

CAIRNS, John (cont)

"I knew that if I was going to die, it would have been on that day."

SUNDAY, John Cairns returns to the Downsview Rehabilitation Centre. After his hospital stay, Cairns was transferred into the Workers' Compensation Board-backed centre which treats industrial accident victims. Roughly 1,500 people use the centre's amputee and artificial limb programs annually, said prosthetic program manager Bill Burt.

Acceptance is the first — and often hardest — hurdle on the road to recovery.

"A whole lifestyle comes to an abrupt end. What they see is a tunnel without any light. You have to give them that light."

John's dreams are different now. He dreams of downhill skiing with other amputees — even jokes that his amputation means his ski tips won't cross.

In May, John and Susan celebrate their sixth wedding anniversary.

"Regardless of the accident I married him for him, not simply for his arm and leg," said Susan, 26.

In August, the family moves into their new \$186,000 wheelchair-accessible home in Belleville's west end.

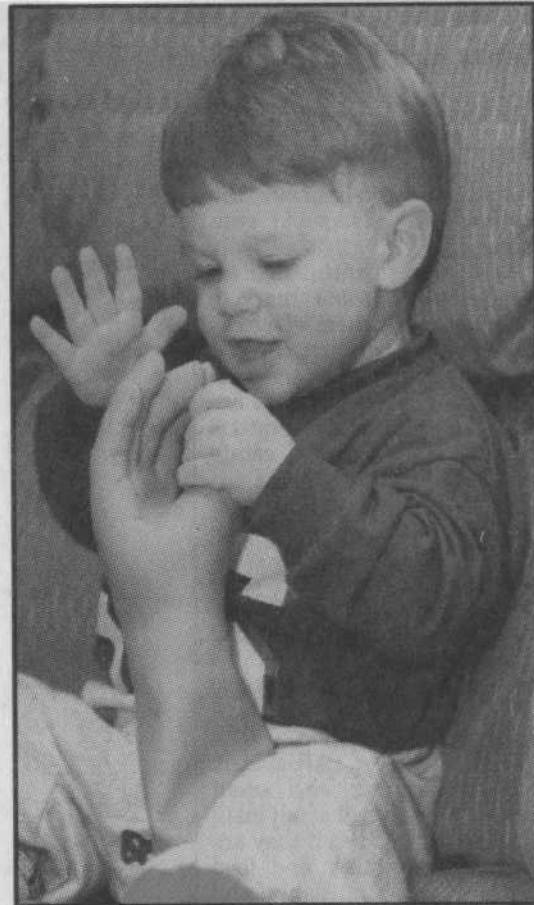
"We'll get through this," said Susan. "You have to realize you can never go back. This is normal and you have to adjust."

Just then, the couple's two sons, one-year-old Mackenzie and three-year-old Zachary, charge into the room. John sees his sons and his blue eyes light up.

"It's so nice to hold these guys. I saw a guy who lost both his arms. Can you imagine not being able to hug your children again?"

There was a day when John couldn't.

"The future is scary sometimes, but I just have to take it one step at a time."



One-year-old Mackenzie has a unique play toy — his father's artificial hand.

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