

November 7, 2004 – December 29, 2004
Arriving Home and Kessler Rehab Out-patient Therapy

November 7, 2004

Hello to everyone from wonderful Kinnelon! It is SO good to be home. Words can hardly describe how I felt arriving in town to see banners, bows and ribbons everywhere I looked. All for US! It was very, very special, and I thank everyone who had anything to do with the decorating effort.

Our trip home went pretty smoothly, just a flight delay, which was no big deal. Other than that, we arrived safe and sound, to be met by John and my brother-in-law Pete. The rest of the family was waiting at the house, where we had a nice dinner prepared by the Lulo's (thanks Tom and Lori!) and saw a few friends. It was a perfect home-coming.

Saturday and Sunday were pretty low-key. Just tried to get the new morning routine going - it takes a little more than 2 hours right now, but I expect that to get shorter as we get better at it. As Darren is able to do more, it might take a little longer than that at first, since he'll be doing things himself, but then that will get easier, too. Right now, we just take our time and don't rush. During the day, Darren's friends stopped by to visit and catch up. It was great to have them come and spend time with him. I really appreciate that they took the time to come and see him. Not all of his friends could come this weekend, but he knows as soon as they are able, he'll see them, too. Our family and friends came, too, and it was great to get and give hugs, and just hang out. It was also good that people could see Darren for themselves, and not rely on pictures and others' accounts of how he is doing. Many expressed surprise as how well he looks and what he can do for himself. Of course, I am SO proud of him and all that he has accomplished. And I know there is more progress to come. Just being home will help him tremendously. The fact that we are all home together, as a family once more, makes me so very happy. There truly is "no place like home."

Arianne posted lots of new pictures to the photo site, so check them out. Here's the link again:
<http://www.imagestation.com/album/?id=4229700093&code=11748674&mode=invite&cmp=EMC-AlbumInvite>

We don't have much planned for the week, so if you have a few minutes to stop by, PLEASE CALL FIRST, and see when might be a good time for a visit.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement. I'm sure I'll still be needing it as we get settled in here at home, so please keep in touch!

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

November 11, 2004

Hi everyone,

This morning I posted on the Kinnelon Yahoo Group, and I'm attaching it here, since many of you might not be on there (especially those of you not from Kinnelon!). But since its a general description and thank you, I thought it appropriate to share here.

Now that I am back in Kinnelon, I wanted to take a few minutes to post here. As some of you may know, my 18 year old son, Darren, suffered a spinal cord injury when he dove into shallow water in Barnegat Bay this past July 23rd. He broke his C5 vertebrae, resulting in paralysis from his chest down. After having surgery at Thomas Jefferson Medical Center in Philadelphia, he was at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia for an intensive rehab program. We are both home now, as you can tell by the signs, bows and ribbons all over Kinnelon.

Our homecoming was wonderful! There is no place I'd rather be living right now than here in Kinnelon. The outpouring of care and concern was obvious right from the start. I was not able to respond to many of the e-mails, and not at all to the many cards, letters, and gifts that we have received. I know people don't expect to be thanked, but I do hope everyone knows how much we appreciated all that we received. We looked forward to the mail and package delivery every day, and we were never disappointed. Everyone was so very generous, and we are so thankful to all of those who took the time to remember Darren. It gave us such great support as we were so far away from home.

To all those who made the signs, decorated, planted flowers, delivered flowers, set the table, and have delivered food so far – THANK YOU!!! I know more is coming, too, and I thank you all in advance for volunteering to help us. Not having to take care of the routine tasks like food preparation is very helpful as we get settled into some kind of routine.

Most people who see Darren are surprised at what he can do for himself. He uses a manual wheelchair, although he will be getting a power chair to use for longer distances. He can push his chair pretty well, which was very obvious during Wednesday's trip to BJ's. After helping him get onto the sidewalk, he was on his own the entire time we were in the store. He has good use of his arms and wrists, and a lot of his fingers are moving now, even though they are not yet functional. Having strong wrists helps him do so many things with his hands. He feeds himself, and can pick up a cup or plastic bottle and drink from it. He can partially dress himself, although it takes time and effort. All of these things will get easier as he gains strength and hopefully more movement.

All the while, Darren's spirits have been good, and it helps to have so many people pulling for him. His attitude will be key to his success.

Darren will be going to Kessler in West Orange for outpatient therapy (PT and OT) three times a week. I also hope he'll use the gym there for more strengthening and exercise. We'll also be looking into using the pool at the Mountain Lakes YMCA. In addition to the physical part of his rehab, Darren wants to start doing some college coursework online, so he is looking into that as well.

I wrote this in hopes of reaching as many people as possible who are concerned about Darren and want to know how he's doing. I have an extensive list of people who have been receiving regular e-mail updates, but I know a lot of townspeople are not on that list. I hope this helps.

There are so many people to thank for their ongoing support and prayers. Please continue to pray for Darren's healing to progress. It will be a long, slow road to recovery, but I know it is possible through faith and hope.

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

On another note, all the food we have been receiving is wonderful, but the empty containers are piling up! They are all in marked bags on my front covered porch, so please stop by and pick them up when you are passing by. So far, I have bags for the lulos, Jekogians, Rathyens, Weingartens, and Fethermans. No need to call first or ring the doorbell, just run up and take yours - thanks!!!

These last few days have been nice not to have any sort of schedule and just figure things out. A few phone calls here and there, a few visitors, and even a trip to the supermarket is starting to make things feel "normal" again. The idea of a "new normal" that I have referred to in the past is starting to set in. My mother comes up each day just to see us and help with whatever she can, so that has been nice. I even went to the office for a few hours yesterday. Once Darren starts his treatment at Kessler, things will fall into place. I'll stay in touch as best I can.

Cynthia

November 16, 2004

Hi everyone,

Well, my days are running together, and I don't even remember when I last wrote an update. Not good! Writing more regularly helps me keep things in order, so I will try to get back to that as soon as possible.

The weekend brought more friends visiting, so that was nice for all of us. I even went out to a friend's house party for a bit on Saturday night, and had the chance to see a few people and socialize. On Sunday morning, I tagged along with the Regan family to attend the service at the Community Church of Smoke Rise. I enjoyed that very much, and felt very welcomed by friends and strangers alike. I was very glad that I went, and look forward to going again. It means having more help from John and Ari for Darren's morning routine, but that's a good thing to do anyway.

Monday was our last day of "not having anything scheduled." Darren was feeling a bit under the weather; we both suspected another urinary tract infection, which will be determined by the sample brought to Kessler today. So he rested a good part of the day, and went to bed earlier than usual. We have never had a TV in our bedroom, but now that Darren is using our room until the elevator comes, we rigged one up last night. He wanted to get out of his chair, but not really go to bed to sleep. So we dragged in the TV from the exercise room, cable, extension cord, etc. and set it up for him. It was worth it, as he watched til just after 10, then went to sleep. Good thing, since it was an early morning today to get to Kessler for a doctor appointment then therapy.

For our first day there, filling out forms and answering the same questions several times, it went pretty smoothly. I was disappointed not to see the actual doctor we wanted, but we saw one of his associates. I never got the copy of Darren's final testing results at Shepherd, so I didn't see their designations, but the doctor said Darren was an ASIA B now. In the beginning, he was an A (worst level of injury), so a B is good! Also in the beginning, as many of you may recall, he was classified as "complete," but that changed early on to an "incomplete," meaning there was movement below his level of injury. All good signs that healing is possible, and is happening.

The doctors and therapists all expressed surprise and pleasure that Darren has the abilities he has. They thought he was strong and doing more than they expected, seeing him as only a C5 on paper. Functionally, he is a C6, at least, although the doctor was hesitant to say any more than that (like functioning as a C7). We both liked his PT, Joe, who hopefully will work him hard and push him. Likewise for his OT, Sheena. Today was so much evaluation and Q&A, there wasn't a whole lot of therapy, but we expected that. Thursday should be different. I also showed Darren the gym there, and he liked the idea of going there after his therapy sessions. I'll get more info on that while I'm there on Thursday.

All in all, it was a good, but long and tiring day. I'll update you again at the end of the week, when I'll have more exciting news to report, I hope!

Help us keep the faith with your e-mails, cards, letters, phone calls and visits - the encouragement is appreciated! I look forward to seeing more and more of you in the near future. I love getting the hugs!!!

With love and prayers,

Cindy

November 22, 2004

Hi everyone, there just doesn't seem to be enough time in the day to get to everything that needs attention, and the update is one of those things that gets put off. If there is some time, there might not be enough energy, so it doesn't get done. Anyway, its great to be seeing some of you, and I've enjoyed going out to the High School Fashion Show and to the Community Church of Smoke Rise. Even doing food shopping and errands enables me to see some of you, and that's great.

Please continue to keep in touch, and call if you'd like to come over. This upcoming weekend will be very busy as most of Darren's friends will be home from college and will come to visit. I'm thinking its going to be like an Open House for Friday afternoon/evening and Saturday during the day (noon til 4-ish). Darren is planning on going to the Alumni Hockey game at 5 pm at Skylands on Saturday. So for all of you friends who might be planning on coming over - that's the plan! And for all you parents - please pass this along. If anyone is still around on Sunday afternoon, I'm sure Darren would like to see you then, too. This is going to be so good for him, just to see everyone and reconnect.

So, now that we have our days at Kessler set (Tues-Thurs-Fri), I am working at more of a schedule. Should fall into place in the next week or so. I am in the process of setting up a few initial home visits for PT and OT, but I don't think it will be the same people I will use long term for extra help. I don't know yet, for sure, though. We're thinking of getting a specialized PT or personal trainer to help design a specific program, then have that person along with friends to help with exercise, strengthening, stretching, etc. Of course, as soon as we can move Darren upstairs, that will all be much easier. As of right now, the elevator is still not in, but we are expecting it this week. Hard to know how the actual installation will be handled with the Thanksgiving holiday, but I am hopeful it will go quickly. Once he is upstairs, a more solid routine can be established for his care, his exercising, etc.

As any of you know who have seen Darren so far, you know that his spirits continue to be high, and that he is motivated to work hard and get better. He continues to amaze me, and he strengthens me each

day. His positive attitude is contagious. He is looking forward to seeing his friends over the long holiday weekend, and I know they are looking forward to seeing him, too.

Speaking of the holiday, we have much to be thankful for, and I look forward to having family and friends here to celebrate. I am thankful to all of you who have been supporting us through your care and concern these last several months. I know I've said it before, but Thanksgiving brings an extra reason to say it again - THANK YOU. I could not have made it this far without so much support from all of you. Renewing my faith has also been a huge help, as I find I cannot do this alone. There is a strength far greater than ours in the Lord, and I am finding comfort and hope by turning to God. So my best wishes to all of you and your families to enjoy this Thanksgiving and celebrate all that you have and are thankful for. Have a safe and wonderful holiday.

With love and prayers,

Cynthia

November 28, 2004

Hello everyone, I hope you all enjoyed your Thanksgiving holiday and long weekend. We did! Tonight the house is quiet - a first in about 6 days! Friends started arriving home Tuesday night, and we've had visitors ever since. It was a lot of kids, but I wouldn't have had it any other way. It was great for Darren to see everyone, great for them to see him, and great that they all saw each other. What a nice group of "young adults" - hardly kids anymore! In addition to visiting and hanging out, Darren went to the movies with friends one night, and out to Applebee's another night. His friends tackled doing a car transfer, and taking him out in our van. Everything went very smoothly, and its great to have others who will take Darren with them and do what needs to be done. I had no doubt it would happen; it was just nice to see.

Thanksgiving brought 14 for dinner at our house. I really didn't do much of the cooking, so it wasn't too much work. Thanks to Mom, Michele, and Lucille, everything was very nice. I know how much I have to be thankful for, and said so in a prayer before dinner. Of course I cried through my words, but managed to say what I wanted. The food was kind of secondary; I was thankful to be all together and have our family and friends with us. It was a lovely day.

The Kinnelon High School Hockey team had its first-ever alumni game. We all went, with some trepidation on my part. I had two meltdowns - one at the beginning when they were going to announce everyone's name (I couldn't listen; could only think about how Darren should have been out there) and again at the end of the game when they gathered for a team picture and they brought Darren out with them. Thanks for the shoulders, Jane and Cindy D. You were there for me when I needed you. Darren seemed to thoroughly enjoy himself, and again, it was good for him to see everyone and everyone to see him. As difficult as it was, I was glad I went.

As we see more and more people, I realize how good it is for all of you to see Darren. It has been a long time, and reading e-mails and looking at pictures just isn't the same. I am so proud of him when everyone tells me how good he looks, and how good his spirits are. He is amazing, and he continues to give me strength each and every day.

Our elevator still isn't in, but the guys installing it have been working their tails off for us. Long days over the holiday weekend, and we truly appreciate their efforts. In the meantime, we are managing with our

makeshift set-up, but anxiously look forward to moving Darren upstairs and us back into our own room. As our schedule at Kessler takes shape, I will be setting up other routines for stretching and exercising with Darren. I know there are many volunteers out there, and I'll start contacting you as I formulate a plan. The time between now and the end of the year will be what we can arrange; after the new year I envision a more solid plan. I appreciate all of your offers and watch out - I WILL be calling some of you for different kinds of help!

Thank you to all of you who have made dinner for us. We have enjoyed them all, and it is such a huge help not to have to plan, shop, cook, etc. THANKS!!!

A few items for those who are new to the list or might not have the information anymore: the link to the photo album site is:

<http://www.imagestation.com/album/?id=4229700093&code=11748674&mode=invite&cmp=EMC-AlbumInvite>

Don't forget to post a message, but you have to register or sign in to do that.

Also, Darren's e-mail is puckzman16@yahoo.com

Well, enough for now, I think.

With love, prayers and continued hope for more healing,

Cynthia

November 30, 2004

Hi everyone, I don't have much "new" news to report on, but I do have some random (though important) thoughts I would like to share with all of you. I am writing this at Kessler, while Darren is in therapy. I forgot my book and my phone, but perhaps that was a good thing. I got to do two of my favorite things - walking and writing. I took a walk around the property; not too scenic, but its brisk and sunny out, and it felt good to be in the sunshine. Now I get to write, another therapeutic activity. Sometimes as I relate the events and activities of our day to day lives, I forget to leave out the most important part of the happenings. I will attempt to fill in some blanks today, as I review the last few weeks' events. First, I know that many of you on this e-mail list know Carol Gordon and her family, and know that Carol's mother recently passed away. However, this list goes far and wide, and some of you have had e-mail and phone conversations with Carol, without ever having met her. So this news is for you, and also to reiterate how thankful I am to have a friend like Carol (as well as the entire Gordon family). It is with great sadness that we accept Charlotte's passing, and know that she is resting in peace. Living next door, we have had many occasions to interact with Carol's parents, and have always enjoyed their company. Of course, her husband David and the whole family are in our thoughts and prayers. Over the last few months, I can no longer refer to Carol and the family as our "neighbors." That implies that they just live next door. Our relationship is so much more than that. We are so lucky to live next door and be such close friends. How tragedy and crisis brings relationships into focus.

In this same vein, I am so thankful that Eli (Gordon) has been such a true friend to both Darren and Ari. There's not many things that seem "normal" to us these days, but having Eli at our house, just hanging out, is one of the best parts of being home. He has hardly missed a day, and when he's not around, I

notice it! Thank you, Eli, for being there - for all of us! Also, in relating the story of attending the Alumni hockey game, I neglected to say "Thanks" to all those involved in the association and the game for including Darren as you did. From giving him jerseys, to dedicating the game to him, to including him in the team picture, you really made him feel a part of the whole event. That's what made the evening special - it wasn't just another game. For all of those who have been praying for us, I wanted you to know that I am praying, too, as has been evident to you in my prior e-mails, I think. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank my friend Betty, and her husband Rick for inspiring a new connection to my faith. Betty bought a beautiful Bible for me when she visited in Atlanta, and I have been reading it each night, along with the Purpose Driven Life. When I feel I just can't keep going, faith is helping me stay strong and focused. Thanks also to the Regan's for bringing me to Church and to the whole congregation for making me feel welcome. Well, I know this all sounds sappy today, but that's how I'm feeling, and I thought it helpful to express. Remember, these e-mails are as much for me, as all of you! Thanks to all of you for "being there."

Til next time, with love and prayers,

Cynthia

December 5, 2004

I can hardly contain my emotion as I write this - Darren moved a toe this morning!!!! I wasn't here to see it myself - doesn't that figure? - but I was at church....John was getting Darren bathed and dressed this morning when John told him to try to move his toes. At first he couldn't, but then a few minutes later, Darren said he thought he could move a toe, and he did! I believe in the power of prayer, and that our collective prayers are working. While the healing process may be slow, it is happening, that's the good news. Whew! Now I forget whatever else I was going to write about today!

Well, there are fund raising events that are being scheduled that I'd like to pass along the information on. There's a band concert that is scheduled for Jan 7th - see attachment. Then there's Casino Night on March 4th - see attachment on that, too. Then there's a marathon/two-woman team half-marathon on April 10th. I don't have information on that electronically (yet) but will send that along as soon as I can.

What else is happening: Therapy went well at Kessler this week. Feels like we are getting into the routine. Looks like the elevator was finished today. We are waiting for an inspection tomorrow (Monday) and hopefully will be using it right away. I can't thank Steve Masterson and crew enough for all of the time he put into this project, and it was a project! Thank you to his wife and family for sacrificing time that I'm sure he would have spent with them to work on this. We truly appreciate his dedication to getting it finished.

Saturday we went to Giants Stadium to see Butler High School play Westwood for the championship. Butler lost, but we had a good time anyway. We were fortunate to be in a suite for the game, and had a great view of the field. Unfortunately, we didn't see the other fans, so maybe some of you were there, too, that I missed seeing.

Sunday, it was back to Giants Stadium to see the Jets! John took Darren, Ari and Eli while I had a bit of a break to do some shopping. Since they won, it was great! Thanks to Bernie Schick for asking Herm Edwards for tickets.

Now, a request: I am looking for volunteers to drive Darren to Kessler on Fridays. I don't need too many, but if anyone is available from 12 noon til 4 pm on a particular Friday, starting Dec 17, I would love to hear from you. I could show you how to get Darren in and out of our van, and everything else you need to know before you actually take him. It's not complicated, and would only take a few minutes. I'm not sure of the Kessler schedule for Dec 24 and 31, but I will check this week.

Also, there was a very nice article in today's Trends. I will try to scan it and attach it to my next update.

Gotta run - want to watch "The Five People You'll Meet in Heaven" - a TV movie based on the book by Mitch Albom. I liked the book; hopefully the movie will be good, too!

With love, hope and prayers (and more prayers....)

Cynthia

December 14, 2004

Hi everyone, no, you haven't missed any updates, I just haven't written in more than a week. My apologies, and its to myself as much as to you. Each day starts blending into the next, and I can't remember what happened! Anyway, I'll do my best.

So Darren's toes on his right foot continue to move, ever so slightly, but at will. He thinks his toes on his left foot are moving, but we can't see them moving - yet. I am positive they will start moving soon, too. Seeing that more healing is taking place is so positive, and I truly believe it will continue. Yes, our prayers continue to work!

It's been a week now that the elevator is operational and Darren is in his new room! Lots of helping hands came to our assistance to help move him upstairs and then put our room back together for us. It all went very quickly and smoothly. Of course, he loves his new digs! With smooth linoleum flooring and tile in the bathroom, he is able to roll around quite easily. And even though there is carpet thru the upstairs living room and into the computer area, he is getting better at going over it with his manual chair. He is getting stronger and able to do more things easier now. He wants to be able to transfer from his manual chair to the power chair by himself, so that is something to work on. Then he can buzz around upstairs as much as he wants without wearing himself out. Moving upstairs also meant taking showers in his new roll-in shower area! He was grinning ear to ear while letting the water pour down on him! Oh, the things we take for granted.....

Therapy at Kessler is going well. Darren works hard each and every time he goes, and he practices newly learned skills at home. This morning, he transferred himself from the bed to his chair with no assistance from me, just spotting. And he can go from his chair to the therapy mat in his room with no assistance as well. When the transfer surfaces are even or downhill, he can do it himself, as he's getting stronger and more confident in his abilities. Having the therapy mat is great, as he can prone (lay on his stomach), stretch and balance on the edge - all good things to do. He is starting to "pop wheelies" so he can get over uneven door thresholds and in and out of the elevator, too.

A physical therapist has come to the house twice so far, and will come 2 more times, as per insurance coverage. It is great to have him here, working on equipment and skills right in Darren's own environment.

We will also have an OT come to the house 4 times, to work on daily living skills as Darren actually does them. After that, I am investigating options for the future - either a PT or a personal trainer for an extended period of time to really help Darren strengthen and improve. In the meantime, some friends are helping with stretches, exercises and games - all very beneficial to his development.

Darren is helping to coach the Kinnelon Bantam Hockey Team, mostly 7th and 8th graders. He's gone to one practice and one game so far, and really seemed to enjoy it. He said the kids were great, and he really feels that he'll be able to teach them things that they'll understand and use. Thanks to Coaches Tim and Andrew for making this happen. I always thought Darren would make a good coach because he understands the game so well, and now he has that chance. He looks forward to making most of the future practices and games, too, as long as they're not too early in the morning!

(See what happens when I don't write in a long time - the update is endless.....)

Last Saturday was a long and busy day that started with a bantam hockey game earlier than our usual morning routine would allow (but Darren was determined!), he got a back and shoulder massage in the afternoon (felt VERY good, he said!), went to the Christmas Candlelight concert at the Smoke Rise Community Church with me (beautiful music and singing to get us in the Christmas spirit), then ended with the High School Hockey reception and game that night. Whew, that was a busy day! But Darren enjoyed every minute, and it was great for more people to see him and for him to see them.

Sunday was the Christmas decorating day, and it was with some reluctance that I dragged out the boxes and the tree. Just isn't the same, but I couldn't not do it, either. So I just did the minimum, and didn't wear myself out with it. What goes up must come down, so I was careful not to do too much.

A home health aide started yesterday to help with the morning care. I am hopeful it will work out OK, and look forward to getting a break on some mornings.

Yesterday, Darren & I spent some time on the computer exploring CLEP exams for college credit and online courses. Within an hour or so of filling out some forms, he received phone calls from 2 of the schools! He chatted with them about his goals and is closer to making a decision on how to proceed. He certainly is motivated.

Today, Darren had a visit with his doctor (a physiatrist) at Kessler. She was very excited upon hearing of the toe movement, and declared that he would now be considered an ASIA C - great news in my book! He was originally an A, the worst level of injury. She spoke to him about his future plans for school, driving, etc., and was very positive about his progress.

Well, I thought I was tired before I started writing - today was another long day - but I managed to write even more than I had envisioned. Thank you for allowing me to share our days with you, as well as our hopes and dreams. You continue to keep me going, even when I don't feel much like it. Your support with meals, driving, and visits, as well as your on-going e-mails are greatly appreciated, even when I can't respond individually. I hope you know how much your offerings of help mean to all of us.

I continue to take one day at a time. Some days are more tiring than others, but somehow we make it through. After all, if Darren is smiling and positive most all of the time, how can I not be?

With love, hope and prayers, especially during this Holiday Season,

Cynthia

December 21, 2004

Hello everyone, and Merry Christmas!

Knowing my recent track record of infrequent updates, I'm sure this will be my last one before Christmas. I want to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas, and may you enjoy the holidays with family and friends.

Our routine is coming along here at home, but with a little twist this week. A home health aide started last week, and I think she is going to work out fine. However, she is now sick and will be out all of this week. I was hoping to really have her trained well by the end of the year, but now this will set us back a bit. I'm disappointed not to have the help, but I am hopeful it will work out in the long run. We'll see.

Our good friend Randy Velischek (former NJ Devils player and current radio commentator) put together a WONDERFUL day for us on Sunday. He brought a current Devils player, Tommy Albelin, and former players John MacLean and Ken Daneyko to our house for a visit! The guys couldn't have been nicer. They sat, visited, ate and chatted for quite awhile. We thoroughly enjoyed their visit, especially the fact they gave up a Sunday afternoon to come and see Darren. What a treat! I've attached a few pictures that we took that afternoon. I hope you can open them! An early Christmas present.

Therapy at Kessler is going well, also. Darren now reminisces about how hard it used to be to put on a t-shirt, or get one off. Now he does these things, and more, so easily. When it doesn't seem like progress is made each day, we have to look back and remember how far he's come. Now when he transfers from his chair to the therapy mat, he doesn't even use the sliding board, so he knows he's getting stronger.

In just a few days, it will be 5 months since his injury. I don't know how I feel about that. It seems so long ago, yet it seems like yesterday, too. The progress seems so slow, yet look at the differences in what he can do. I continue to take each day at a time, trying not to get ahead of myself or the situation. During the day, I can focus on that with the daily tasks, but at night, when my head hits the pillow is when the tears come. The only way to calm my fears, to ease my pain, to lessen the burden is to say my prayers. To know there is a force more powerful than all of us put together, to believe that there is a plan though I don't know what it is, and don't understand it, to think positive thoughts with all my heart - this is what puts me to sleep. And with Christmas approaching, I wish for so much more than I ever knew one could wish for. To wish for things I've always taken for granted. To want those things it seems like everyone else has. Wishes, prayers and dreams all wrapped into one. I think of these things at night, so I can wake up in the morning, ready to tackle another day.

The reason I can tackle each day anew is through all of you and your help. It just occurred to me that all the "gifts" I've been receiving - dinners, transportation, errands, shopping, etc. - are all the same. They are all gifts of "time." Not having to shop for the groceries, not having to cook the meals, not having to drive each and every day gives me time. I am so grateful to ALL of you who have given us your time - a very precious commodity - so that we may have a little more of ours freed up. I apologize for not calling each and every one of you for the meals and other goodies and gifts we've received. Please know how thankful we continue to be for your care, concern and support.

For those of you not on our Christmas card list, our annual photo is attached to this e-mail. It comes to you with wishes for a wonderful, joyous holiday season.

With love, prayers and hope for recovery,

Cynthia

PS I wasn't able to attach the pictures - not enough room in the mailbox. Sorry. Maybe I can re-format them and send them in the future.

December 22 , 2004

Happy Holidays!

As we look forward to sharing Christmas with our family and friends, I am reminded once again of all we have to be thankful for. May the peace and joy of the season be celebrated with love and blessings.

Cynthia

December 29, 2004

Hi everyone, and I hope you all had a Merry Christmas (at last those who celebrate!).

We had a wonderful three days of Christmas. It started with Christmas Eve lunch here at our house with our good friends, the DeMarco family. They used to be a family of four, now they are eight! Both Dawn and Shelley are married, and Dawn and her husband Dan brought their one-month old twin boys. It was wonderful to see them and the babies. Christmas Eve dinner was once again a success as we celebrated with the Schicks, Rathyens and Naseefs (Ralph and Lucille's daughter and her husband George). It was, as always, a lovely evening of food, wine and conversation. Christmas morning was spent opening presents by ourselves, until my family joined us at lunch. More presents, food and a good jigsaw puzzle! Then onto Grandma's for dinner (and more presents!). But it wasn't over yet! On Sunday, we went to my sister Michele's for lunch (yummy beef brisket) and then to the Feredjian's (our neighbors) for another wonderful gathering of friends and food. Whew! It was a busy, but good three days. When you have family and friends to celebrate with and spend time with, that's makes all the difference. We are so lucky to have the traditions we do, and thankful we could once again be all together to appreciate each other's company. Now we are recuperating.....

This morning when I was getting Darren up, he asked for his slippers instead of his sneakers. Sometimes he just wears his slippers til its time to go out, so I didn't think much of it. Later, I went up in his room to do some laundry, and he's completely bent over in his chair. His backpack is half off of his chair, and his stretchy loops are out (I knew I had put them in his pack for therapy today). He already had one sneaker on, and was working on the other! It was really hard for him, but I didn't offer to help, just remarked how impressed I was. I went about my business, and later, he had both sneakers on and loops were back in his pouch. I was really impressed with all of that! He continues to be so motivated and determined. Of course, he has his frustrating moments when he is trying really hard to do something and he can't quite do it, but he never gives up.

The jigsaw puzzle Michele gave to Ari on Christmas inspired Darren to want to do another, so a new one - 2000 pieces! - is now spread out on the kitchen table. Its great therapy for Darren to manipulate the pieces, and its a fun thing to do for me, too. If anyone stops by, we invite them to help! We'll see how long this one takes; I have a feeling it will be awhile....

In the meantime, Darren is closer to signing up for an online course for the spring semester. It will probably be an intro course of some sort, similar to what he would have taken as a freshmen. He's looking forward to doing it, and I think it will be a very good thing to get his mind working again. I'll let you know what he signs up for.

As the year winds down, I wish all of you a happy and healthy new year. I look forward to many positive changes in 2005, and hope for a physical, emotional and spiritual renewal as the new year begins. I wish the same for you, your families and loved ones.

Love,

Cynthia