August 5, 2004 – October 7, 2004
Shepherd Center In-patient Rehab and Story of Accident

August 5

Today was a busy day for Darren. He sat in his wheelchair for the entire day, is learning to drive it around quite well, and managed to feed himself both lunch and dinner with his left hand. All very impressive! He is tired now, and is resting after a long day. He also had two therapy sessions.

We are so thankful for the little things he is able to accomplish! His spirits are good, and we have laughed quite a bit today - ALL of us. Especially when I came into the room soaking wet after getting caught in the rain coming back from the apartment. I just HAD to clean it today, and also do some laundry. Its functional, but small, and was not quite as clean as I would have liked. Now when it gets dirty, I know its OUR dirt. Does that make any sense to anyone?? Anyway, the people here are great. Very wonderful and caring individuals. I KNOW Darren will make progress here, and every day I find new reasons to be hopeful. Keep us in your prayers and thoughts, as I know you will. When Darren starts receiving your cards and letters, I know it will help his spitiris even more.

Thanks for everything,

Cindy

P.S. For all of you who are new to the updates - thanks for caring, and I hope my daily news is as much a comfort to you as it is for me to write it.

August 6, 2004

What Happened?

Well, today is 2 weeks since Darren's accident. In one way it feels like yesterday, in another it feels like it’s been much longer. Who can describe these last 2 weeks? It’s still like a nightmare, a bad dream. I wish we could just all wake up and life would be "normal" again. But we know that can't be, so we try to move forward, however slowly, each day. I have heard various rumors about Darren's situation and his condition. I thought it best for me to try to explain what has happened and what is happening now, so the facts are out there. Today I feel ready to do that. For those who I have spoken to personally, the story is redundant and difficult, and for that I apologize. For those not familiar with the facts, I hope this helps. Here goes: We were all out on our pontoon boat with our friends, the Recchia's, from Albany. It was an overcast day and we were thinking not to go out on the boat, but it was hot, and what else would we do with all these kids? Besides Darren & Ari, we had Catherine and Lauren Recchia, and their friends Genna, Shannon and Francesca. So we went. The weather cleared up, and we were having a fun time. Chatting, swimming, generally enjoying ourselves. After awhile, Darren tried to do a flip off of the boat, landed on his back and came up laughing, saying “I didn’t quite make it around.” A few minutes later, he was preparing to jump in again when I said “don’t dive.” I don’t know if I even got out both words before he dove. I kept watching him, and he came to the surface, face down in the water, not moving. I was hoping he was joking, but after awhile – 30 seconds? 40 seconds? – I knew it was no joke. John was already in the water, and I started screaming from the boat, go – go – then go fas ter, go faster. Of course, he was going as fast as he could. The current was strong, and John was having a hard time getting to him. Our friend Joe also tried reaching Darren, but the current and the water depth (now deeper) prevented him from even reaching him. John got to him, turned him over, and treaded water to keep himself and Darren from drowning. Meanwhile, I had called 911 while screaming to a boat anchored near us that we needed help. They had a tube and were able to get it to Darren and John to save them. Then a small boat was coming through the channel and pulled them toward our boat. During all this, I was on the phone with 911 and the ambulance was already at the beach. Police came in a small boat, were able to get Darren up onto it and stabilized his neck immediately. By the time they got Darren to the beach, I was on the wave runner heading back to the house. At the time Darren dove in, Ari had Fran out on the wave runner, so they did not see what happened. When they did come back, the scene was quite frantic, and it took a few minutes for them to understand what had happened. So I took the wave runner, and Ari managed to drive the boat home. John and Joe were with Darren. I never drove the wave runner so fast through those no wake zones back to the house, stripped off my bathing suit, put on clothes and had my mom drive me to the beach where the ambulance was. By the time we got there, it was gone, but I flagged down a State Trooper who took me to the field where the chopper was coming in. Everything was happening so fast, and all the emergency personnel did what had to be done, expertly and quickly. It was a surreal experience, to say the least. We were choppered to Atlantic City Medical Center, the regional trauma center. Ironically, the medics on the chopper discussed going to Atlantic City or Thomas Jefferson, but they decided on AC. What did we know? After arriving at AC, and being evaluated and assessed, our good friend Joe suggested we get a second opinion, and what a God-send that was. John immediately thought of George Naseef, Ralph and Lucille Rathyen's son-in-law. George and Jill drove during the night to come to the hospital, and reviewed what records they could. They then slept a few hours, and we met them in the morning to review more information. After making lots of phone calls and talking with the best minds in the field, George advised going to Thomas Jefferson Univ Hospital in Philadelphia, and seeing Dr. Alan Hilibrand. We did just that, and Darren had surgery Sunday morning to release the pressure on the spinal cord. So that is the story of what happened. No matter what happens with Darren and his condition, our lives will never be the same. Nor will those with us on the boat, those who helped us, and all of you, as you know and love Darren, some of you as if he were your own. Well, my tears are preventing me from seeing the keys now, so I guess I have to stop. I'll write more later.

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

August 7, 2004

Hi everyone, its been another tiring day for Darren today. But productive, too. He again fed himself his lunch but had a little trouble with dinner. It was chicken Caesar salad and just a little too difficult to eat by himself. He did try, but it was too hard. He had therapy twice, and he was a little sore from that. We did tour around the Center a little to look at the gym, and sat outside in the garden for a little while. It was good to get some fresh air. And John shaved Darren tonight before dinner. It wasn't the best job, but it was enough!

The "Assistive Technology Dept" has set him up with all kinds of blowing tubes for using the TV, and the phone, and also an extra long sipping tube to get sips of water during the night. He even used the computer today to write one e-mail, using the eraser end of a pencil to tap out the letters. He is determined! As a point of clarification, I just to make sure that everyone knows Darren's current condition. For starters, he is NOT on a ventilator, and never was, thank goodness. He knew enough to hold his breath after he dove, and never took in any water before he was rescued. That means SO much to his general recovery, medically speaking. He does have some movement in his arms, and they are getting stronger every day. He also has good wrist extension. He does not have use of his fingers yet, but we hope that will come. He is using an electric wheelchair, and is hoping to soon get strong enough to use a manual one. That means so much to be able to get yourself around. We don't know how he will progress; no one knows for sure. We have a medical team meeting on Monday, where a plan will be presented for his rehab goals. I both look forward to and dread that meeting. We'll see what happens. Well, gotta go and give Darren his nightly hand and arm massage. Tonight I'll also clean and trim his nails. He likes my massages.....

With love, prayers and thanks for your caring, Cindy

PS - Please keep the e-mails coming. Even though I can't answer most of them personally, I do read them all and find great comfort in your words. I look forward to them every day.

August 9, 2004

Hi everyone, sorry to keep you hanging over the weekend without news. Truthfully, I just didn't feel like writing. Saturday was a quiet day, and Sunday was a very "teary" day for me. I found myself crying periodically through the day, with no good reason. I cried right thru the Worship Service and again later at a little prayer service with some parents. It was awful, and I cried myself to sleep last night. Now that I got that out of my system (I find it happens about once a week), I was much more positive and focused today. I felt much better. We had our Medical Conference with Darren's primary physician and case manager today, along with 2 nurses. His Doctor is an Orthopedic Surgeon, a no-nonsense kind of guy. He presented the facts of Darren's injury with a very positive attitude. I have to admit, I was scared to death to walk in that room. I was expecting to hear the grimmest of grim statistics. Instead, the Doctor expressed much hope in new medical advances being tested now, saying that Darren will see the benefits of those. At the same time, he said "one never knows what can happen." We were all encouraged, especially when he said that Darren's injury has already changed from a "complete" injury to an "incomplete" one. That's because he now has some sensation and feeling in his feet!!! We don't know REALLY what it means, but it COULD be positive. And we hang onto everything positive that comes our way. I went to the gym today while Darren was at therapy, and after only 30 minutes on the treadmill, my legs felt like jelly. But it felt good to get more exercise than walking from our apt in the morning. And the shower was much better than our apt! Darren's spirits continue to be good. He got a shower today - yea!!! - so his day got off to a good start. Two therapy sessions, and he needed a nap! When we came back from dinner in the cafeteria, Darren wasn't in his room, and one of his roomates said Darren was downstairs and outside! He navigated the elevators all by himself. Now his goal is to get into a manual wheelchair. No more of this electric one! We hope that will happen in a week or so. For all my friends who know my habits all too well, you'll be happy to hear that I have a notebook (of course) and will soon buy folders for all the information I am collecting. We have an internet hook-up right at Darren's bed, plus we can use the library and print stuff out, make copies, etc. Its a wonderful set-up, and the librarian is very helpful as well. Well, enough for now. Darren has been talking on the phone a bit today, and is resting up for extended therapy tomorrow. If you want to send me e-mails directly, please do so: cynthiat@optonline.net. I might not answer them directly, but I'll read each and every one, I promise. And thanks for your continued thoughts and prayers.

Cindy

August 10, 2004

There's not much "new" news today - just more therapy for Darren, and he continues to work hard. He comes back tired, so I know he's doing as much as he is able. Each day, as I see more and more patients with a wide variety of injuries and disabilities, I continue to be thankful that Darren is doing as well as he is. We received a box of "stuff" from home today that included hair clippers (along with other things we wanted and needed!), so I expect Darren to be looking different in the next few days. He says he trusts me to do it, but I'm not sure I trust myself! He wants his hair short; says it will just be much easier. We'll have to take pictures.... Today I went to the gym and tried using an elliptical machine. It was a great workout, and it helps take my mind off other things. Its a great benefit. Tomorrow John and I have a full day of lectures to learn all about various aspects of a spinal cord injury and how to take care of Darren. I'm sure there's a lot of information, and it will be overwhelming, but necessary. Well, enough for today. Hopefully, I'll have more to write tomorrow. Thanks for caring about all of us, and for continuing to send e-mails. They never cease to provide me with love, support and strength.

Thank you all.

Cindy

August 11, 2004

Well, John & I felt like we had been hit with a mack truck today. We had a whole day of nursing lectures on all kinds of health issues related to spinal cord injured patients. When I see someone in a wheelchair, I usually think about the fact that the person can't walk. I never, ever once thought about bowel and bladder control, respiratory issues, skin conditions, and positioning. But these are all areas we need to learn about, and practice, not knowing if Darren will be able to perform these tasks by himself. God willing, he will be able. Otherwise, they are daunting tasks to perform on a daily basis. So we were feeling very overwhelmed, and quite negative about such pressing issues. Then we received the e-mail I have attached here. What hope! What promise! If an older gentleman can have such recovery, why not Darren? So good things CAN happen, and again, that is what we have to hold onto to. I started reading the e-mail to Darren, and of course, I started crying when it cam e to the part of having a loving and supportive family. I couldn't finish reading it, but he got the gist of it. That's what important. Anyway, Darren was changed from "pre-rehab" to "rehab" status today, and that means his sessions, twice daily, increase from one hour to one and half hours each. That is good news. He always works hard, and comes back tired. Tonight we are having an impromptu pizza party with one of the roommates - a boy from Ridgewood, same age, same injury. Looking forward to it.

Much love and prayers, Cindy

Attachment:

Dear John,

I am the Vice President of Human Resources for Printronix. I heard about your son Darren's accident and thought you could benefit from my experience. A very dear friend of mine had a surfing accident 2 years ago resulting in severe compression to the spinal cord at C5 and C6. He was in intensive care for 6 weeks. I have such empathy for you and your wife. This is a horrible thing to go through for the whole family. He did not sever the spinal cord but there was severe compression resulting in paralysis from the shoulders down. The good news is; today he is walking with a walker and hopes to be using a cane soon and then without anything. It has been a long recovery but there has been recovery. I am sure your son is much younger than my friend who is in his 50's. I talked to my friend today and he said that if the doctors were able to get the swelling down right away, it sounds like he will be fine. He has his age, good doctors, obviously very loving and supportive parents and of course a lot of prayers in his behalf all working for him. It will be a difficult journey but there is an end in sight. I am very encouraged to hear that he has been able to move his arm and one leg a little bit already. With good rehab., he will most likely have a full recovery.

Don't loose hope, it is a long journey but hang in there, now more than ever he needs you. Life is strange, your whole life can change in an instance. The good news for my friend is, there has been some very positive things that have come from all of this. You will see some little surprises also. My prayers are with you and your wife as well as Darren.

Sincerely,

Juli Mathews

August 12, 2004

Well, some days are quiet here at Shepherd, and today was one of them. Darren was feeling a little under the weather, probably a result of the urinary tract infection he has. Some kids get really knocked out by them, but Darren managed to go to both therapy sessions anyway. The therapists just re-arranged their plans to accomodate his not feeling well.

Darren's roommate Paul's mother (got that?) buzz cut Darren's hair last night. It looks good, and I love rubbing it - although he doesn't! Ari says he looks ready for boot camp, and I guess he is. He's in for a long haul and lots of work. If you want to send him an e-mail that can be printed and delivered to his room, go to www.shepherd.org and click on "contact us." Then click "contact a patient" and I think you'll get to it. They deliver all messages with the mail, and its always a treat to get mail! I'll write more tomorrow - hopefully there will be more "news" to report. With prayers and love, Cindy

Hello all! While I was so excited to pass along that e-mail with the encouraging news of that older gentleman's success, I neglected to clarify that the writer mis-spoke about Darren's condition. While he does have feeling of pressure on the bottoms of his feet, which we consider good without knowing what it means, he has not been yet able to move either of his legs. His arm strength continues to improve, slowly, and he works at rehab everyday to make progress. I am sorry if I misled anyone, but we still need to grasp and hold onto all that is positive. And today we became aware of a Devils player who suffered a broken neck early in his career, who was told he'd never walk again. He now plays in the NHL. My goal is to re-write the narrative that Al MIchaels made famous in 1980 - Do you believe in miracles??? Yes, yes, yes.

Cindy

August 13, 2004

Hello everyone, Darren seems to think it's "curious" that I send updates EVERY day. He asked "what do you write about? I didn't do anything today." I tried to explain that so many people just want to know how he's doing, what he's doing, and how we are. What he doesn't see as anything "big" might be HUGE to me. I try not to over-exaggerate, but I get excited at the littlest things! Today, the occupational therapist said Darren should be brushing his own teeth. I was so excited, since as the official tooth-brusher, I didn't feel as if I was doing such a good job. But he felt inadequate that he hasn't been doing it along. So tonight we will try that! In addition to his feeding himself each meal, he fed himself a handful of gummi bears, held a small milk container, and was using his cell phone. Not very pretty to watch sometimes, and hard to see him struggle, but worth every effort! He is excited to watch the Olympics, and has a busy week scheduled. So we will try to rest up this weekend so he is prepared for more hard work. John was out with another dad for dinner (yea!!!) and just brought me back a burger and a shake.

Gotta go......... Cindy

August 16, 2004

Well, I know you've all been waiting for the latest on what's going on in Atlanta. Even though the weekends are slow, sometimes I just don't feel like writing.

Let me start by thanking everyone for participating in the Prayer Service. Especially Doris and Paul Zoch, Msg. Carroll and Carol Gordon, for pulling it all together, everyone who participated, and everyone else for attending. Its sounds like it was a wonderful service, and I am anxious to see the videotape for myself.

To back up a little, last Friday I took Arianne to a local shopping mall. At first, it seemed weird to be doing something "normal," but then I relaxed and started looking for things we wanted for Ari and Darren. It felt good to be out, but after a few hours I was anxious to get back. The weekend was quiet, as expected. However, on Sunday morning, I had some "hands on training" in Darren's personal care. Bathing, dressing, personal care and positioning wore us both out, emotionally and physically. The whole routine took us 2 hours, and Darren needed rest after that! He was exhausted. Today was a new day, the start of a busy week of therapy, classes, counseling, etc. This morning he was learning how to put on a pair of shorts, and was told he made as much progress as someone who worked on it for three sessions. He doesn't see the significance in that, but do you? I do! I know he is really working hard each and every session. I met with a counselor today who helped me see that each day has promise and hope. I need to learn how to balance optimism with reality, good with bad, positive with negative. We talked about making plans for home modifications, and she advised to be as patient as possible, since things (related to Darren's condition) can change so rapidly. Easy for her to say!

While Darren was at therapy this afternoon, I went to the gym, then decided to take a walk outside. I was in search of an ice cream cone, but never found one. I did find a grocery store, so I stocked up on some food! When I returned, I was hot and sweaty, and I find Darren bundled up under his fleece blanket. It's so strange to see him so cold, but a spinal cord injury affects (among other things) the body's ability to control its own temperature. It's something to always be aware of.

Enough for now – I'm sure I'll have more to write tomorrow. Thanks for staying connected, and I look forward to return e-mails and messages.

Cynthia

August 17, 2004

Hi everyone! You'll know when I've been here awhile - I'll start saying "hey, y'all" like the natives! Everyone here is friendly and loves to call all of us honey and baby. It seems like family. Darren had a busy, tiring day. Let's see if I can remember everything. First was an hour long class about the respiratory system and how it is different than pre-injury. The number one cause of death of SCI (get used to this - spinal cord injury) patients is pneumonia. So its real important to prevent that from happening in the first place. After class, he went to OT and was working on sitting himself up and holding himself up as long as possible. You can imagine how tiring that is. But he says its getting easier. Darren also worked on putting on a t-shirt. He said that was easier than before (I didn't even know there had been a "before"). Lunch, then PT, where he tried a manual wheelchair for the first time. Yea!! He could only stay in it for half an hour, and he'll work up to more time very gradually. When a person sits in a wheelchair for long periods of time, they have to do "weight shifts" to distribute their weight off of their tail bones for at least 1 minute every half hour. Likewise, if they're in bed for prolonged periods, they have to be turned periodically, and those times have to be gradually increased as well. But back to the wheelchair - Darren was able to push himself to his room, to show me, but I wasn't there. :(I was at the gym. Oh well, he'll try again tomorrow! His shoulders and neck were prettt tired after that, and I massaged him as best I could. After that he had a bladder test that I won't detail, and then a session at "assistive technology" where he learned about a computer program named Dragon something, which works on verbal cues. Pretty cool. Darren was asked to try eating his lunch with his right hand, which was difficult, but he managed. It took a lot of concentration and a long time, but he was patient. Last night, Darren was wondering aloud if he would be able to raise just the bar used for free weights at the gym, and we both decided - ummmm, probably not. He expressed some regret in having trained like he had - what good is it now attitude - and I nipped that in the bud pretty quickly by saying - thank goodness you WERE in such good shape before your accident; that will help you now. He agreed, maybe reluctantly, but he agreed.

Every day is a challenge, and while I am happy to report his progress, it is so difficult to see him struggling. But I try to stay focused, and be thankful for whatever the day has brought. Thank you to everyone for cards, packages and e-mails. We eagerly await the mail delivery, and we read everything. I sift through my own e-mails, and share what I can with Darren without overwhelming him. Short, positive e-mails with inspirational messages are the ones I share, the others I keep to myself. But I read them all, so keep them coming!

With love, hope and prayers,

Cynthia

August 18, 2004

OK, my update tonight might be quick - Darren was using the computer! He was checking e-mail and IM'ing his friends. It is so good for him to stay in touch with his friends. Last night, Darren & I shared some tears, and spoke of our fears and worries. Mostly it was hugs and tears. I think he is protecting me from his emotions as much, if not more, than I try to protect him from mine. But last night we cried together. That prompted me to seek out the Chaplain this morning, even though I was feeling much better. He was very understanding, offering up some suggestions for coping and healing. He said we need to cry and grieve, to let it out. Otherwise the stresses will show up later as heart problems, ulcers, etc. He explained that all of this is an unfolding process, as Darren's body heals itself. We shouldn't consider fevers or infections as setbacks, but a part of the healing. Rev. Ken thinks that an incident such as this can be considered a tragedy or a blessing - we choose which path to take. It can also be a re-birth, and part of that re-birth can be finding a new spiritual self, one that I haven't had in quite some time. I look forward to tha t. Well, enough for my healing.... Darren didn't get back in the manual chair today, but maybe tomorrow. Since his left arm and hand are sronger than his right, the therapist has been encouraging him to use his right more, like with eating. It is a struggle, as I reported yesterday, but he's getting better at it. And tonight at dinner I put a burger in his hands and he was able to eat the whole thing. His arms and hands do all the work, since he still doesn't have any movement in his fingers. But his wrist extensions are good, and that is really helpful. Well, his spirits are good tonight - we got a call from Lou Lamoriello, CEO of the Devils! He was so sincere and genuine in his conversation, amazing that he made time to call Darren. He told Darren and me that ANYTIME his spirits are down and he needs a kick in the ass, to call him. He said to stay positive, that the mind is all important now, and other motivational, inspirational comments. He was great - thanks Shelley!!! That made our day. OK, I did manage enough time to write everything I wanted, and more. The opportunity to share my thoughts with you is part of my healing, and I appreciate the opportunity.

Love and prayers,

Cynthia

August 19, 2004

Our quiet room just got loud again (but in a good way) with the arrival of John, Ari and Greg DeVries. They came with famous Armenian rolls from the Feredjians (thanks Kathy!), famous sandwiches from Taste of Reality (thanks Jim!) and lots of cards and presents. Thanks to all who sent anything!!! Thanks also to the anonymous sender of a balloon bouquet - it arrived without a card. so please 'fess up so we can thank you properly. Today was another successful day in therapy. Darren wheeled his manual wheelchair from the therapy room to his room, so I could see him, and then BACK AGAIN. We're guessing its about 50 yards each way so that's no small feat! His therapist was happy, and so was he. Then he received electrical stimulation on his back muscles while flexing his shoulders, and that wore him out even more. The elec stim can be used when the muscle is "firing," otherwise it can actually do some damage. But the therpist says his left tricep is firing, so the elec stim will be used on that in the future. He also ate a pork sandwich for lunch, he just needed help getting in in his grasp. Once he had his hand and fingers wrapped around it, he could bring it up and down to eat. A little messy, but tasty. Last night, we had a very special visitor. A friend of Trip (George) Winnie's in Kinnelon (thanks Trip!) has a friend who lives in Atlanta now. He called a few days ago and arranged to visit us last night. He came and spoke with Darren and me for awhile, then treated me to dinner. When he was a sophomore at Kinnelon High School, Doug suffered the same injury playing football as Darren has now. He was so inspirational and motivational; so caring and compassionate. He has recovered fully, even though it took him more than a year. So he encouraged Darren to work hard, stay focused and never give up. He told him all the right things. And dinner out was so wonderful!! It was truly a magical evening, reminding us both to never give up hope. We could see what IS possible. I am headed home for a few days, so Ari will be the official "updater" for the next several days. I look forward to seeing some of you (unfortunately I can only see a few people this time) and being home in Kinnelon.

With hope, love and prayers,

Cindy

August 20, 2004

I don't think I can make these updates as detailed as Mom can, but I'll do my best. Darren was very, very busy today. After morning therapy we had surprise visitors- Julie & Alex Kramer. Darren and Alex used to be very good friends before the Kramer's moved down to Atlanta about 10 years ago. It's unfortunate that they were reunited under these circumstances, but Darren really enjoyed seeing him.

When I came down yesterday, I brought some sandwichs from the Taste of Reality Deli in Kinnelon that Darren requested. He ate a Mike's Delight today, and he finished it so fast. I'd say that has been his most enjoyed meal so far. After his afternoon therapy, he was 'interviewed' as part of a research survey that they are doing on spinal cord patients. After that, Darren was tired and now he's back in bed resting before dinner.

We received a very interesting package today- from Gilbert's Chowder House in Portland, Maine. When we take the annual ski trip up to Sugarloaf Mountain in Maine, we always stop there on the way, and Darren loves it. But we don't know who arranged for the package , so will someone from our skiing family please confess?? Darren is looking forward to a more relaxed weekend and enjoying his time while Greg is here. He thanks everyone for the cards, emails and packages he has been receiving and hopes to thank some people individually soon.

Love,

Ari

August 21, 2004

Note: Ari has asked me to pass along her email address to the group

distribution list. She can be reached at: atempleton@optonline.net

Carol Gordon

A brief message from Ari today:

Through Shepherd, Darren is scheduled to go to an IMAX movie today-his first time out of the hospital. Should be exciting...Greg DeVries (his friend from Kinnelon who is visitng for a few days) and I will go with him. Even though it might be hard as Darren's first public outing in a wheelchair, I think he's excited about it, as we all are.

August 21- second update

After Darren's shower and short therapy session this morning, he was scheduled for an outing to the IMAX theater. Only two other patients went, so Greg and I were able to accompany Darren on the bus ride to the show. This was Darren's first experience in public in a wheelchair. It went better than I expected it to and everything went pretty smoothly. The only thing that seemed to bother Darren was when people looked at him, especially young kids, but other than that I think Darren really enjoyed leaving the center and getting out. The movie wasn't the most exciting, but since it was his first outing it was pretty short and not too complicated.

Several of Darren's friends chipped in to buy him an ipod, which he has been listening to and enjoying a lot, so thanks guys! We were also able to watch the movie that a bunch of his friends from school made last week, so he enjoyed seeing that. Greg was able to hook up the dvd player to the big TV which we put at the end of his bed so he can watch it comfortably in bed tonight.

Darren's roommate, Paul, was able to move his big toe on his right foot today. It was a very exciting event in room 217. Paul's accident was on June 26th, so he's been here a while longer than Darren, but it's a great sign.

The weekends are pretty slow and uneventful here, so Darren's just taking it easy and enjoying his company and the nice Atlanta weather.

Love, Ari

August 22, 2004

Sundays are very relaxed days here at Shepherd. No therapy, and nothing is usually scheduled. We went to the worship service this afternoon that was run by the chaplain. A guest speaker, who was currently a day patient at Shepherd (after you are a patient at Shepherd for about 8-10 weeks you move to the day program where you live in an apartment with a family member near the Shepherd building) spoke about his journey and the obstacles he faced. It was very inspirational. We then enjoyed a nice lunch in the garden and just spent a while out there.

Once Darren got back into bed this morning, his feet were pretty swollen. The nurse thinks it's edema, which is caused by sitting up in the chair for periods of time. Although Darren's never had this, it is possible for it to occur. They gave him Tylenol, and elevated his feet on the bed. Hopefully that'll take care of the problem.

Tomorrow he has a very busy day-only one hour off for lunch between 9am - 4pm. He's just watching a movie in bed now and resting up for his busy day and week ahead.

He definitely enjoyed having a pretty laidback weekend and loved seeing Greg. His first outing yesterday was successful.

For those of you are new to the list, if you'd like to contact Darren, you can go to:

www.Shepherd.org, click "contact us" then "contact a patient".

or you can send him mail to:

Darren Templeton

Case Manager-Pam Winter

2020 Peachtree Rd., NW

Atlanta, GA 30309

This is my last update since Greg and I are going home tomorrow. Mom will be back on Tuesday.

Love, Ari

August 23, 2004

This is a poem that John appreciated and asked me to forward to the group distribution list. It was written by Joe Hofmann, a business associate of John's from many years ago.

I've lived next door to John and Cindy for about 20 years now, and it's never ceased to amaze me how diligent they are about keeping in contact with so many people. I think we all know how easy it is to lose touch, but the Templetons should be an example to us about the importance and comfort of maintaining ties with our past.

C.Gordon

Broken Hearts

For Darren Templeton

Life sometimes seems so unfair
So say children everywhere
No one even seems to care
Shattered dreams and such despair

Hear their laughter fill the air
No tears falling anywhere
Oh how quickly life repairs
Broken hearts caught unawares

Faith and hope will get you there

It can’t hurt to say a prayer

Take the challenge if you dare

Reach your goals with time to spare

by Joe Hofmann 8/11/04

August 25, 2004

Hi everyone, I know you're anxious to hear news on Darren, so I'll write up something quick this morning. I was so happy to be home, but I was also SO happy to get back, too. Darren was resting when I arrived, but when he opened his eyes and smiled, that's all I needed! He's been fighting a fever, and now has a blood infection. I'm not sure what it means, but he's now on a different antibiotic. I hope to be speaking with the Doctor later this morning. He's feeling pretty good, though. He went to class and is off to therapy in just a few minutes. I spoke with his PT for just a bit, and she said that Darren is working really hard, every session. He's making improvements, but progress is very slow and sometimes hard to see and appreciate. She said he's a great patient to work with! I am doing some housekeeping this morning - so many packages have arrived that I am sorting through. Thank you to everyone for sending such wonderful things!!! We are truly appreciative of everything that's been received. I'll try to do an update later this evening............

Cindy

August 25—second update

Hi everyone, I'm glad to be back in Atlanta with Darren. It was good to be home with family and friends, but I was anxious to come back, too. When I saw that thousand watt smile, I knew why I had missed him. When I arrived, Darren was resting, but there was just enough time to help him eat a Mike's Delight sandwich from Jim's, then get ready and go to the movies. We saw Bourne Supremacy with four other patients and their caregivers. It was my first time out "in public" with Darren, and it went better than I expected. I think that was because we were with other people in wheelchairs, and our accompanying staff knew exactly what to do. But Darren purchased his own ticket and gave it to the ticket checker (a man in a wheelchair, by the way). With some assistance, I could see Darren going to the movies with his friends (except for the personal care issues which might have to be addressed). Anyway, it was good for him to get out, but he was ready to get back to Shepherd, too. He went right to bed, and I went back to the apartment a little before 11pm. Then I realized I was hungry - I never ate any dinner! Two pop-tarts and a cup of tea, some Olympics and I went to bed. I was exhaust ed, too.

After some confusion, it was determined that Darren did NOT have a blood infection after all. Thank goodness. He still has a urinary tract infection, but that seems less worrisome. He was feeling good today. Today was a pretty normal day of therapy and class, then an afternoon ultrasound to make sure there were no blood clots in his legs - a routine thing to check. Luckily, there were none. But since he had to be in bed for the ultrasound, he figured he'd take a little nap! Then he got up for dinner and now he's watching TV. A little earlier, he made a few phone calls and sent 2 e-mails to 2 lucky recipients! Hopefully, he'll feel up to more of that in the coming days. I hope so, as he likes to feel in contact with everyone, too.

While I was home in NJ, Darren was scheduled to go to the gym, and got a look at some of the equipment and exercises he can start to do. I hope that he and I can go tomorrow or Friday so I can learn how I can help him on the machines. It just depends on how tired he is after his therapy and if he has enough energy for more! I took a few pictures that Ari helped me post on Sony ImageStation. Click on this link to see them http://www.imagestation.com/album/?id=4229700093&code=11492301&mode=invite&cmp=EMC-AlbumInvite

If you've never been to that site, you'll have to register, but its quick and easy. I hope you enjoy the pictures.

Enough for now! With love, prayers and hope,

Cynthia

August 26, 2004

Hi everyone! It seems hard to believe that I spend more than 12 hours at Shepherd each day, and the time seems to fly by! When Darren has a full schedule, it seems I do, too. And today was a whirlwind. Busy morning, very chaotic lunch hour, busy afternoon, early dinner. I can hardly believe its 8pm already. Darren started working on "sliding board transfers" today and said it was really hard and he really wasn't able to do it. Watch for updates; I hope to be able to report on significant progress in a week or so. He spent more time in his manual chair today, too. The hour allotted for lunch was almost completely taken up with Darren learning to perform his own bladder care. Of course, it takes much longer to do with him trying to do it himself, then he had about 5 minutes to eat. Not good! But he didn't want to be late for therapy, so lunch had to wait. During his therapy session, I went to the gym, and when I came back, he was nowhere to be found. I looked in the usual spots, but I didn't check one of the outside areas where the sun was shining - that's where he was! It was birthday celebration night tonight. One roommate's was yesterday, the other today. Around 5:30 tonight, lots of the boys gathered in the gym for a pizza party, and it was fun. Pizza, conversation, photos - a real social gathering! Darren was able to hold his own pizza slice and eat by himself. Even a kid who was in a car accident and broke C6/7 was there - walking! His accident was about 3 years ago. During my treadmill session today, I decided that I was going to try to find as many success stories as possible, and make contact with anyone willing to share their story with Darren. I truly believe that Darren will walk again, but to keep his spirits up and help him stay positive - I can't do it all alone. So if ANYONE knows of someone who has been in a similar situation, or had a similar accident, and you're willing to help me make contact or give me information, that would be SO helpful.

Today, Darren received a WONDERFUL present - an autographed authentic 2004 NHL Eastern Conference All Star Jersey - signed by the whole All Star conference team!!! It is SO awesome! And the fact that it includes 3 Devils players is even better! Thank you, Bill - you're the best!!! Thanks to everyone who sends us packages, and cards and e-mails, too. I am trying to start e-mailing personal thank you's, but until then, one great big THANK YOU!!! Well, Darren tells me that his OT is coming at 7:30 am to help him put on his t-shirt in the morning. As he says - "that should be interesting." And I agree. I don't think I'll be here to see it, but I'll get a report....I hope to be able to report on lots of different kinds of progress in the next few weeks. Keep the prayers coming....we need them all!!!

With love and hope, Cynthia

PS Check the picture site again; Ari is adding more pictures. (Thanks, Ari!!)

August 27, 2004

Hello everyone, sorry for the lateness of this; thought I would get to it earlier tonight. But I had more personal care training, and then it took FOREVER to get Darren's TED stockings on. Ever try to put stockings on someone else? Tight stockings? On legs that are HEAVY?? Well, this isn't the first time I tried it, but for some reason they weren't cooperating, and now my back is hurting and I'm TIRED. But enough about me. Darren asked if I would include in my update thanks to everyone for all they've been doing. He viewed the photo album for the first time tonight, and read the guestbook. He was visibly moved by some of the comments. And we received more packages today - thanks again! I AM keeping a list, so I can eventually (soon, I hope) thank everyone personally. There just never seems to be enough time in the day, and the days are long. This morning, Darren had his OT session eraly, and it consisted of dressing himself and brushing his own teeth. But it was so much more than it sounds. He was successful with getting on his T-shirt, so that was improvement! He had quite a hard time with his pants, and needed a lot of help. He tried getting his toothbrush and toothpaste out of his cabinet (it fell because it was heavier than he thought), he put the paste on the brush, brushed his teeth and rinsed out. Pretty much all by himself. Quite impressive. After a skin class where he saw very graphic examples of not taking care of his skin, and a PT session, he was wiped out. He hardly ate any lunch, and slept for several hours this afternoon. The rest of the roommates were resting, too, so the room was quiet and he got some good sleep. The he was feeling much better for dinner, but running a fever again. Just can't seem to pinpoint the cause of the fever.

Anyway, that was our day.

I did meet a nurse at the gym today who works here on a different floor, and she had some really good insights and perspectives. She introduced me to a 32 year old C5/7 who is in a wheelchair but competely independent. His injury was 7 years ago, and his upper body looked SO strong. She works out with him 3 times a week, and she says he is very committed to staying strong and in shape. It takes a lot, though. Well, I'll try to keep everyone updated throughout the weekend. Enjoy, and keep us in your prayers.

With love and hope, Cynthia

August 29, 2004

Hello everyone! Darren is still fighting a fever - cause unknown - but the nursing staff is all over it. Doctors will be in on Monday. Frustrating, because its wiping him out. A half day of activity is about all he can handle. So if the morning is good, the afternoon is shot. Or vice versa. I hope we can solve the mystery SOON!!! We were so happy to have visitors yeaterday - Saturday. Charlene and Michael Butera came down, and we had a very nice day together. Darren showed Michael what he could do in the gym, and Michael helped him even more. We were outside in the garden for a bit, then came inside just before a sun shower came! Then minutes later, it was hotter than hot again. While Darren rested, we went across the street to Friday's for drinks (a first for me!) then ordered take-out to bring back to Darren's room. It wasn't exactly the same as a restuarant meal, but better than hospital/cafeteria food! All in all, it was great to have friends here, both for us and Darren. Well, back to the tougher schedule tomorrow - hopefully Darren will be up to the tasks at hand. If his body cooperates, I know his mind will be determined, as always. I'll let you know...............

Love Cynthia

August 30, 2004

Hi everyone, another day of high temperatures and Darren feeling wiped out. This is getting really old, and he's so frustrated. Instead of going to his afternoon physical therapy session, he went for an MRI. And he wasn't too happy about missing it, but he also wants to find out why he has the high temps. This morning, he had both a chest X-Ray and an X-ray of his hips/pelvis. Then the MRI of the hips. Internal medicine and Infectious Diseases have both been consulted, so they are doing everything they can think of to try to find the reason behind the fevers. One thing they're trying is discontinue the Augmentin that he's on for the urinary tract infection. Maybe he's reacting to it. The Doctor had a patient about 10 years ago that had an infection in his hip, and was running fevers. It took them forever to pinpoint it, and he hasn't forgotten that. So that was the reason for checking the hips....we'll see what the results are tomorrow, I guess. I wish I were writing about therapy and progress and good news, but some days are like this, I guess. Unfortunately, on days like this, we focus on getting him well, and there's no energy for rehab. Again, today, he had only half a good day. We pray for whole days of feeling better, working at rehab and recovery. Please continue your prayers.

Love Cynthia

August 31, 2004

Hi everyone, another day of medical mysteries. Darren felt fine to go to class and a morning session of OT, then he was told the Doctor wanted to check his legs again for blood clots. So back into bed for that, then off to adjacent Piedmont Hospital for a hip aspiration. The Doctor had seen some fluid in Darren's hips on the MRI done yesterday, and he wanted it checked for bacteria. Before he got the results, he explained what would be done if the fluid was infected, and it would have meant surgery tonight to clean out the hips and pack them with antibiotic. Awaiting the results meant no dinner and no outing. But the

results were negative - no bacteria. That IS a good thing, but now we're back to square one again with the fever, which has been going up and down all day again. We were able to eat about 7pm, but Darren was not able to go on the outing to Galyan's - a huge sporting goods store. Too bad, since his roommates were going, and he was looking forward to it. Oh well, a nother day, as Darren says. His spirits are pretty good, despite these setbacks. Yesterday, he did get his neck brace/collar off, so he was happy about that. He is starting to move his neck more now, and will do new exercises in therapy now that it's off. During his OT session, he worked more on dressing himself - putting on a T-shirt and shorts. He said the shirt is getting easier, but the shorts are really hard. His arms are not strong enough to lift his legs, but I'm sure he'll see improvement doing that, too. Today, I realized that there are challenges and triumphs every day. Right now, the challenges seem huge and the triumphs small, but they are there. I just need to look for them, and focus on them. I have started reading "Love, Medicine and Miracles" by Bernie Siegel, and it makes a lot of sense to me so far. Thank you to those who suggested it, and to the one who delivered it! So far, I see Darren as the "exceptional patient" that Dr. Siegel describes: one who is involved in his own care, wants to be educated and made "doctors" of their own cases, and have an "inner locus of control." I've been telling Darren about the concepts, and I can't wait til he's up to reading it. I think it will be a tremendous help to us both. Please check out the pictures, and be sure to add a message to the guestbook at the end.
http://www.imagestation.com/member/join_signin_prompt.html?album_idB29700093&rf=u=Falbum%2F%3Fid%3D4229700093%26mode%3Dinvi

Also, in preparation for some downtime this long, holiday weekend, I think it might be nice for Darren to receive some e-mails of his own. Please send to "puckzman16@yahoo.com." I think he'll enjoy getting some mail. I don't like to discourage anyone from sending things, but we have reached a saturation point of food, snacks, cookies, etc. We could compete with the snack cart that comes around each night! So thanks for the goodies everyone, but send cards and letters. We still love getting mail every day. And you can still send e-mails through the Shepherd site – contact us – contact a patient. They are printed out and delivered with the mail.

With love and prayers, and hope that these fevers go away,

Cynthia

September 1, 2004

Hi everyone, another interesting day here at Shepherd. Despite a fever of 103.8 during the night, it dropped down by the morning. Darren was exhausted, though, since he didn't sleep well, so he skipped class in favor of saving his energy for therapy. He did make both his therapy sessions today - yea!!! But in between lunch and afternoon PT, nurses and techs whipped into his room, dismantling it without an explanation of what was going on. It turns out he has a bowel infection "C-Diff" which can be treated by a specific antibiotic, and will take at least 7-10 days to clear up. Some can last a month, but we certainly hope that doesn't happen. There seems to be some difference of opinion in whether the C-Diff has been causing the fever. Some say it is, some say it might not be. One thing that happens with C-Diff is that the patient is put into a room by himself - isolation - which means that gowns and gloves must be worn when any contact with the patient is made. I can sit here

in the room without one, but if I do his bladder care, or change his clothes, I should wear a gown and gloves. Also, any nurses, techs or therapists have to wear gowns as well. Darren can still go to therapy, class, etc., just extra precautions have to be taken because the infection is very contagious. On the positive side, Darren is figuring how to do more and more with his hands, devising ways to get things done even though his fingers aren't working. And he said he can pretty much get his own T-shirt on in therapy. So, again, baby steps of improvement. I was pretty frazzled with the way the room change was made today, and it sent me into a crying spell. It just seemed that NOTHING was going his way, and everything has been a struggle. I made it known to the staff that I was unhappy, and I received 2 apologies from nurses - his own nurse and the charge nurse - that, yes, the situation had not been handled well. After that, I said OK, time to move on and get him better. If this is what it takes, let's get to it. And Darren felt the same. Well, I need to end so I can try to hitch a ride back to the apt with another family. I move out tomorrow, into the hotel next door.

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

September 2, 2004

Hi everyone, hard to believe that our first 30 days are over, and I had to move out of the apartments they provide for the families. In one way, it has gone so fast, in another it has seemed like an eternity. A few items that I don't want to forget to tell everyone: we have received a lot of stuff from the Devils, Nets, and Jets. They have been very generous, and I understand a lot of different people have asked. So thanks for your efforts everyone, and now that they have responded, there is no need to keep asking. His room is well decorated, by the way, with all the cool stuff he has received. A while back, Darren received a beautiful framed print from Successories entitled "The Power of Attitude." It arrived anonymously and I thought I knew who sent it, but it wasn't them! So please let us know who the giver is! OK, today's news: it feels like we are back in the hospital, taking care of Darren's sickness(es) rather than in a rehab center. While they found this infection, the C-Diff, it causes stomach upset and diarrhea. So even though the fevers are not as high, or at least they weren't today, now there are other symptoms to treat. A never-ending saga, it seems. I only hope that he gets all of this out of the way before we come home, so we don't have these kinds of problems later. On the positive side, Darren is FEELING his stomach, so I think that's a good thing. He even said last night he's starting to feel the needle he gets in the stomach, and that's new. He also described a really weird sensation in his knee, like a piece of metal turning around and around in there. Strange, but maybe good??? We certainly hope so....... Its quiet now, being in a room by ourselves, but maybe it will help Darren sleep a little better. It does get boring, though. Keep the e-mails, cards and letters coming! They always brighten our days and make us smile, reminded by our friends' prayers, support and love.

With love and hope, Cynthia

September 3, 2004

Another day, another question mark about why Darren feels like he does. His temp went up to 103 last night, but this morning he was back to feeling OK. What a roller coaster. As the day wore on, he was complaining about a sore throat, and they tested him for strep. They put him right on penicillin, just in case it is. So another antibiotic, and I wonder how that will affect the C-diff and the flagill they're using to treat that. Right now, we'll wait on the strep and see what happens. In the meantime, his OT session was feeding himself breakfast and dressing himself. Up until now, he has been getting fed breakfast since he's still in bed and its much harder to eat on his own. Not anymore! At least according to Amy, his OT. Then he dressed himself, and he did better than last time. Still hard with the pants, but better, and better with the T-shirt as well. After that, he was exhausted and slept another hour and a half! Since he had to stay in his room til 2pm today (a 24 hour restriction because of the infection), he figured he may as well rest! Then when he got up, he brushed his own teeth, and did that better than before, also. He gets frustrated, but he is making improvements. After his afternoon PT session, he was tired, but since it was nice, we went outside to read his mail and take in some sun. Since he wasn't running a fever, he could afford to get a little warmer, and it felt good to both of us. A new roommate moved in today. He's been in ICU for 4 or 5 days, and has the same infection that Darren has. He is 16, from Alabama, and was in a car accident about 4 weeks ago. He was in an a hospital in CA, and I know he had a halo, his break is C6/7. He is already moving at least one leg, and seems like a really nice boy. I'm sure we'll get to know him better in the next few days. Well, we are looking forward to having some local visitors this weekend to break the monotony of long days. Not that Darren doesn't need the rest, but a little company will be nice. I hope you all enjoy the long holiday weekend, and keep us in your prayers.

Love Cynthia

September 4, 2004

Hi everyone, it was a nice day here in Atlanta, so Darren was able to get outside and enjoy some fresh air and sun. Unfortunately, his fever went up after that, and he got back in bed for a bit this afternoon to take a rest. Sometimes when his fever is high, he still feels OK, so he does as much as he is able. He was up again for dinner, but is just eating bland foods because his stomach is still uneasy. But his strep test came back negative, so that's good because I didn't like the fact he'd be on two different antibiotics. Besides, there's a good chance I would've come down with it, too! John and Ari arrvived late last night, and Darren was happy to see them, especially Ari. When we were outside, they went off on their own and were chatting up a storm together. It seems like they are so much more than brother and sister now. Being next door in the hotel is very nice. Costly, but so close and easy to go back and forth, and a nice large comfortable area. I'm happy about that. A last minute planned visit today from Mary Fasciano. Many of you know Mary as Darren's and Ari's babysitter for many, many years. She became part of our family, and is a very special person. As I write this, Darren is showing Mary around, just to get out of the room a little and show her the pool, the therapy room, etc. Its good for both of them. I hope you all have a safe and happy holiday weekend. Please keep in touch and continue your prayers.

Love Cynthia

September 5, 2004

Today was not as quiet as Sundays past. Relaxing but more activity than usual. In a good way! Darren had an early shower, then rested more after that. He got out of bed before lunch, ate lunch and went outside for some fresh air. It was really a beautiful day, and there were lots of people out. Mary's visit continued, and she joined us at the Worship Service. The service included a moving sermon (at least for me) about not looking elsewhere for God, but looking within yourself. Not asking God to help you, but accepting his help. There was a wonderful choir, who ended the service with a Circle of Love (everyone holding hands) singing Amazing Grace. Needless to say, a few tears were shed during that (during the whole service, for me...). In one way I felt uplifted, in another way I was drained. In fact, afterward, since Darren was in his chair, I laid on his bed and slept a little! Later in the afternoon, Julie, Mark and Alex Kramer came for a visit. They brought food for Darren - hamburger, fries and a shake - visited for awhile then took John and me out to dinner. We had a really nice time, and I knew Darren was being kept company by Alex, who brought a DVD to make him laugh. Meanwhile, Ari and Mary went out for dinner themselves. People keep asking what they can do for us, and I know everyone wants to do something. Mary and the Kramers did what so many others are unable to do - they gave us their time. Don't get me wrong, I know some of you would be here in a heartbeat, and we appreciate your offers to come. It just worked out perfectly for Mary to come this weekend, and the Kramers live nearby enough for a visit. Their hugs, comforting words and loving support will be enough to get me through a few more days. I keep their hugs in my memory bank, and draw on them when I need them. Maybe sounds strange, but it works for me! Well, Shepherd has some activities planned for Labor Day tomorrow, and I don't know what they are exactly, so I'll report on them tomorrow night. I'll end by saying that even though Darren's temperatures were rising and falling again today, he was really feeling OK, and managed to keep down not only the burger and fries, but a few bites of a delicious chocolate cake, too. With love, prayers and thanks to our angels of the weekend,

Cynthia

September 6, 2004

With Hurricane Frances quickly approaching the Atlanta area, the winds have been heavy and rain is coming. The lousy weather has a way of making everyone else feel lousy. Darren has managed to get his fever down, but still gets exhausted very easily, especially after therapy. My mom is also feeling under the weather and opted to go back to the hotel this afternoon and just rest for the remainder of the day. Assuming our flight doesn't get cancelled or delayed, my dad and I will be flying back home tomorrow, so my mom wants to make sure she's feeling better for the week ahead.

The doctors are still trying to pinpoint the cause of these fevers, and are now running all sorts of tests on different things. Hopefully by the end of this week they will know for sure what it is, and be able to give him the right treatment so he can get back to his normal, determined self.

On a brighter note, we had a visit from Barbara Glauss today, a friend who used to live in northern New Jersey, and now lives in Atlanta. It was nice to have her around for a few hours this afternoon. And the big news of the day, Darren is able to wiggle the pointer and middle fingers on his left hand. He claims that he's had the pointer for about 2 days, and just got the middle finger today. He just chose not to share that with anyone. The wiggle is ever so slight, but it is definitely there. He has also began to get spasms that make his legs and feet move. They are neither good nor bad. Some say it's good, some say it doesn't make a difference. But we are going to say that it's a good thing, since it can't hurt.

New pictures will be added to the website within the next day or two, when I get home. For those of you that are new to the list and aren't aware of the site, I'll make sure the invitation to the site gets forwarded to all of you tonight as well. Be sure to add comments to the guestbook at the end of the album, we read them to Darren.

Continue the prayers.

Much love, Ari

September 7, 2004

Hi everyone, this is my second attempt, as I did something wrong, and Poof, my entire e-mail was gone. Hope I can re-create it.... I am feeling better after my day of R&R yesterday. Back today in true form and taking care of Darren. Last night, his fever did not spike, so that's 3 nights in a row! Yea! He's still running a low grade fever during the day, though. Infectious Diseases is still running various tests, as Darren says a "laundry list" of possibilities. They certainly seem to be thorough. He still is tired, but made it through his class and therapy sessions. Right now, he's taking a "power nap" so he can watch the tennis on TV. I hope he can stay awake for that, then get a good night's sleep. We were all so excited about the movement of the 2 fingers, and yet he chose to keep that to himself! I know you all are excited, too. Keep praying, and I just KNOW more recovery is to come. Not much else to report, except that Frances brought lots of wind and rain to the area today. Traffic lights weren't working, and schools were closed, so that affected the staffing to some degree. The garden here is strewn with branches, leaves and plants that were blown about. Its still raining now, but it is expected to stop late tonight. I look forward to some sunshine tomorrow, and a brighter day. Keep praying for Darren and all of us.

Love Cynthia

September 8, 2004

I used to believe the saying "when Mama's happy, everyone's happy." Now its when Darren is happy, everyone is happy. Or shall I say feeling better. He's not feeling great, but better, and I'll take that today and yesterday. I feel better, too. He's eating more, is not as tired, and is in a better mood. Progress!

Today, he was working more on "transfers," moving himself from one surface to another, i.e. from his manual wheelchair to the PT mat. Eventually that will mean moving from his chair to his bed, instead of being lifted, his chair to a car, to a kitchen chair, etc. Once he is able to accomplish that, he will have so much more independence. Its a slow process, but he says its getting easier. One day, I'll sneak into therapy and watch him. Then I'll have more to report!

Darren said that he can't wait til he's home and the 4 of us all have dinner together in the kitchen, eating a meal that I've made. Imagine that - wanting one of my dinners! But seriously, it just points out what he's missing - home, the 4 of us together, "normal things." It pains me because it will be a "new normal," yet I can't wait to get him home, too. Such conflicting feelings.

Please check the picture site again, as new pictures have been added. And please sign the guestbook. Its great to read all the new posts. Here's the link again:
http://www.imagestation.com/album/?id=4229700093&mode=invi&idx=0

I don't usually report on gifts received in my updates, but I can't help myself on this one. Ian Hamilton arranged a signed, oversized tennis ball from Andy Roddick - how cool is that??!! Thank you! Add that to the Devils, Nets and Jets memorabilia and we are accumulating quite an impressive collection! Thank you to all those who had anything to do with receiving these wonderful gifts - you know who you are!!! We still look forward to getting mail every day. Please keep the cards, letters and e-mails through the Shepherd website coming. Anything to brighten his day is very welcomed!!!

With love and prayers, Cynthia

September 9, 2004

Hi everyone, I'm writing early tonight so that maybe Darren can get all settled and we can watch The Apprentice without interruption. We'll see... Today started out really well. The sun was shining, it was a beautiful day and I was in a good mood. So was Darren. He was awake, washed and dressed, ready to get up.

First scheduled was an Assistive Technology class, and the instructor came here to help Darren learn to use "Dragon" - a voice recognition software program. He needs more practice, but it will be really helpful. Next was PT, but thanks to the laxative he was given last night, he didn't last long and he was back in the room, where he's been ever since. With the C-diff infection, an involuntary BM means a 24 hour confinement to his room. He can either be in bed or his chair, but he has to stay in his room. Real bummer. But his therapists can come in to do range of motion exercises and other training, so he did get some therapy. Not quite the same as going to the gym for 2 sessions, though. The Chaplain stopped by for a quick visit, and his message was uplifting and inspiring, suggesting that Darren focus on the "trilogy of being": mind, body and spirit. He had other good things to say as well. He is always encouraging and relays meaningful messages. Despite this setback, Darren's outlook was quite positive. He is feeling so much better, and he knows this was a result of the laxative, and not the infection. He is anxious to finish this round of the antibiotic and get tested again to see if he is clear. We certainly hope so! In the meantime, he impressed me by eating potato chips out of the bag, only dropping a few. Even some he dropped he was able to retrieve. And for dinner he ate a meatball sub, mostly by himself. He dripped some sauce, but hey, who doesn't?? He really is trying to do as much as possible by himself. Well, sorry about the personal stuff, but if you're gonna hear the good, you gotta hear the bad, too, sometimes. I try to be as sensitive as possible in describing these kinds of events. Its not pleasant, but it is part of our day. Hope I didn't make anyone uncomfortable. Well, here's to better days and a good weekend. Darren's looking forward to a visit from Arek and Eli. Should be fun!

Love and prayers, Cynthia

P.S. Darren read the posts on the picture site tonight, and was quite surprised (pleasantly!) at the number of new messages. So keep them coming - thanks!!!

September 10, 2004

Hi everyone, another hot sunny day in Atlanta today, and Darren got outside to enjoy the sunshine this afternoon. That always makes him happy. This morning, he had morning OT again, so he started early. He washed himself as much as possible in the shower, dressed himself as much as possible and then fed himself breakfast. Then he went right to class, then to PT after that. He came back in his manual chair, after transferring himself (with help) into it, ate lunch in that chair, then participated in a research study survey, which is when he was outside. Do I have to tell you how tired he was after that?? He was then ready for a nap, since he was going to the mall tonight. Again, he looked better, ate better, and felt better the whole day. The Infectious Disease Doctor is still looking for something going on in his body that might be "hiding," and he is determined to find the cause. He is almost finished this round of the flagyl (antibiotic for the C-diff infection), and I am so glad he is feeling better. But it would be good to know what is going on in there! In the meantime, they keep taking blood, running tests, etc. So tonight we went to the mall. It was just Darren and me, another patient Michael and his girlfriend, a recreational therapist and the driver. It was a worthwhile trip for a lot of reasons. First, it got us out of here. Second, it was fun! We ate Chinese food, shopped, walked around and talked. Third, its good to get Darren into situations where he needs to fend for himself to an extent and figure out how to do things, like handle money, get in and out of doors, manuever around obstacles and through narrow aisles, etc. We enjoyed ourselves. Now we wait for Arek and Eli, and I think I'm looking forward to their visit just as much as Darren! The weather is supposed to be nice, and I think we'll have a barbeque for Saturday dinner. We've seen other families and groups do that, and it looks like fun.

I hope you all have a good weekend, and if I don't send an update, you'll know we've been busy!!!

With love, prayers and positive thoughts, Cynthia

Just a note:

For those of you who don't know, when Cindy refers to Arek and Eli below, that's the Honeysuckle Lane contingent. The Templeton’s live at #8. Arek Feredjian is their neighbor to the left at #6 and Eli is my son. We're at #10. Our kids have grown up together. We've all lived here about 20 years. There are seven kids between the three households ranging in age from 16 - 23 and even though they're not all the same age, they're very fond of one another and have many, many shared childhood memories.

Regards,

Carol Gordon

September 11 & 12, 2004

Hi everyone, its Sunday night, so I have the weekend to catch up on. No, you didn't miss an e-mail; I just didn't get to it last night! Arek and Eli arrived late Friday night. Their flight was delayed, so it was too late for them to see Darren that night. But we stayed up and talked for about an hour. It was a pleasure to see them and catch up on their summer adventures. They also had a a lot of questions about Darren and his condition, so it was good that we had a chance to talk before they saw him. Saturday morning started out early for Darren as he had his morning shower and dressing with the Occupational Therapist. Then he rested for awhile until we came over. But once we came, he was ready to get up and out of bed. He was happy to see Arek and Eli. They went outside for awhile and into the recreation room downstairs. I tried to give them some space and let them catch up with each other. For lunch, they took Darren to the Chick-Fil-A, which I thought was OK, but turned out to be "iilegal." Oh well, they were fine, and even better that they got away with something! While they were out, I went to the grocery store to buy what we needed for our much-anticipated barbeque. After they watched a video of kids that Arek and Eli brought with them, we prepared for the BBQ, only to discover we needed charcoal - DUH!!! But they found some, and we were in business. It was just burgers, but it was different, and we had fun. Check the photo site for new pictures - as soon as Ari can get them posted, they'll be there. After dinner I left them alone for a while. I went back to the hotel and they were watching a DVD. Again, after we left Darren, we went back to the hotel and just talked.

Today, they only had a few hours together, but they helped Darren with his breakfast then went outside and just "chilled." Luckily, both days were really nice weather. The rest of the day was quiet, just spent watching TV and resting. Darren was so happy that they came to visit; it was great for all of them, including me. I know the relationships that 6-8-10 Honeysuckle have are rare, and I am so appreciative each time I think about it. It can be any combination of children, adults, even grandparents and relatives - it is always an enjoyable time. And this weekend was even more special than most, since they had to make a special trip. Thank you to the Gordons and Feredjians for making it happen! Well enough for now, I've probably bored you to tears with this one! I hope you all had wonderful weekends. I know we did, and we are well, rested and ready for a busy week. "My friend Betty" will be visiting for a few days this week, and I am anxious to see her and spend time with her. I look forward to her coming!

With love and prayers, Cynthia

Link for photos: (please remember to write a message in the guestbook)
http://www.imagestation.com/album/review.html?id=4229700093&mode=invi

September 13, 2004

Hi everyone, I can't believe its already Sept 13th. Seems so strange, being in our own little world down here, that everything else is continuing as usual. Anyway, Darrren was asleep just after 8pm tonight. He was really tired after a busy day, but it was a good tired - he worked for it! Both sessions of therapy, art therapy, and the gym. All good stuff. Duting PT today, I watched him have to get himself up after laying flat on his back on the therapy mat. It was a struggle, and he needed lots of help, but he was really working. Then after sitting up, he transferred into his manual chair. Again, he needed lots of help, but the therapists assure me he's doing well and is improving. After seeing him actually get into that chair, I looked at him in a whole different light. What hard work. I don't think he was all that crazy about "art therapy," but he went and found it enjoyable. He said it was quiet and realxing, and gave him something different to do. He's painting a ceramic candlestick with the help of a hand/finger splint to hold the paintbrush, and he was very patient! I was impressed. At the end of the day, he had an appointment at the gym, and met with an exercise specialist. She is very knowledgeable, positive and optimistic. I think that will be the best part of Darren's rehab here. Its too bad he couldn't have started with her earlier, but he is definitely going to take advantage of her and the equipment.

Tonight we watched the tape about Molly, the 13 year old girl who had a similar injury and was on the Today Show recently. We were all very encouraged by it (thanks Lois!) and it spurred some good discussion among a few parents and patients afterward. The parent support here is great, and there is one father who is very committed to getting the very best for his son and for all the patients. He is definitely a man who can get things done, and he has encouraged me to advocate as much as possible for Darren. I can't wait to see his Doctor tomorrow morning! Watch out, Dr. Murray!!!

Well, good night for now. Time to get some rest, as I need to be here early in the morning.

With love and prayers and hope, Cynthia

September 14, 2004

Hi everyone! Darren was trying out different kinds of wheelchairs today, and will try another one tomorrow. Its kind of confusing, because there are so many choices. But we'll see what the insurance company says...then take it from there. Darren was so excited to go to the gym today and use a particular machine - the NuStep - but it didn't work out. There was a wait to use it, and by the time his chance would have come, the therapist to help with the transfer would have already left. And since I'm not trained to do a transfer yet, I wasn't able to handle it myself. So he has another appt Thursday morning. Since he had used his manual chair and a manual/power chair alot today, he was pretty tired, and took a little nap this afternoon. When he awoke, Betty had arrived. For all of you who don't know Betty, she is one of my closest & dearest friends. She & I were college roomates for a year, and she is Darren's Godmother. So it certainly is special for her to visit. I thank her family for allowing her the time to come and be with us. I look forward to our time together. (And the fact that she's an OT - occupational therapist - she'll be making sure Darren is doing what he should be!) Darren managed to open another piece of mail today. The envelope didn't look too good, but the letter was intact! And he read it too! He also held and ate an apple tonight. Small but important tasks that mean more independence for him.

Doesn't sound too exciting today, but he is still feeling good and working hard. With love and prayers, and continued thanks for all the cards and letters,

Cynthia

September 15, 2004

Hey everyone, hello from Atlanta. We're bracing for the outer rim of Ivan's fury; will probably get a lot of rain and wind in the next few days. It seems these storms are continual, and we're only on the outskirts. As they say, "this too shall pass."

Darren had a busy day of activity with his OT, and a group session of PT this afternoon. He was in his manual chair quite a bit, and has increased the amount of time he can wear his shoes. He had a good day. Tonight's e-mail is going to be a little different. It's going to be about me.

Yesterday, my visit with Betty started off and continued into the night with hugs, good conversation, laughter and tears. She is an angel sent to guide and help me. Today was my first foray into Altanta, not counting going to the grocery store and the mall. We headed to "Underground Atlanta." It wasn't underground, the store fronts were half empty and it was very touristy. So we headed out of there, and made our way to the Curb Market. We saw pig's ears, hog hocks and chitterlings for sale. We couldn't get out of there fast enough! So we headed back to where we came from, walking through part of the Georgia State Univ campus. I hadn't realized it was right there in the city. Back to civilization and we had lunch at Johnny Rockets. A lingering lunch with more conversation, laughter and tears. Friendship really is the best medicine. We took the train and the bus back toward Shepherd, but got off early and walked and walked. A stop at Borders, where I didn't leave empty handed, and we walked some more. The weather held out, and there were only a few showers here and there. Back to Shepherd, where we found Darren just getting into bed for a rest. After a short nap, he got up for dinner and amused us with some humor about getting used to a low quality level of food. I can't repeat the whole thing, but it was funny. I look forward to another wonderful evening and night with Darren and Betty. Since he took a nap, I expect he'll be up til at least 10, then we'll head back to the hotel. So enough about me for now! I want to wish all my Jewish friends, their families and acquaintances a "Happy Rosh Hashana." Enjoy your holidays and count your blessings. Please continue to remember us in your prayers. With love and hope,

Cynthia

September 16 & 17, 2004

Hi everyone, I'm sorry I didn't write last night, but after having a few really good days, we were hit with yet another obstacle: Darren now has a blood clot in his left leg. The good news is that they found it now. The bad news is it means keeping the leg straight and still - bed rest. For how long - we don't know yet. I am waiting to speak to the Doctor this morning. So up until about 5 pm yesterday, Darren had a great day. He started out at the gym, using a Nu-Step machine. By using your arms to push and pull, it moves your legs. His hands had to be strapped to the handles, and his feet strapped into the footrests, but he was able to do 15 minutes. The exercise specialist was so impressed, and so were Betty and I! It was great to see his legs moving. After that, he headed to PT, where he worked on rolling over from his back to his side on the mat. With continued practice, and tweaking the techniques, he was almost able to do it himself. Betty and I watched the whole session, and he was so determined to do it. No wonder he comes back so tired from therapy! So last night, after receiving the news about the blood clot, we allowed ourselves some tears and hugs together. It just seems that as soon as things start going well, another obstacle is thrown in front of us. Then I climbed into bed with him - quite a feat since its a twin bed! We watched the Apprentice together, trying to put everything else out of our minds for a bit. As soon as I have more news, I'll pass it on. Please continue your prayers. I feel we need them now more than ever.

Love Cynthia

September 18 & 19, 2004

Hi everyone, another quiet Sunday in Atlanta. Its beautiful weather, but we're staying inside to keep Darren company. It was determined that Darren would have to stay in bed for 3 days. They're keeping a close eye on his blood work, which is drawn daily, to make sure the blood is thinning as its supposed to be. The swelling in his leg where the clot is has decreased significantly, so we think that's a good sign. He's feeling quite well; makes it hard to stay in bed. But he rolls with the punches. As usual, he is in good spirits. Darren's friend Kevin Sensbach and his mom Judy were here yesterday. Even though Darren had to be in bed, at least he had good company! Judy is especially sensitive to our situation since her mom has the same injury as Darren. So it was great to have them here: to chat, visit, cry and hug together. And great for them to see Darren and all he can do, too. Ysterday, since John, Ari, Judy and Kevin were all here, I went for a long walk. They all thought I was going back to the hotel to rest, but I wasn't tired. I just wanted a break from the hospital. It was such nice weather, I just walked and walked. I remembered there being a Church some distance away, and I walked there and went in to sit, reflect and pray. It was a beautiful church and I felt refreshed after spending some time there. I made a promise to myself to go back today for their service. Late yesterday, Darren's gastroenterologist came in to say that there had been some blood in his stool, and they were thinking of doing an upper endoscopy. I was quite concerned about the procedure not interferring with his schedule (since so many other things had already), and the Doctor assured me they would take that under consideration. So, they decided they do it this morning - Sunday! Well, since he had to be in bed anyway, and nothing was going on, why not? He was on a "no food" alert to prepare, but the nurse inadvertenly gave him the blood thinner injection, and then they couldn't do the procedure! Oh well, the Doc came in to say that he'll just watch him closely and see what happens. But since I had gone to Church, I didn't know the whole thing had been cancelled. I was waiting for word that everything went well. In Church, I was praying that the procedure would go smoothly with no complications (even a routine procedure has more risks now) and that God would heal his thumbs. I have decided to focus on small, specific prayers. Since Darren is taking baby steps in his healing, perhaps God can do the same. Having use of his thumbs would be SO huge and helpful in his quest for independence. Maybe all of you who are praying for Darren can focus on that as well. Think thumbs!!! Well, Darren and John are ordering in sushi for dinner; Ari and I are going out. I look forward to spending some one-on-one time with her. It is so hard to be separated. We have a busy week ahead of us, and my Mom will be coming tomorrow when John and Ari leave. She'll be here til Thursday, and I look forward to her visit. Thanks for the USTA tennis items (are they signed by Sarge???) and the Mets stuff. All really cool items - more to decorate the room with! I hope all those who celebrated the Jewish holidays are refreshed and renewed in their faith. Thanks for adding Darren to your prayers.

With love and hope for recovery, Cynthia

September 20, 2004

Well, this is the short list for a different kind of update. Last week, Shelley asked me how I was. Not that others (including most on this list) haven't asked me as well. It just took the right frame of mind to tackle the subject. And she wasn't looking for the kind of answer I write in my updates. It was difficult, but I decided to answer her. Here is what I wrote: (I hope it all copies OK from e-mail to Word and back again - no promises!). But you'll get the gist of it, I'm sure.

So how are we - really? Well, you are a friend who really cares about that answer, and certainly I don't reveal ALL of my true feelings in my updates. But I can and will here, since you asked. The answer is not pretty, but I know you weren't expecting a pat answer. Be prepared with tissues. As I am crying while writing, I know you'll be crying as you read. This all SUCKS. There is no way around that. I was never one to complain before. I had a very nice life - all that anyone could ever hope for. A wonderful, loving husband. Two beautiful, healthy, bright, caring children. Anything material I ever desired, and more. As close to perfect as anyone could describe. We worked for what we had, and were grateful to all the opportunities that came our way over the years. Then THIS. It has changed our lives (and friends like yours) forever. The words the Doctor said that first day (your son's neck is broken) did not even begin to describe what a spiraling hell we would be falling into.

The question "why?" is never farther than just below the surface. I try not to dwell on it, but try now to ask "how?" But it isn't easy. Every minute of every day is different now. The amount of dependence is unimaginable. It breaks my heart to be rejoicing at Darren brushing his own teeth when he was a weightlifter; struggling to push a manual chair when he was a big, strong hockey player. I could go on and on. It feels good, in a way, to release this pent up anger, and I do that, but its mostly to myself, in bed, late at night when no one can hear me. Who wants to hear me complain anyway? The setbacks, the fevers, the infection, the blood clot and more are all superficial, really. The injury is just so devastating. Perhaps its just today - seeing Darren get out of bed after lying there for 3 days, then not feeling well because he did too much, too fast. Having to rest and then get up again. God knows he's trying; he's doing as much as he is able. Will it be enough? Will the spinal cord swelling decrease? Will he regain feeling? Movement? The uncertainty is unbearable. Fear of the unknown is tremendous. Will he recover in a year? Two years? Ever??? If I sat and thought about these kinds of questions on a daily basis, I would have to be hospitalized as well. And probably heavily medicated. Who could function in that state of mind? So, instead, I focus on the small triumphs, the challenges, the baby steps. I am thankful I still have Darren, not a brain injured child. I am thankful we are in the right place, getting the best care. These are the things to focus on, the things that keep me sane. The attitude that gets me through each day. The outlook that says to Darren "we can do this." I am thankful for the friends who truly do care how I am feeling, and will listen to the answer. Thankful for those same friends who give me hugs and say the right words to comfort me. And thankful to those who just listen to me cry. Each day brings a roller coaster of feelings. Focusing on the highs, and just getting through the lows, is my day. Does it get easier? Sometimes. Sometimes its not so easy. But dwelling on the lows is definitely not the answer.

Wow, I'm not sure if I feel better or worse after saying all that. I do know I'll keep this as perhaps my first entry into a journal I haven't started yet. Maybe even send these same words to my closest friends who really want to know "how are you?"

I just realized that you also asked how is Darren - really? I have to honestly say "I don't know." I try to talk with him, but it usually turns up being superficial. When I do ask him, I get so emotional myself that I don't think its that beneficial. They do have support groups here with the kids, and individual counselling if desired, but Darren hasn't been interested as of yet. I am still working on him to explore that possibility. I think it’s a very important piece of his road to recovery.

September 21, 2004

Hi everyone! Its been 2 busy days here. Darren hasn't been feeling as well as he did last week, but he's resting when he can because the rest of the time he's pretty busy. I'll try to fill you in. Yesterday, our day started with OT family training bright and early at 7:30 am. First a shower, where Darren was able to do quite a lot himself. But its a chore, and tiring. We all think of a shower as refreshing, but right now its more work then pleasure for Darren. But I know that will get better. After the shower, Darren worked on dressing himself again. Each time, it does get easier, but that too is work. Then we went through all the arm exercises and range of motion movements for his upper body. Up to eat breakfast, brush teeth and into the therapy kitchen to talk about eating, cooking, reaching foods, etc. Pointed out something interesting things we'll need to think about for home.

After lunch, during his afternoon PT session, he worked more on transfers and tried out a "power assist" chair. He liked it, and it was much easier going thru the hallways and up slopes. It was still work, but good to try it. I was so exhausted last night that we left around 8pm! That was a first in a LONG time. But I went to sleep early and slept well, ready for today's airport trip! When we (Mom and I) arrived this morning, a former patient was here visiting Darren. A guy about 40 or so, that had a similar injury to Darren, was here 2 years ago, as a quad (quadriplegic) and is now fully recovered. Another miracle!

The outing to the airport started out at 9am, and we were at the airport by 10. The Delta personnel were wonderful, and told us everything we would need to know from arriving to checking in, going thru security, etc. They had trained personnel to lift the patients from their chairs, put them on an "aisle chair" and then into the seat. Quite a feat for someone as tall and as heavy as Darren. And he wasn't the only big guy. But they were very good. The therapists with us stressed how important it is to convey your wants and needs clearly and specifically to avoid problems. The trip was very thorough and I learned a lot about what I'll need when we fly home. It was tiring for Darren, though, getting around in a manual chair. He was able to do some on his own, but we pushed him a lot, too. When we got back to Shepherd, he needed a nap! But the nap was a short one, because we had a family conference with the case manager, OT and PT therapists and a nurse. We covered goals and expectations for the next 3 weeks, and what we might anticipate in the Day Program (outpatient). It was a worthwhile discussion. Tomorrow is going to be another busy day. First, Darren gets into the pool - yea!!! He's looking forward to that. I'll be getting in with him as well. Then we'll meet with the Day Program case manager before starting several sessions of family training for PT - lots of transfers.

Well, this was a long one since there is so much happening. My mom is glad to be here, and see all that Darren is able to do and what Shepherd offers. I'm expecting to see my brother Tim and his wife Andreia this weekend, as Tim has business in Atlanta. Since Mom leaves tomorrow (Thursday), I'll have more company shortly. And we'll all be glad to see each other. Enough for now! Time to get this room straightened up, and let Darren rest. Good night, and please continue your prayers.

Love Cynthia

September 22, 2004

Hi Medora, sounds like plans for the October weekend are coming along. Good. I'm glad you can all come together. Sorry I will mis you the weekend I'm coming home, but when do you actually leave? I'll be home on Thursday afternoon (Sept 31st). Maybe I can see you then?? Regarding fund-raising: Cheryl

Coutts is planning that their annual casino night proceeds partially benefit Darren. I am still in awe of their generosity. Diane McIntee has been working with Cheryl on that. Also, Dave McIntee and Ed Morba are talking about a spring golf outing. Diane suggested we think about setting up a fund for Darren. I think I'll talk with Sue Struble at Lakeland Bank about the idea. I'm sure she can give us some guidance. So you ask how am I, really? Well, Shelley asked me that the other day, and I decided to really answer the question. I think I am going to send it off to you and a few of my closest friends. Its definitely not for the general e-mail distribution list. The short answer is that this all really sucks. There is no way around it. It is depressing, frustrating, scary, overwhelming and lots more adjectives I can think of. But instead of reiterating it, this will prompt me to send it a few of you. I'm sure you understand that its the easiest way. In the meantime, we are hanging in there, doing what needs to be done. Sometimes its with smiles, other with tears. But its all with love and support. That is the key. And still, I draw my strength my from all of you.

Love Cindy

September 23 & 24, 2004

Hi everyone, I really wanted to write this update this afternoon, for all of you who get your e-mails at work, but I just couldn't get to it. Sorry, I tried. OK, another 2 busy days, and today's schedule was written out to be all that busy. But it was! I'll try to start from yesterday morning - Thursday. First was a session in the pool, which we both enjoyed. Grandma got to watch and took pictures. The water was really warm. A lot of stretching and relaxing. It was really good. I was "checked off" on assisting him, so I can take him in whenever we have time. Then I had "PT Family Training," which consisted of "me" and the therapists. It was a LOT of physical work. First was transferring Darren to and from his manual chair with a manual Hoyer lift, then learning to manually transfer Darren in and out of a car, first with a manual Hoyer lift, then on a sliding board. I was sweating, to say the least. It was really hard, but the instruction was excellent, and they said my size helped me (imagine that!). I could fit into the smallest of spaces between Darren and the car, sometimes leaning through the open car window. Then it was into the garden and pushing his chair through the grass and onto uneven surfaces, then up and down t he ramp. Then the biggie - up and down stairs! That was HARD and I was nervous. So was Darren. The therapists and Darren were all surprised at my strength, as was I. I am really not that strong, but using the right techniques are key, and also "doing what you have to do." As if that weren't enough, into the PT gym, to get him onto and up from the floor, again with the manual Hoyer lift. That was hard, too. At this point, I was looking for the Aleve! I knew I was done! And we didn't even cover everything; still 2 more jobs to learn: range of motion exercises and transfers from chair to mat and back again. Why they don't start with that, I haven't figured out. Oh well. Back to the room for dinner, and we learn that Darren is moving rooms - again. They did give him the choice, but Darren's roommate had a new infection, so one of them had to move. So if we weren't tired enough, we packed up the room and moved back next door, to his original room. We went for dinner, and I promised Darren that in 15 minutes after we returned, I would have his bed cleared so he could get into it. It was done, and while he was getting settled, I had the room all put back together, with the exception of things to hang high up on the wall. I wanted to take a picture while it was in the chaotic stage, but I forgot! Today, I finished it all, and you would never know we moved only yesterday. Then we watched the Apprentice together. Whew! What a day!!! Two Aleve and a good night's sleep, and I was good to go for the next day. Darren said that I did a really good job on all that I learned, and he was proud of me. That felt good. Friday - started off with "seating clinic" to discuss wheelchair options. Too much information, too many decisions, and not enough time. We don't have to decide right away, but we need to order his chair in enough time to have it when we arrive home. So we have to discuss it more. Late this morning, my brother Tim and his wife Andreia arrived for a visit. Tim had to go right off to a meeting, but Andreia stayed and watched his therapy. Then lunch, then afternoon OT before Darren went to the gym for the Nu-Step machine. This time, he stayed on for 20 minutes, did it at a higher pace, and really pushed his last minute. He was tired, but he felt good. Now Tim came back, and after hanging out for a bit, we were cleared to ALL go out for dinner - YEA!!! We took Darren in his manual chair to Friday's, and really had a nice time. It was great to be out, and to take Darren. A little tough getting to and from, but we managed. The uneven surfaces made Darren's legs spasm, and they were jumping all over the place. Now we are back in his room, and they are watching a baseball game as I write. They are chatting away. Tim and his clone.....it is great to have them here. A bit of quick info about our plans here in Atlanta. Right now, the discharge date from the inpatient stay is October 12th. Then we move into an apartment either across the street or down the street, and Darren comes to Shepherd as an outpatient Monday to Friday 9 am - 4 pm. It is a busy and intensive "Day Program." Outside of those hours, I will be 100% responsible for his care. A little scary, but exciting, too. I think we'll be in the Day Program for about 3 weeks, but it could be a bit longer. Our goal is to be home for Thanksgiving, and what a holiday I am dreaming about. Hopefully, that will happen, and I feel confident that it will. Darren's spirits are excellent, and his determination continues. I am so proud of him.

Please check the picture site for new pictures (thanks John and Ari!), and don't forget to post new messages. Also, keep the cards coming - we still love to get mail! Thanks for keeping in touch.

With love and prayers, Cynthia

September 25 & 26, 2004

Hi everyone, another weekend coming to an end here at Shepherd. One not-so-good day, one good day.

Happy Holidays and Happy Yom Kippur (I hope that's the correct phrasing) to all my Jewish friends and their families. I hope you enjoyed your holidays and feel renewed and refreshed in your faith. Saturday morning didn't start off so good when Darren didn't feel like eating much breakfast. One of his medications has to be taken on an empty stomach, others on a full stomach. But he needs to eat in between. He didn't feel like it, and by the time he ate lunch, he was starved, but wound up throwing up everything he ate. Yuck. After that he felt better, but for dinner I only gave him some broth and noodles. He kept that down OK, and felt better. During the day, he had almost 2 hours of PT, longer than most Saturdays. Some of the time was spent teaching me more about the transfer, other time was because the therapist was working with several patients at the same time. Tim and Andreia watched the whole time, and were impressed with what Darren could do. We also spent some time outside in the garden, just chatting and catching up. This morning, I walked to the same Church I went to last week, and again, it was a great walk to and from and a very nice service. I'm glad I went. When I arrived at Shepherd, Darren was eating lunch, and had been feeling good all morning. We went outside, and Darren was on the phone quite a bit, catching up with friends. Then we went to check out the Vintage Car Show in the parking lot. They had some pretty cool Packards and Cadillacs, most in excellent condition. We took some pictures, and chatted with other patients and families. I won't be able to post the pictures for awhile, but I'll let you know when I do. When we came inside, some of the boys started a poker game in our room, and it was quite a lot of fun. They had a good time. I had a good time listening and watching, too. I learned that PT REALLY stands for physical terrorist or pain and torture! And it was fun to watch the boys use their hands to manipulate the cards and the chips. The table is still set up; maybe they'll still play a little tonight. Their OT's would have been proud of them! Tim and Andreia visited some friends last night and most of today, but they were able to stop in for an hour or so before their plane took off tonight. It was good to get in some more good hugs. Well, this coming week will not be as busy as last week, but still a full schedule. I will be using some time tomorrow for phone calls to insurance company, equipment vendor, etc. Stuff that NEEDS doing. I am coming home on Thursday til Sunday night, so I'll try to make plans with some of you. As much as I can squeeze in while doing what needs to be done.

On Sundays, I feel renewed and refreshed, ready for another week. And I'm looking forward to coming home for a few days to get all those hugs I've been promised!

With hope, love and prayers, Cynthia

September 27, 2004

I've been staring at the computer screen for a few minutes, not knowing how to start tonight's e-mail. Nothing new or exciting happened today, I guess that's why I don't know where to start. It doesn't feel like I have much to say, I guess. I started my morning with phone calls to the insurance company, various county and state offices to see what benefits may be available and the medical helicopter company that transported Darren (twice). Then onto the program people here to see what happens next. As much as I hate to admit it, the insurance company MIGHT get the last word on how long we stay here. I will fight for what I believe we need, but who knows what will happen. While I was busy, Darren went up on the tilt table at PT. I can't believe I missed it! He got up to 70 degrees, which was really good. And he didn't get dizzy. They also worked on his shoulders quite a bit. They have been really sore, and it seems like he's losing strength, but its from using his manual chair. It just seems like 1 step forward, 2 steps back. It also seems like tasks he's been able to are now more difficult. The Doctor says "no pain, no gain." But its tough to watch. Darren was supposed to go the Braves/Mets game tonight, but the weather cancelled the trip. The game might still have been played, but not good for these guys to be out in that kind of weather. Oh well, would have been fun for him, and a night off for me, since I wasn't going. So I'm still here, but getting ready to go soon. One of the boys had a nurse make them PB&J sandwiches, and he brought one to Darren, so its snack time right now. Smells good.....you can tell I've been eating hospital cafeteria food waaaayy too long........ Darren said tonight that we've been here too long. Well, we have another 2 weeks to go, so we have to hang in there. Keep the cards and e-mails coming, they'll help us get through. Have a good night, and keep us in your prayers.

Love Cynthia

September 28, 2004

Hi everyone, another busy day here at Shepherd. There were "classes" for me today: therapeutic recreation, wheelchair maintenance and emotional issues. All had some worthwhile information and some useless info, too. You really have to be your own advocate in finding out stuff, though. As much as they try to cover, there is so much going on, that if you don't ask, you don't know. Especially with the wheelchairs. The "seating clinic" is such a busy place, its hard to get the info you need quickly. And while there's a lot of info on the internet, its hard to decipher and compare. Oy! (As my friends say).

Today in therapy, Darren was sitting on the edge of the mat, supporting himself. He was able to catch a ball while keeping his balance, but couldn't throw. But that is improvement! He is really hoping to get some "abs" back so he can balance himself. I'll have to go and watch so I can take some pictures. And in between my classes, I went it to see what he was doing, just in time to do a transfer from the mat to his chair. That went pretty well. He can help quite a bit, so its not all me. And the therapists assure me he'll be doing more and more of the work as time progresses. His PT was also encouraging Darren not to look at progress day to day, but week to week, and task by task. A good reminder to keep working and not get discouraged or frustrated. Volunteers came to give patients haircuts today, so Darren has a new buzz cut. A little shorter than the first, but it looks good. He was also at the gym again today (I think I forgot to mention he was there yesterday in the update) and tried the V-glider, a cardio machine. He didn't like it as much as the Nu-Step, but still good to work out. I'm looking forward to being home for a few days. I'll try to keep you updated as best I can; maybe John will help? We'll see! Be prepared for a lull in communications, just in case!

With love, hope and prayers, Cynthia

September 29, 2004

Hello everyone, another night of Apprentice - a date with Darren! So that's why this is late. Before the show started, we went to the gym to watch some wheelchair rugby. Those guys are fierce - checking with their chairs!

Some more PT training with transfers and range of motion with Darren's legs. Those therapists know all the tricks to make the exercises easier. Thank goodness, because his legs are HEAVY. But the exercises are so important to keep him flexible and limber. And he's getting better with the transfers, doing more of the work himself. On the first one, I did all the pulling, until I was told to let HIM do the work! Good idea!! The next one went much easier, and he did more of the pushing. Julie Kramer and her son Alex stopped in today for a visit. It is always great to see them, and we made plans for another get together. They are going to lend me a car to use for our move to the Day Program, and I am SO grateful for their generosity. What a huge help it will be to get groceries, move stuff, etc. I am so lucky to have them close by. There's something special about reconnecting with old friends, especially good for the boys, too. We are blessed to have so many friends helping us. John arrived safely tonight, and I look forward to going home tomorrow. We'll see what happens with the updates, but I'll do my best. I will be posting new pictures on the website in the next day or two, so be sure to check them out. And don't forget to post a message; Darren has been checking it pretty regularly. I look forward to seeing some of you at home. For all the others, our return home is not too far away, and we'll see you then.

With love and prayers, Cynthia

September 30, 2004

Well here goes, my first update! I arrived at Shepherd last night so that Cynthia could finally go home for a few days. I am happy to be here both to see Darren (it has been over a week), and to give Cynthia a break from being here. The days here are long and difficult for Darren, and for us as well. Today started out early for Darren with a shower, and when I arrived, he was just starting breakfast at around 8:30.

Today was early PT day with it starting at 9:00 and going to 10:30. Today was the first time that I spent almost the whole time in PT with Darren. It is very difficult for him, but he tries so hard with everything that is asked of him. It really puts things in perspective for me on what a difficult road we have ahead of us.

Right after lunch at 1:00 it was back in the gym for OT, I stayed there for almost of that too. Aagin, everything was difficult, but Darren gave it his all. We had a little bit of a disappointment as the scheduled pool session at 3:00 was cancelled. Apparently they had to clean the pool and all activities were cancelled. Tonight there is a "fishing trip" scheduled, but Darren has elected not to go. Many of the young men here are very interested in watching the debate tonight, Darren included.

I am writing this update early so that I can watch the debate too with Darren. It is only around 4PM and Darren is resting before he has to go at 5PM for a bladder test. Were not sure why, or who ordered it, but it is being done.

Before I finish up, I just want to send a special "THANKS" to Tom Mongelli, who has started our home renovations and is really moving it along in the hopes of being close to finished by the time we bring Darren home. I appreciate all of your help Tom.

I will try to be diligent in Cynthia's absence and actually write the daily update, let's see if I can follow through???

Thanks for all if the support you have all given us and Darren,

John

October 1, 2004

Today started with a 9AM seating clinic to have Darren fitted for wheelchairs. The idea is to have insurance pay for the power chair. They go up to $30,000 and we will have to pay for the manual chair. Darren was measured in many ways, some that I would not have thought of, for proper fit into these chairs. The idea behind having two chairs is because when Darren is away from home, he will probably get very tired in a manual chair. Hopefully, if he is able to go to college, the power chair will enable him to get around the campus. The clinic lasted about an hour and a half and afterward, when I was walking with him to therapy, I could barely hold back the tears. I tried not allow Darren see me. I don't think that he did. It was incredibly difficult for me to sit through the clinic because the grim reality of the huge challenge we are all facing is becoming quite clear.

The clinic went far longer than we expected and really cut into his scheduled therapy time. By the time we got to the gym, there were only 15 minutes left in Darren's time slot. So Darren, being Darren, asked if he could get started and at least get in the 15 minutes. He got started and then had Judith show me how to help him with the stretching exercises, so that he basically got in the whole session. It was nice for me to get to help him as well.

After that, Darren went to art class. I am not sure what happens there.

In the afternoon Darren had a 1-1/2 hour OT session. He is working so hard and wants to succeed so badly. At lunch we talked about how much all of the things we need are costing. At the seating clinic Robin was telling Darren that the manual chair that he liked was the most expensive one they had. It is made of titanium which is why it is so much more than the others. He looked at me, perfectly willing to settle for less (typical Darren) and asked me what I thought. I told him to order what he thought was best, which really pleased his therapist. I thought he was going to shed some tears, and I think he came close, but he didn't. He really realizes what an impact this is going to be on all of us. Anyway, after our little conversation, I told him that the only thing I wanted for spending all of this money was the opportunity to throw all of this stuff away someday because it was no longer needed. He concurred. I think that this is enough writing, except for one more thing ---

I am very excited about tomorrow. Alex Kramer is supposed to come and visit with Darren again. Alex lived in Kinnelon 10 years ago and they were very good friends then. It is nice to see them renewing their friendship. Also, I have arranged for a very special overnight visitor for Darren tomorrow (not anyone famous). We will have the afternoon together, go to Friday's with his favorite nurse Charlie to have dinner, and spend a little time on Sunday morning as well. Darren will be surprised because he doesn't know at all. In fact (Arianne), I can keep a secret because you don't know about this and neither does your mother !!!!!! So you'll have to wait and see too !!!

Thanks to all of you who read these updates, and keep us all going.

John

October 2, 2004

In case you all haven't figured it out yet, I do not do this update all at once. It is ongoing during the day. That way I can put things down as they have happened making it easier to remember. It also is much easier for me not to write it all at once.

Last night Darren had to have another ultrasound on his legs. The doctors suspected that he may have had another blood clot. I was relieved that the test was negative. Blood clots are pretty scary; they can kill you if they get to the heart. Darren is being put on Lacics (not sure of spelling) to try to get the swelling down in his legs and feet. I am a little excited to see that Darren is beginning to get spasms in his legs. Spasms sometimes mean absolutely nothing and they can be painful, but sometimes they are the precursor to getting some movement back. I am really trying to be optimistic that it could be the latter.

Today was a 'sleep-in' day like every Saturday and Sunday. The morning is kind of lazy, and I am starting this update while Darren is at his Saturday PT session. There is only one therapy session on Saturdays, and none on Sundays.

11AM - I am anxiously awaiting the arrival of Darren's 'special guest', Sean Spiller. For anyone who doesn't know, Sean was Darren's hockey coach for his first 2 years playing for KHS. In my opinion, Sean has been one of the most influential people in Darren's life as far as motivating him to always do his best, try harder, and never quit. I saw Darren get so much 'tougher' under Sean than he ever was. I asked

Sean a couple of weeks ago if he would come down for a visit, and he was only too eager to do it.. I truly appreciate it, I know it will make Darren's day and give him some motivation. I expect Sean to arrive about noon, and I will be sure to disappear for a while to give Darren some private time with him.

3PM - Coach Spiller and Darren are sitting in the garden chatting. Sean arrived around 1:30 and we were already in the garden. Darren was fooling around with his IPOD and didn't even see Sean come in. So, Sean walked right up to Darren and stood in front of him. Darren looked up and said, "Oh my God." He was so, so surprised and so happy to see Sean. He has been going 'a mile a minute' ever since. I decided to leave for a while and give them some private conversation time. Sean's effect on him is so positive. He is telling Sean about his college plans in the future, and how hard he plans to work at rehab. I was having a very hard time keeping the tears from my eyes.

9PM - Darren, Sean, Charlie (Darren's favorite nurse) and I just returned from a really great dinner outing at Fridays. All went smoothly, the food was really good. Good night and thanks for keeping up.

Thanks to all of you who read these updates, and keep us all going.

John

October 3, 2004

11AM - We just finished saying our 'good byes' to Sean. It was a bit emotional for both of them and for me as well. I had breakfast with Sean earlier and he said that he felt that Darren was really doing great as far as his attitude towards our situation. He told Sean that he knows that he has a long and difficult road ahead, but he is up for the challenge.

The dinner last night couldn't have gone better. Darren really enjoyed his time away from the center, and having both Charlie and Sean just made it extra special. Darren ordered Jack Daniels Triple Combo (chicken, ribs and shrimp) and he finished it all, and some mozzarella sticks as well. This morning Darren and Sean talked about going to a few Devils games this year (if there are any) and Sean would really like to go with him, which I would love to see happen. We also talked about the possibility of Darren taking one of two college courses on-line just to 'stay in the game' as Sean put it. I think that this would be a very good idea and Darren does too.

Today, Alex Kramer is coming at 1pm and we are going to hunker down and watch the football games. The Jets are on TV here for the first time this year. What a relief not to have to watch the Falcons again today. There is no therapy on Sunday, so it is a free day to just hang out and do nothing.

9PM: The day went as planned. Alex came and Darren had a nice visit. There will be no update tomorrow, as I have to come home and Cynthia will not arrive here until late tomorrow night.

Thanks again to Sean for taking the time to visit Darren. It was a really nice surprise for him. He told everyone that he spoke to today about it.

Thanks to all of you who read these updates and keep us all going.

John

October 5, 2004

Wow, I go home for a few days and its October!!! How did that happen? I thoroughly enjoyed my time at home, especially being with Arianne. That is such a tough part, being separated. But we know its for the best, we just have to get through it. I look forward to her visit this weekend, along with my sister, Michele and Medora Regan. A "girls" weekend (plus Darren)! We will either have moved into Day Program (possibly Friday now) or getting ready to move on Tuesday. The insurance company is calling the shots, and I think I will fight for more time in Day Program vs more time in Inpatient. Picking my battles, so to speak. We'll see what happens; we are prepared for both. I was so proud of John, doing the updates and arranging for the surprise visitor (former hockey coach Sean Spiller) this weekend. He did a great job, and I know he didn't want to go home.

It was SOOOO good to come in and see Darren this morning. We had a long hug and lots of "I love you's" and "I missed you's." He didn't have therapy til 10:30, so it gave us time to catch up and exchange stories about the last few days.

In PT, I was learning chair to bed transfers, and vice versa. It was a little hard, but certainly do-able. Darren looks forward to not having that hoyer net under him all day long - another sign of independence, or at least less dependence. Progress. Now for the BIG NEWS - Darren is now moving his ring finger on his right hand!!! This is brand new movement!!! I was so excited, I was kissing his head, kissing his hand, and hugging Tari, who happened to be in the room when he told me. He said "its only a finger..." And I said "wow, its a FINGER." And it moves more than the 2 fingers on his left hand. In OT this morning, they were testing his arms, shoulders, fingers, and there it was - movement!!! Darren describes his right side as "nothing." Its weaker than his left side, no tricep either. And now a finger! I think this is SOOO positive. Some kind of communication is getting through. God is answering our prayers.

With LOVE, HOPE and PRAYERS, and thanks to all of you for your unwavering support,

Cynthia

October 6, 2004

Hi everyone, another busy day at Shepherd, but in a different way. Looks like Darren will be discharged on Friday, which is the day after tomorrow as I write this - Wow! I can hardly believe it. We have been at Shepherd for 9 weeks as of yesterday. Seems like a blink of an eye and an eternity, both at the same time. Now, all of a sudden, there is just SO much to do! Insurance questions and conversations, orders for "Durable Medical Equipment," buying supplies and medications, getting groceries, packing up, unpacking, and more. I am a little anxious about the whole move, but excited, too. I know the apartments are small and quite spartan, but its an "apartment" where Darren & I will live together. An improvement over hospital living. Except there are no nurses, no helpers, just us. But I think that will be a good thing in the long run. Thank goodness I will know my neighbors!! Today, the Kramers delivered their car to me to borrow for a few days. What a huge help! It is SO generous of them, and the timing worked out perfectly. Now I can move all this stuff, buy groceries, etc. Maybe we can even figure out how to get Darren in and out of it! We'll see.... PT and OT sessions were pretty run of the mill today. During OT, more testing was done on Darren's sensory reactions to sharp and dull (using the very scientific safety pin tool!), but in the little I observed, I saw no difference than before, and I really couldn't watch much. It was upsetting to see that there was no change. In PT, they had "group" which Darren usually enjoys. That's when they do more interactive activities with each other than individual therapy. Fun, but it means I'll have to do his leg stretches tonight.... Right now (6:30pm) there's a pizza/movie party going on with the kids and the therapists. Tonight's movie is Office Space, one of Darren's all time favorites. I'm sure I'll be hearing lots of those now familiar lines for the next few days. I'm sure it will be fun for all of them. Later on, we are supposed to go and visit Paul, one of Darren's former roommates, who has been in the Day Program and who's going home on Saturday. I am really going to miss him and his Mom; they are both wonderful people. Paul's mom is going to try and get Darren in her car (a jeep, I think!) to show us "how it's done." Then we'll see their apartment (not the same as where we'll be) and get any and all tips they can give us for the Day Program. It will probably be a bit of a late night, so I figured I better do this update now. Then Darren has OT dressing early tomorrow morning, and I'll start packing up his room. When I sat down to write this e-mail, I didn't think I'd have much to say about the day. I guess I was wrong! I'll try to keep you all as updated as possible, but I know you'll understand if communication falls off a bit while we figure things out in "Phase 2" (or is it 3 or 4 by now???).

Keep the faith for us,

Love Cynthia

October 7, 2004

Hi everyone, we are finishing our last full day at Shepherd. Darren gets officially discharged at noon tomorrow (Friday). I can hardly believe it. I was so ready to leave Jefferson after 10 days for the next step, now we are ready to leave inpatient after 9 weeks (I think.)

I forgot to tell you yesterday that Darren transferred out of his bed into his manual wheelchair in the morning and stayed the whole day in his chair before transferring into bed last night. Staying in his chair the whole day isn't the story, though. Its because he was able to resnfer, he didn't need to wear the Hoyer net under him the whole day. So much better not to fuss and mess with that net the whole day. Yea!!! Today was early morning dressing with OT, and they said Darren did quite well, better than last time. We'll see how that goes when we move out. Practice makes perfect, as they say. It was a pretty quiet day, as afternoon therapy was skipped since Darren and Talbot went on an outing to a wheelchair tennis tournament. It must have been prelim matches of some sort, since the tournament is this weekend and not many other spectators were watching. But Darren said it was pretty cool, and the guys hit the ball really hard. And he had fun being out with just Talbot and the therapists. They finished up with dinner from Chick-Fil-A. While he was gone, I started packing up, and putting things in the car. Then I did some grocery shopping in preparation for the move. Felt good to prepare for a more "normal" routine. My range of emotions was all over the place today. Sad and happy, nervous and excited, and they kept changing. I had to keep reminding myself that things WILL get better than they are today, how thankful I am that Darren is doing as well as he is, and that his spirits and determination are still strong. But intermixed with those feelings were anxiety about the upcoming responsibility. The day got better as it went along, and now I feel quite ready for the move. Wish us luck, keep praying and keep in touch. I couldn't do all this without your support.

Love Cynthia