. Their hugs, kisses and smiles are what keep me going, and I am thankful each and every day that I have them both. Although belated, I hope that all of the mothers that this update reaches had a loving, restful Mother's Day.

Well, enough for now, and I hope to keep in better touch. I know its been awhile since the last update, especially when I see people at the supermarket and they say "I haven't gotten an update recently!....." so I promise that I'll at least TRY!

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

May 26, 2005

Hello everyone,

Not much "new" news lately, but I thought I'd write and catch everyone up on the latest goings-on. I couldn't resist attaching a picture of our beautiful daughter, Arianne, going to the Prom last week. Many of you are far away, and wouldn't have a chance to see any pictures, so here's one for you. She is with a friend, Jess, and they had a great time.

So Darren has temporarily finished his driving lessons, until he gets his own vehicle. That should be in a few weeks or so. Then we'll get his driving controls installed, and he'll go back for some training in his own car. Then he'll take his driving test.

The two on-line summer courses he's taking have started - College Writing and a History course. They are both through UMass, as was his Philosophy class. Darren checked to make sure all the credits would be transferable to Ramapo. He will be attending a summer orientation at Ramapo at the end of June for a whole day. So that is all coming together, as is his schedule for the Fall. We'll be looking for an aide to accompany him to class, so if anyone out there knows of anyone who might be capable, interested and available, please be on the lookout and let me know. That would be very helpful.

We are in the process of figuring out a summer schedule with a new aide, the personal trainer, a PT and the medical muscular therapist Darren has been seeing. I am hoping we can pull together a good summer program that is very beneficial for Darren and encourages more strengthening and healing.

As usual, Darren's spirits are good, he is working hard, and looking forward to using our newly renovated pool area and pool house. Not only for therapy and exercise, but for fun with friends, too. We are all anxious now for warm weather and sun!!!

A new friend (an almost totally recovered SCI patient) told me of an article in a recent issue of Woman's World. It was so encouraging and enlightening, a story about a 22 year old guy who is now walking and recovering from a similar injury. It spurred a new round of internet research, and excitement for the possibilities that lay ahead. As my always encouraging mother recently said to me - its not a matter of IF Darren will walk, its a matter of WHEN.

So on that note of hope, I wish you all a safe and happy Memorial Day weekend.

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

June 10, 2005

Well, be prepared for a long one (again!), since I haven't written in awhile (again!). Oh well, maybe soon I'll catch on that if I write a little bit each time, and more frequently, the task won't seem quite as overwhelming when I do sit down to write! Here goes...

Memorial Day weekend brought 2 visits that were very good, very nice, but emotionally tough. The first was with our long-time friends, the Recchias. Joe and Gail and their daughters Katherine and Lauren live in Albany and were spending time at LBI last summer when they joined us for the day on Friday, July

23rd. They also had 2 other girls (I think there were 2) with them. While we have kept in touch with them over the last 10 months, we just weren't able to get our schedules together to see each other. So they were with us that day, but we hadn't seen them since the night of Darren's accident. Needless to say, it was an emotional reunion, but a very good one, too. Just to spend time together and catch up was wonderful. And I guess its all part of the healing process to discuss the day's events and all that has transpired since then. And that has been a huge amount, as Joe and Gail realized upon seeing Darren and all that he is capable of doing. So we had a very nice time with all of them, and we were so glad they made the time to come and see us.

The next day (I tried to coordinate this, but was unable to) the fireman that happened to be in the boat next to us that day, that brought a large tube to John and Darren while they were struggling in the water, came for a visit with his wife and 2 young daughters. They live in North Caldwell, and Robert is a paid fireman in North Hudson. His daughters had been with him on the boat that day. I had spoken to Robert on the phone 2 times, but we had never met. I felt it was time, and called him to arrange a visit. That visit, too, was emotional, but very nice as well. Fortunately, Robert was there in the bay, and knew what to do, being a trained fireman. He acted quickly and saved both John's and Darren's lives. Another small boat who was coming through the channel at just the right time, was able to get to Joe Recchia, who was also struggling, and helped him to safety. Since that time, Robert has received 3 valor awards for his efforts that day. Re-living the events, it was a very real possibility that 3 lives might have been lost had it not been for the help of strangers. But that was not meant to be, and all 3 were saved. I thank God for that every day. As it turns out, Robert and his wife tried to buy a house here in Kinnelon just 2 doors away from us about a year and a half ago! And he went to school with Al Escudero, our neighbor in the back! When we told him that Darren had taken Al's daughter Dana to the prom the year before, he just couldn't believe it. What a small world it is! And we invited Al and Angela over after dinner, so they could have a mini-reunion of their own!

So that was our Memorial Day weekend - more like a reunion weekend.

On the Tuesday after, we welcomed Marge into our house and our lives. Marge is an LPN and will be working for us 6 hours a day. Sometimes she'll work 3 hours in the morning and 3 more in the afternoon, or she'll work 6 hours straight through. She is very experienced, very caring and thorough, and flexible, too. So far, so good. Being that she is a nurse, and not an aide, she'll be able to some of Darren's care that only I have been doing up to this point. So I look forward to a bit more freedom and flexibility in the mornings. Marge has also worked with patients in the pool, and so far has been a big help with that.

Speaking of the pool, we now have a heater hooked up, and it is wonderful! We were in for the first time last Saturday, and in all the years we have had a pool, we had never been in it this early. And it was warm, too! Darren loved it, just floated around and enjoyed the water and the nice weather. We have a lift to get him in and out, or we use a spare wheelchair (thank you, Diane P!) and go in and out using the steps. That's a bit more tricky, though, and requires at least one really strong person and a few helpers. Darren continues to do a variety of exercises in the water, and is always trying new things. We had his neuromuscular massage therapist come yesterday for 2 hours, and he really worked! (So did we!) We helped him to stand up in the shallow end, and while he required a lot of support, he was able to use his legs a bit to push himself up. Then we also gave him a lot of support while Margaret, the therapist, moved his legs in a walking pattern. She is a huge proponent of getting the body moving again like it was used to, reminding the brain of what its supposed to do and feel like. She also had him doing a "doggy paddle" of sorts with his arms while we moved his legs simultaneously. All in all, it was a great 2 hours, and Darren later took an hour and half nap to re-energize! We look forward to working more with Margaret over the summer, as well as 2 physical therapists who are available, too.

Last Friday, Darren, John and I went to Rutgers to hear Dr. Wise Young speak about SCI research and cures. Margaret, the therapist mentioned above, also joined us there. Dr. Young is a prominent SCI researcher, well-known in the US and internationally as well. He is in the forefront of all the work that is going on around the world. We toured the lab, then listened to him speak about various procedures, medications and trials either going on or planned for the future. It was obvious that he is both passionate about his work, and has great compassion for those who suffer from conditions like SCI and others who

can benefit from stem cell research and other types of procedures. I asked some specific questions about rehabilitation, and at the end of the session, we were lucky enough to benefit from a one-on-one conversation with him about Darren's condition. He even evaluated Darren's grip and wrist strength, checked his biceps and triceps, and was quite impressed with Darren's capabilities. He suggested looking into using biofeedback as a means to improve some of his arm muscles. We also spoke of intensive rehab facilities, like Project Walk in California, and others located in Europe. Dr. Young feels that a few places in Europe have superior programs to any in the U.S., and Margaret is helping research that for us. All in all, it was a VERY worthwhile experience, hearing him speak, and feeling his positive attitude and energy. I came away feeling that since there is just SO much happening in all parts of the world, someone is bound to make a breakthrough, and soon, too.

I will end on this positive note, thinking about Dr. Young's commitment to this field of stem cell research, and what it could mean to hundreds of thousands of patients suffering from SCI, MS, CP, etc. There is just so much to hope for. We continue to ask for your prayers and support.

Love Cynthia

June 21, 2005

Hello Everyone!

I am happy to report that we are now on a good pool schedule, getting Darren into the pool at least 3 times a week, doing exercises, stretching, strengthening and movement. We have the water very warm, under the pretense of "therapeutic" (which it needs to be for Darren, but not necessarily the rest of us!) and it is quite lovely! So we are getting lots of use of the pool.

A great, big, huge THANK YOU to the Newton Country Club and their charity events committee for putting together a wonderful golf outing for Darren and a little girl suffering from cancer, last Tuesday. Special thanks to our dear friends, Ralph and Lucille Rathyen, and Pam Etzold, the chairperson. It was such a beautiful day, and the turnout was fantastic. From golfers, to hole sponsors, to prize donors and dinner attendees, the support was overwhelming. And to ALL of those who either participated or contributed, or helped with the details behind the scenes, our heartfelt thanks to you all. We were also very grateful to one of our favorite Devils players, John Madden, who was part of John's foursome. I've attached a picture of the two of them. Darren was happy to be out there on the course, driven around by his sister, and tagging along after his buddies, for the entire afternoon. He really enjoyed the day and seeing everyone. On the way home, he said something like "I really want to get better for all of these people pulling for me." That is not the first time he has said something like that, so I KNOW that he truly appreciates the support, care and concern that so many have shown over the past 11 months. It really does make a difference. It was the highlight of our month, and I know will carry us a ways with all of the positive energy shown that day. I have also attached a picture of Darren, Ari and Steve Colonna, the uncle of the little girl, who ironically was a friend of mine from high school. I haven't seen Steve in years, maybe even since high school, but his mom and my mom still stay in contact. We wish her and her family all the best in her fight against cancer.

Another highlight was the arrival of Darren's Honda Element. That came Thursday morning, bright and early, brought on a trailer from Michigan. We have since tried Darren's power and manual chairs in it - just to make sure they fit, even though we tried it previously. Also, making sure his chairs fit as a driver and a passenger. We are scheduled for our first appointment to discuss the driving controls specific to Darren's

needs, which is tomorrow (Wednesday). After that appointment, we should have a better feel for the kind of equipment needed and the timing of it being ready for him to drive. It almost seems cruel that its sitting here in the garage, and he is unable to use it yet, but Darren knows that is part of the process. So hopefully we can get the ball rolling on the equipment, and have him ready to drive in just a week or two.

Ramapo College appointments and orientations are starting, too, as Darren prepares for the Fall semester. Their Office of Specialized Services is very involved with the whole process of becoming a new student there, and they have quite a comprehensive plan for helping Darren acclimate as a freshmen with special needs. So we are looking forward to that whole process, too.

So as we are enjoying the warm weather, Darren continues to work hard with his new therapy routine and his online courses, and is still as positive, determined and motivated as ever. Thank you all for your continued support, hope and prayers.

Love Cynthia

July 11, 2005

Good morning all.

Darren has asked me to forward this announcement to everyone on the update list. If you don't get the insert below with the text and photo, you can go to www.murderballmovie.com to read about it. MURDERBALL is getting a ton of press and incredible response from critics and audience, but we still need your help.

Please forward this to your friends, family and colleagues. Hopefully we'll see you at the movies. I think Darren would appreciate your feedback after you see the movie. Thank you very much.

Medora Regan

July 21 2005,

Hello Everyone, I know its been a long time since the last update. I guess when there's nothing "new" happening, I am not as motivated to write as often as I used to. While we've all been very busy, and Darren is progressing in strength, endurance and balance, there really isn't much new news. Darren continues to work hard at his therapy, going in the pool 3-4 days a week, and working out on the other days as well. He uses the Bow Flex machine and works a lot at improving and maintaining his core muscles. He also uses the Nu-Step machine and the standing frame. So his days are busy, believe me. Throw in his schoolwork, a doctor appointment here and there, and that's our schedule. Not to mention the time he spends with friends, hanging out, playing poker, going to the movies, etc. He is as busy as any other 19 year old I know!

His attitude and determination continue to be strong. He continues to be self motivated, like he always was in anything he undertook. Knowing the meaning of hard work and working for what you want has proven to be an invaluable asset since his accident.

In a few days, we will mark the one year anniversary of his injury. As I lay in bed last night thinking about this milestone, I had such mixed feelings. Has it already been a year? Has it only been a year? I was thinking back to that day, immediately after he was hurt, and I had no idea what lay before us. Seeing him placed in the helicopter, talking with the trauma doctors at Atlantic City Medical Center, transferring him to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, planning for surgery - nothing could have prepared us for what the future held. We didn't know anything about what might/could/should happen. Then it was a whirlwind, treating him post-op and figuring out what to do next. Choosing Shepherd was the best decision we made, and we are grateful for the guidance we had that found us there. Most of you know the rest of the story.

So much has happened, yet we hope for so much more. We are looking into a place called Project Walk in San Diego, California, where intensive physical therapy is emphasized with the goal of walking. There's another place, too, in Ohio. We are thinking about spending the month of January in a place like that, between semesters at Ramapo. And there's so much happening with stem cell treatments and procedures. So we continue to research, explore and learn what we can do. There is so much information out there, we just have to sort through it all.

In the meantime, there is a lot of living going on, as you can see from my above description of Darren's days, and also in the picture and the link I'm attaching. People involved with the recent golf outing at Newton Country Club sent us a disc of over 200 pictures from the day of the event. I've uploaded them to a new album at Sony Image Station, and hopefully you can see it by using this link.

<http://www.imagestation.com/upload/index.html>

I can't promise it will work, but try, and see what happens. If it doesn't work, I guess I'll hear about it from some of you!!! (Good way to get e-mails! But remember, please DON'T hit reply - Medora will be bombarded with messages to forward to me!!!) E-mail me directly at: cynthiat@optonline.net.

I think about all of the support, love and prayers we have received over the last year, and will be forever grateful for all that everyone has done. With your continued care and concern, even more progress will be made and dreams will be fulfilled. I am thankful every day for all that I have and all that I am surrounded by. Many of you are to thank for my continued strength and positive outlook. You know who you are, and I could not have made it this far without you.

With love, prayers and continued hope for the future,

Cynthia

August 14 2005

Since we haven't written an update in awhile, and my mom has been pretty busy, I figured I would send a quick one out just to let everyone know what's going on. The biggest news around here is that Darren's new van came in the other day, with hand controls and everything. He hasn't gotten his license yet, but hopefully next week the instructor will be able to take him down to the course, and he'll pass. In case you

didn't know, the Honda Element didn't work out, and that went back to the dealer, so that's why we got the new van. Other than that, Darren's been using the pool a lot, at least 4 times a week. He's worked with different therapists in the pool doing all sorts of exercises. He does have some slight leg movement while he is in the pool, which is really exciting and inspiring. If we put a plastic chair in the shallow end, he is able to get movement in his quad and lift his leg a little bit.

This past weekend, Paul Rudat came down for a visit. Paul was at Shepherd with Darren last summer, and we have kept in touch. The last time I saw him was in March when I went up to visit and bring some things for their yard sale. Other than that, no one else in my family has seen him, so they were very impressed at his progress. It was nice to see him and spend time with him, so we were all really glad he came up.

As far as therapy goes, we are looking into a program called Project Walk that is out of California. Darren and my mom are planning on going there the last week of September to check out the place and hopefully get some sort of home program figured out. Then he will come home and work for about 3 months, and then return there for the month of January and do intensive therapy there. The mentality of Project Walk is very positive and encouraging. If you would like to check it out, the website is www.projectwalk.org So as long as he is eligible (there is no reason he shouldn't be), then it looks like that will be happening.

As far as school goes, he will be starting classes at Ramapo on September 6, which he is looking forward to.

I know this was a short one, but I figured I'd try and fill everyone in on the important things.

Hopefully the summer has been great for everyone, only a few weeks left.

Love Ari

August 24 2005

Hi everyone, this will be a short update, just to pass along some exciting news: Darren passed his driving test on Tuesday morning - yea!!! The instructor said that he did really well, and had no problems at all. I had taken him practice driving at the High School parking lot two times, and I was nervous, but also impressed with his abilities. The driving instructor at Kessler must have done something right! Of course, he was out driving that night - and I was glad he was - and everyone who saw him was so happy that HE was happy! It means so much for his mental attitude, his independence, freedom, etc. And it will do wonders for me, too! Now I'll be going car shopping.....

Tomorrow (or today if you're reading this on Thursday) we head to Atlanta for a long weekend. A visit to Shepherd, a Day at the Lake for water-skiing and jet-skiing hosted by Shepherd's Therapeutic Recreation Dept, and time to see my brother, his wife, and 5 month old twins. We are looking forward to it, but with a slight amount of trepidation as its our first trip since flying home in November. But I see things as being a lot easier this time, as Darren is so much stronger and independent now. I'll let you know how it all goes.....

I started making reservations for our one week trip to Project Walk. We will go the last week in September. It looks like Darren's personal trainer will also go with us, which will be great to have him

trained directly by the experts. They have a "Train the Trainer" program that will fit our needs exactly. Then Darren hopes to follow the home based program for 3 months, then return to CA for the whole month of January, in between semesters. Their whole outlook is very positive and hopeful, and I think it will give Darren a real boost to be in that kind of environment. There are no guarantees, of course, but positive outlook, hard work and motivating personnel will make a difference. We'll keep you posted.....

So that was my quick update. I'll keep in touch as best as I can.

With love, hope and prayers,

Cynthia Templeton

September 8, 2005

Hello Everyone,

Aahh, the beginning of a new school year - new beginnings, fresh starts.....but first, let me re-cap our summer:

We made a decision in the spring (or maybe while it was still winter, even), that we would do the work we had planned on our pool area and pool house. We would not go to our shore house - too emotional, too painful, and not accessible for Darren. So we stayed home all summer, using the pool a lot, enjoying our house, and spending time with friends and family. Not traveling back and forth, and planning, food shopping, etc. just made life a whole lot easier. More time to enjoy ourselves. And that we did. The weather cooperated, although some may say it was "too nice" since we had almost no rain at all all summer long, leaving us with water bans and restrictions. But we took advantage of the nice weather, did lots of things and had a good time. It was nice being in one place, although I did miss the shore and the beach.

So now its September. No matter how long ago it was that I was a student myself, I still look forward to the time in September when school starts. It always seems to be a time of new beginnings and fresh starts. Time to get organized again, have a little more structure to the schedule, start new projects, etc. I also love crisp, warm, sunny fall days to take a walk, watch a football game, enjoy the last of the warm weather. Funny how some things now seem to have different meanings, when you've hardly noticed them before. I guess its related to that old cliché of not taking anything for granted. Well, that has happened to me now. Each day is precious, another chance to realize what I have and to be thankful for. Sounding kind of sentimental, huh? Well, that's true, and you know why.....

This September finds Arianne a senior in high school, and President of the Student Council. She hopes to play tennis this season, although her knee isn't quite healed yet, and she's not yet cleared to play. Hopefully some more time in the gym will help that. She also plans on skiing this winter - her true love. Ari plans on applying to Ithaca College for early admission into their Physical Therapy program. We made a trip up there this summer, and she really loves the school. I can't believe she's a senior.....but she certainly has grown up. I look forward to this year with her.

Darren has started his classes at Ramapo College. For those of you not in this area, it is about a 30 minute drive from home. He drives himself there, and has had no problems so far. I worry about the winter weather and how that might affect his commute, but he has scheduled his 4 classes (12 credits) in 3 days, so that should help. After participating in an orientation program and going to classes for 2 days, Darren thinks he can do this on his own, without the aid of an assistant as I had previously thought. This is all up to him. I'm letting him decide what he needs, how to ask for help, who to ask, etc. Now with him driving himself, he is becoming more responsible for his schedule and appointments. No need for me to figure everything out anymore. And while its a bit difficult to do - step back - I am already enjoying the benefits, and so is he. Another step forward. He seems to be happy with his choice of classes, and the professors, at least on the first impression. Time will tell.

Tonight, Darren drove himself and a friend to the US Open, his third visit of the tournament! He's really getting his fill of good tennis! He went with a friend to a day session last week, right at the beginning, then all four of us went on Labor Day. We saw some great matches, and had a great day. Tonight is the first time he is driving himself there, and we'll see how that goes.....

Our trip to Atlanta went very well, and we did all that we had planned. On our first day, we visited at Shepherd, and saw an administrator we were friendly with, one of Darren's nurses, his in-patient therapists, day program therapists, and assorted others. We had a full day, and it was very worthwhile. Darren was able to try out an FES bike that uses electrical stimulation to contract the muscles and make them work the pedals of a bike. Pretty neat, and a good workout for him. While going back to Shepherd and seeing families struggle with the reality of their new situations was difficult, it also reaffirmed that Darren was in the best place he could have been after his injury. It is such a great facility, and they are doing even more now than when Darren was there.

Saturday was water ski day at a small private lake an hour north of the city. The Shepherd group were the only people there, and they had about 12 staff and 7 participants. Needless to say, they knew exactly what they were doing, had the right equipment and lots of patience with the beginners. Darren enjoyed his two runs, and did well. Keeping his balance was a bit tricky, but of course he declined the "outriggers" on the water ski, and managed to keep himself up most of the way. As soon as I can, I'll add the pictures to the album, so you can see how he did.

We spent Sunday with my brother Tim, his wife and new baby twins. Of course, they are SO adorable, and we had a very nice time, hanging out, playing with the babies and eating. They are in Smyrna, GA, in a very nice house and lots of room. It was a wonderful day.

Plans are in place for Darren to attend a one week program at Project Walk, in Carlsbad, CA. We are very excited that his trainer, Eric Prol, will be going with us. We leave on September 23rd and return October 1st. We are hopeful and optimistic about the results, and look forward to being in a very positive environment. Darren & Eric will come home with a program specifically tailored to Darren's needs, that he'll work on for 3 months. Then, if all goes well, we'll return in January (just me and Darren) for the month. I am very excited about this program, and will update you from CA as best I can.

Well, another long e-mail update, but it felt really good to write to all of you. As always, we appreciate your support, care and concern. Please keep in touch!

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

October 2, 2005

Hi Everyone,

We are back from California, and it was a GREAT trip! Project Walk was everything we had hoped it would be, and more! Darren's trainer was named Margarita, and he spent more than 15 hours with her during the week. It was a no-nonsense set-up. He started the minute he got there, and usually went longer than his 3 hour allotted time slot. There was no down time stitching between exercises and equipment. No fooling around, no socializing - just work. In fact, if Darren "rested" between sets of exercises, Margarita would have him do something different and opposite, like sit-ups! So all of the time was well spent.

After the first day's schedule of 9-12:30, we were there each day from 10:30 - 1:30. If there was any "business" to conduct, like setting up the program, or doing his interview for the web site, it was all done after his time slot. They didn't let anything interfere with his exercise time. First they wanted to see what he could do, what his capabilities were, and what he was interested in doing. As they went along, sometimes with 2 or 3 trainers, they would be developing a home program for him. As Margarita showed Eric, Darren's trainer from home, how to do things, eventually they let him (Eric) do it himself. But she was always there guiding him and instructing. She was very thorough and explained everything in detail.

Basically, Darren's program will consist of table work, moving and stretching his legs, ankles, and hips. Then he will work out on a Total Gym, which we ordered and had delivered while we were away. That is meant to work the legs, pushing against the base and against gravity. (They're big believers in using gravity). Then he'll do floor work, on his back, then against a wall, some kneeling and then work on his hands and knees. They believe that SCI patients need to re-learn the developmental steps that they learned as infants and toddlers - rolling, getting up on hands and knees, crawling, walking. While every case and every patient are different, there are many patients at various stages of walking, using crutches and walkers. So it is a very positive atmosphere - encouraging and motivating the clients to work hard and re-train the central nervous system. What was also encouraging was that Darren had already been doing some of the things they feel are most important. So now he will have a program that he will use for the next three months, getting stronger and stronger to prepare for going back. Our plan is to return for the whole month of January, in between semesters at Ramapo.

In addition to doing and learning all of the parts of the program he will do at home, they encouraged and allowed Darren to try other things in the gym. By the way, it is a large facility, with a ton of equipment. There were lots of people there all of the time, but it was very well organized and focused, not chaotic or disruptive. So Darren wanted to stand up, using a bar for support, and looking in the mirror. They helped him do that, and he was successful at using his glutes, abs and back to help push up, with support, from a sitting to a standing position. After that, they put him on a gait-trainer, where he was harnessed in to support some of his weight, then his feet were strapped in to bindings, and the machine moved his feet in a rotating position, similar to an elliptical machine. It was good he could stay upright, but in this case, the machine was doing the work. However, in "re-training the brain" its the repetitions that matter, so that was a good thing to do. After that, Margarita and 2 other trainers got him on a spin bike. A bit tricky, since there's not any support, but that's why they had 3 people helping! They were able to keep him upright and push on his thighs to make the pedals go round. That was on Thursday. Now for the good news!!! On Friday, after more than 2 hours of working out, they again got Darren on the spin bike. After a few minutes, Darren was ready to take a break, so he sat more upright, and Eric was just holding his trunk, to keep him from falling off or over. Well, Darren's legs kept going, probably from the momentum, initially. But then it was very clear from the look on his face to the trembling in his legs, that he was pushing the pedals himself!!! We didn't even realize it at first, and almost couldn't believe it. But I had the video camera rolling, and yes, its on tape!!! The smile on Darren's face said it all. And I was blinking back the tears. I am blinking them back now as I type this, and I suppose there a few other teary-eyes as you read this. What better way to end the day and the week on that note. It was awesome and incredible to witness.

While we were in California, we had the pleasure of being near some friends of ours and spending quite a bit of time with them. John and Al Wilson were hired by Decision Data at about the same time in 1980. Al was in California, but we got to know them through the annual trips, and John and Al struck up a friendship that has lasted all of this time. Well, Al and his wife, Linda, had us to their house three times during the week, and one night we went out for a wonderful dinner together. Spending time with them, sharing our stories and experiences and catching up, was a wonderful addition to our trip. They made the week special, and made us feel as welcome as family. It was really nice to meet their family, see their house and to have fun together. Thank you, Al and Linda!

Over the course of the week, we also went into the town of Carlsbad (that's where we stayed) to have dinner at an outdoor restaurant that had live music, saw a movie, and went to Balboa Park in San Diego. We also shopped at the outlet mall across the street from our hotel (how convenient!) and had lunch there several times because it was so close. We had beautiful weather the whole week, and thoroughly enjoyed the stay. But, of course, it's always nice to come home, too.....

So now we have a "wish list" of things we'd like to have, so we can duplicate what Project Walk does. Of course, we know we can't do everything exactly as they do, but some key items would definitely help. And if anyone has things around, that they're not using and would be willing to lend them to us, we would be very grateful. So here goes:

A spin bike, in good condition, that has removable handlebars. (They really believe a "spin" bike and not an ordinary exercise bike is the most beneficial).

A bosu ball

Floor exercise mat(s) - 1 or 2 depending on size

If anyone has anything that might be useful, please contact me, and we can see if what you have is what we need. I'd be happy to go and see what you have, and arrange to bring it home.

Well, I must end here, since it's getting late, although jet lag still has me thinking it's earlier than it is! Tomorrow (Monday) begins a new phase in Darren's exercise program, which we are all excited about. Again, all of your care, concern and prayers have brought us to where we are today. The belief that Darren will walk again has been reinforced by our experience at Project Walk, and we need your continued prayers that this will indeed happen.

With love and thanks, Cynthia

October 19 2005,

Hi everyone,

Thank you to everyone who offered some of the items we were looking for. Some we were able to use, some not. But I appreciate all of your generosity and thoughts. We now have a spin bike, which Darren's trainer, Eric, was able to get for us, and a good floor exercise mat. The only item I had to purchase was a bosu ball, and that has been ordered. Along with some "props" we were able to put to use that we had around the house - a seat cushion, a foam wedge, pillows - Darren and Eric are able to duplicate the routine put together for Darren's home program. It's still a bit of trial and error, but they are figuring it out. They try to do the workout three times per week, on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. So far, so good!

Darren's classes seem to be going well, at least from the information I get! He's no different than other college kids - doesn't tell his parents much....but as long as he's getting to classes, getting around and managing everything, the classes are the easy part! He enjoys his two business classes, and doesn't seem to mind the amount of work he is assigned. Every now and then I even hear what goes on in class!

Some of you might have seen the article in the Star Ledger a few weeks ago about a sport called "quad rugby." Darren was featured in the article, since he just happened to go to the practice when the reporter was there. I have my own copy, but I couldn't find it on the web to send a link here, and I tried to scan it to attach here, but was not successful. I'll try again for the next update. Anyway, last week, one of the guys loaned Darren a special rugby chair to try out, and Monday night, Darren and his friends went to the Lakeland Y during open gym time for Darren to get in some practice using the chair. Sounds like they had fun. Darren has added this to his list of activities, and now goes to Hackensack every Tuesday night to practice with the team. I think it's great that he is interested and has made the effort to get involved. All on his own.

I have made a new online photo album with the pictures from Project Walk. Hopefully this link will work. Please let me know! I hope you enjoy seeing what Darren did there, and if you have any questions, I'd be glad to try to answer them. Here's the link:

<http://www.imagestation.com/album/pictures.html?id=2119703218&code=18811984&mode=invite&DCMP=isc-email-AlbumInvite>

Well, a shorter update than most, but hope it's been informative!

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

November 4, 2005

Hello Everyone!

Today marks the one year anniversary of our arrival home from the Shepherd Center in Atlanta. What a year it's been!

Happy times, sad times; frustrations and successes; challenges and triumphs. A year of personal and family struggle, growth, love and endurance. From tears of sadness and grief to tears of happiness and joy. Where the good days now outnumber the bad ones. Through it all, Darren's positive attitude, determination and motivation were the driving forces. If he could wake up with a smile on his face, then so could I. Not every day, of course (do any of you?), but the majority of them. His dedication to his own recovery continues now, as strong as ever. But he also wants to live the life of any 19 year old - going to school, hanging out with friends, having a good time. So I'll try to re-cap the year as best I can (without boring you all to death!).

What I remember about coming home was that Ari was with us (me and Darren), and we had two cars pick us up at the airport - John and my brother-in-law, Pete, I think. As we drove through Kinnelon, there were banners, signs and bows welcoming us home. It was a wonderful, and emotional, home-coming. My family was at the house, food was delivered, and even though our renovations were not quite complete, it was great to be home.

In the beginning, Darren stayed in our room, since the elevator wasn't finished, and did not have use of a shower. We stayed in his room upstairs, and we did all of his care ourselves. We had no help with that in the beginning. Since I had no help in the more than 3 weeks in the Day Program, it was a continuation of that, but it was tough, and draining - both physically and emotionally. But we had so much help otherwise. Dinners brought in three times a week, drivers helping with the Kessler trips, visitors, phone calls and support of all kinds. We could not have adjusted so well without our family and friends.

The weeks were pretty structured, then, with therapy appointments the primary focus. Darren was often tired and worn out from the trips and treatments. But he was gaining strength and endurance, and figuring things out on his own. Thanksgiving and Christmas kept us pretty busy, and then his friends were home from college and keeping him company. A lot of poker playing was going on upstairs! His friends have been right there with him from the beginning, and continue to be a huge part of his recovery and overall quality of life. Thanks, guys!!!

Truthfully, the next few months seem to be a blur. We did get help with Darren's care, and the aide, Mira was wonderful. She didn't have any experience with a spinal cord injury before, and it was tough for her in the beginning. Not only getting used to the routine and the amount of work, but seeing Darren struggle was upsetting to her. But she was caring and concerned, and always careful. She was reliable, honest and a good care-giver. Arianne turned 17 in January and started driving, so that was a huge help. But then she had knee surgery in mid-February, so we then had a second patient to care for! It was tough for a while, but we managed. It seemed like we just "got through" the winter, looking forward to the spring and summer.

At the end of May, Darren qualified for a special Medicaid waiver program, and as much as we hated the idea of losing Mira, we were in search of a new aide/nurse who could give us more hours and more flexibility. The agency that Medicaid uses found us Marge, who is still with us now. She is a God-send. Very caring, very knowledgeable, very reliable. Also, honest and flexible. All of the qualities you could hope for in a care-giver. At first, I was reluctant to hand over my duties as Darren's primary care-giver. Who else would care for him like I did? But the physical and mental strain was starting to take its toll, and we all knew it had to happen. We are so fortunate to have found a wonderful person like Marge.

During this time, Darren started taking college courses on-line, and thinking about attending college in the fall. He was very determined to get back into the learning atmosphere. While the online courses helped, he was more anxious to actually be in a college setting. So the plans fell into place to attend Ramapo, which is where he is now and will continue in the spring. He is now thinking of continuing at Ramapo next year, with a new twist - he wants to live there on campus. I think this is a wonderful progression, and while it will take planning and coordination, it is a very real possibility.

The summer brought lots of time in the pool, and enjoying family and friends in the nice weather. We enjoyed a new schedule, and spending as much time as possible outside.

The rest is still new enough for you to remember from recent updates, so I won't bore you with the repetition.

Today is a beautiful fall day, and in a little while, I will be heading out to Pyramid Mountain for a hike with some friends. I look forward to enjoying the good company, the sun, the view. I'm sure I'll do more reflecting on this past year and a half and what it means. I'll treasure the experience and hope to gain strength from it.

It has been one heck of a year, and still, everyday, I thank God that Darren is alive and with us. As much as I struggle with our situation as a family, and think and worry about Darren's daily struggles, I am so happy and grateful that we still have him. His personality, his sense of humor, his zest for living is all intact. I wouldn't trade that for anything. And especially his smile! He continues to amaze me everyday, and lead us all on a wonderful, new journey. He constantly teaches me new things about perseverance, determination, faith and overcoming challenges. I have learned many things about myself while learning about Darren and his needs. I know he has impressed all of you with his strength. Well, I am his biggest fan!

Thank you to all of you who have been on this journey with us. I know so many of you have been affected by Darren's situation, and now look at life differently. You have been there for us, in thoughts, in actions, in prayers, in sadness and in joy. It has affected us all, and while I am sorry this has happened, and of course, wish it never had, I think it has taught many of us to appreciate the precious moments we have, to treasure our loved ones, and not take anything for granted. With continued faith, hope and prayers, Darren will continue to recover. I thank you for all you have done for us.

Cynthia Templeton