

# Bernie has new lease on life

## Once tried to end it all

By Jim Thomas  
Ten years ago, Bernie Dams, then 18, wanted to die.

And he tried. Standing out behind Midtown Garage, (now the entrance to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library), he put a .22 calibre rifle to his neck and pulled the trigger.

The bullet, (fragments of which are still lodged in his chest) ruptured his spinal cord, rendering him paralyzed from the waist down.

"I screwed up again," he remembers saying to himself as he lay on the ground. At that moment, he wanted to retrieve the gun "and do it right," but he couldn't move and the rifle was out of reach. So he lay there, all through the night, until a lady, out walking her dog the next morning, found him and went for help.

He spent many months in several hospitals.

That was ten years ago.

Today, Bernie Dams, now 28, operates a cartage business under the name of Jeta Movers. Confined to a wheelchair, he resides in an apartment designed for the disabled at 341 Bloor Street West, Toronto. The Senator David A. Croll building is the former Rochdale College, now owned by the city and subsidized by the province.

What's Bernie's outlook on life following his brush with death?

"I'm very happy," he says. "I have a future and I can see my accomplishments. In a lot of ways, I'm only ten years old."

Was that near-fateful night in Stouffville ten years ago, a cry for help? he was asked. No way, says Bernie, I'd been crying for help for five years.

That night, he was determined to end it all.

He remembers driving into Toronto earlier that day and buying the gun. He returned home, locked up the apartment, (located over the Bakery), and went out behind the garage.

It was raining, he recalls. He put the gun to his neck and pulled the trigger—three times, and three times it misfired. A fourth time, he pointed the rifle to the ground. It discharged, with a terrible noise, he remembers. He then reloaded the gun a fifth time and shot himself in the throat.

"Right away, I knew I was paralyzed," he said, "except for my eyes, I had no movement." He remembers hearing the town clock strike several times before he lapsed into unconsciousness.

The call for an ambulance was placed from Aiken's Drug Store. He was admitted first to Scarborough Centenary Hospital, then St. Michael's. Physicians feared removal of the bullet could end his life. So they let it stay.

"It's broken up," explains Bernie, "the fragments are still floating around. There's no problem."

Following his release from St. Mikes,

Bernie spent 16 months at Riverdale Hospital, (on two occasions), then was admitted to Lyndhurst.

"Here, my upward climb started," he says, "the world began to open up to me." Bernie established a group called "GOAL", (Get Out And Live). He was the spokesman and he used his time to good advantage, addressing the problems of nursing homes, writing letters and sending telegrams.

On one occasion, he even called the Brampton residence of the then Premier of Ontario, Bill Davis.

In 1980, he moved to David A. Croll Apartments where he resides today.

Bernie admits he never thought he'd be able to work again. However, prior to leaving Lyndhurst, he obtained a job at York University. Later, he became editor of the newsletter published by the Hospital for Sick Children.

"I was on cloud nine," he remembers, "I couldn't believe it." He's still hoping for a full-time position in public relations or advertising.

What about social work? Bernie doesn't feel suited for this role, even though he's spoken to groups of young people on several occasions. "I feel comfortable talking to people about suicide," he says. He encourages teens to give him a call if depressed to the point of ending it all.

Bernie has his own apartment computer that he operates with great skill. He can also travel just about anywhere in his battery-operated wheelchair. It has a top speed of seven miles an hour.

Bernie still keeps in touch with members of his family; his father, Wolfgang, in Willowdale; his sister, Regina, a graduate RNA from Durham College, Oshawa; and brothers Chris in Ajax and Mark up North. His mother passed away several years ago.

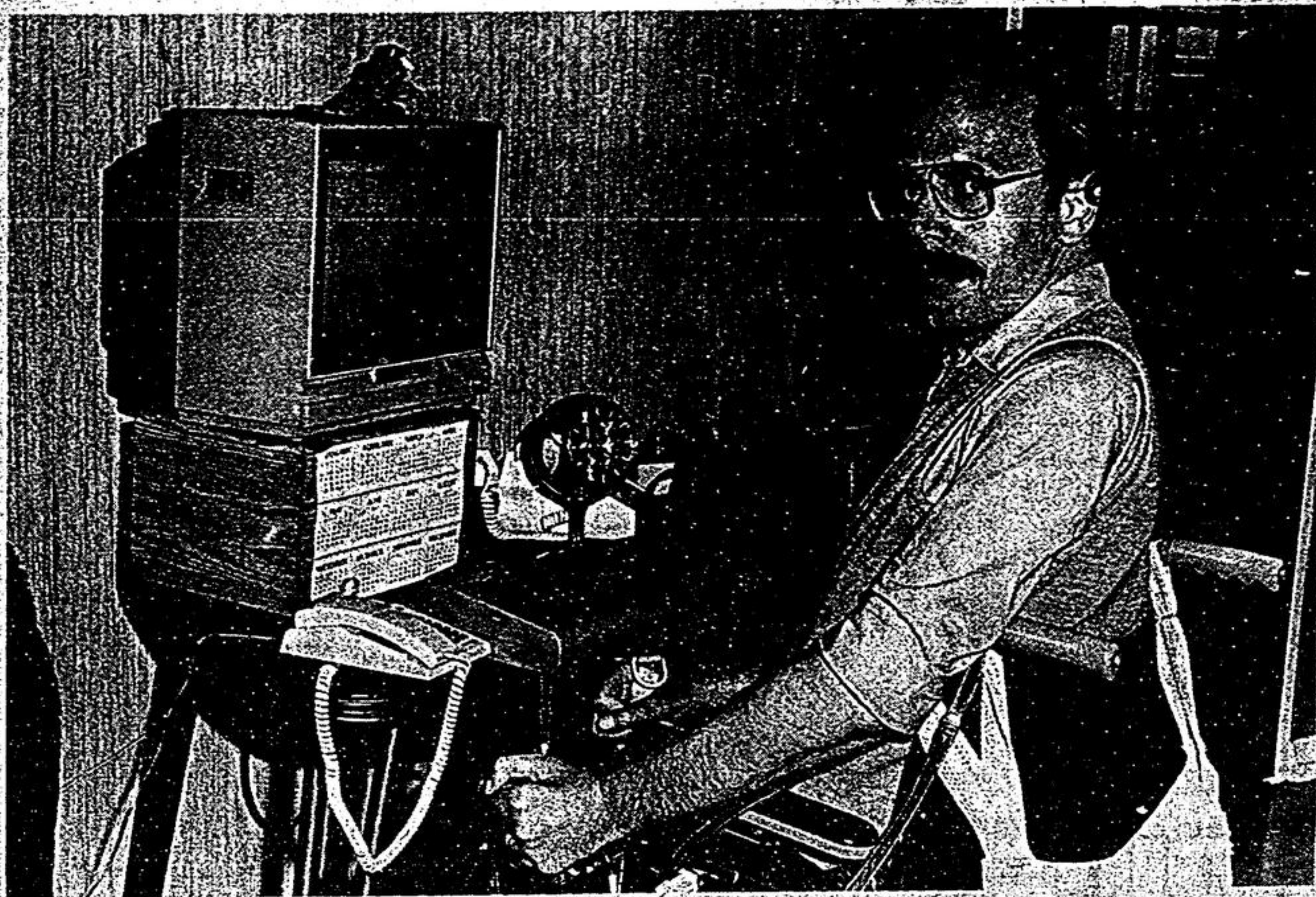
Bernie feels Regina's career has been helped through his experience.

Well-groomed and handsome, Bernie talks about past problems and future hopes with honesty and confidence.

"I was confused; a rebel without a cause; walking around in a circle, trying to get out," he says.

But today?

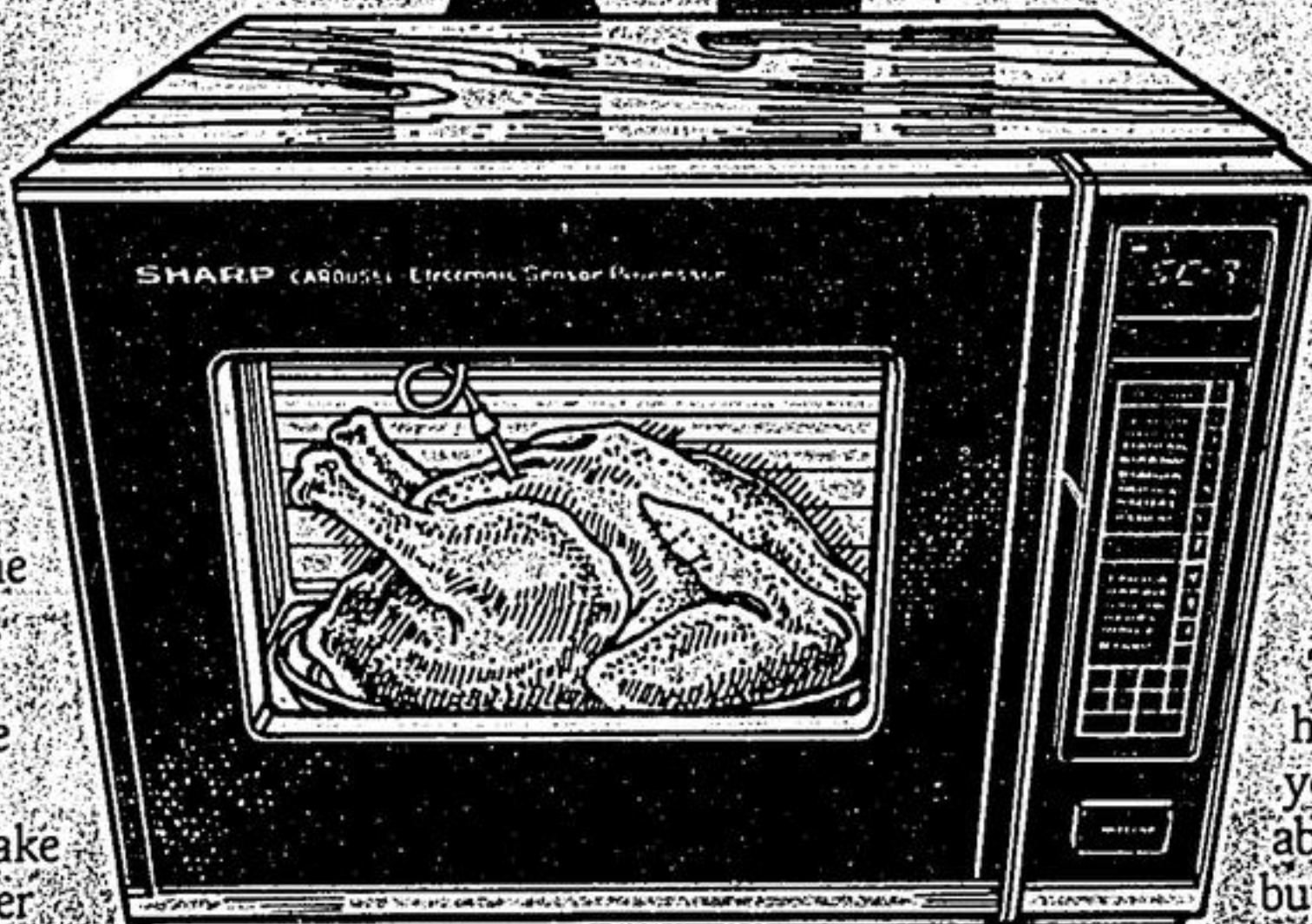
"I'm happy with what I'm doing. It's a dream coming true."



Although confined to a wheelchair since an attempted suicide ten years ago, Bernie Dams, formerly of Stouffville and now of Toronto is happy with the turn his life has taken. "In a lot of ways, I'm only ten years old," he says, "it's like a dream coming true." Bernie would like to hear from former friends in Stouffville. The address is: Bernie Dams, c/o Senator David A. Croll Apartments, 341 Bloor Street West, (Apartment 1411), Toronto.

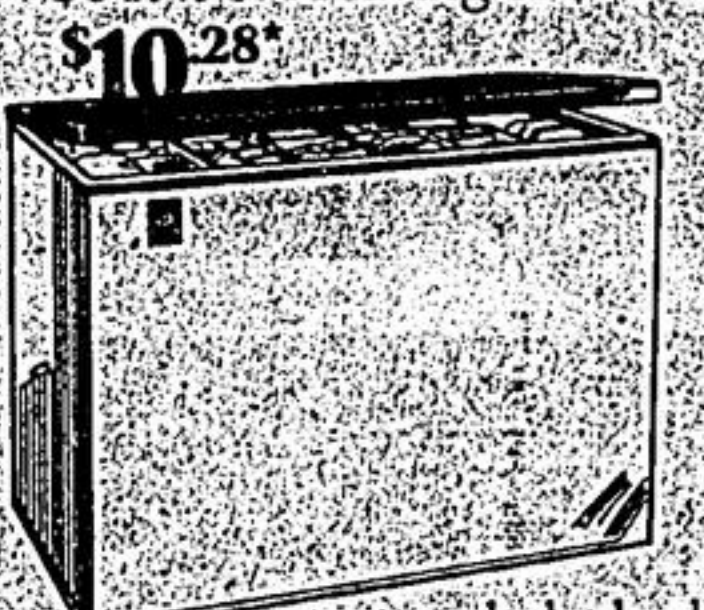
—Jim Thomas

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### PUBLIC MEETING CONCERNING A PROPOSED OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT

**NOTICE OF MEETING**  
TAKE NOTICE that the Council of The Corporation of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville will hold a public meeting on Tuesday, August 20th, 1985 at 8:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building located at 19 Civic Avenue, Stouffville, Ontario to make available adequate information to the public regarding, and to consider, a proposed Official Plan Amendment to be passed pursuant to Section 17 of the Planning Act.

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**  
The proposed Amendment will establish SITE PLAN CONTROL AREAS AND RELATED POLICIES in accordance with Section 40 of the Planning Act.

The proposed Amendment provides that Site Plan Control Areas will be identified by zoning categories in the Restricted Area (Zoning) By-law and will include all Commercial, Industrial, Institutional, Residential Multiple Density, Transitional and Rural zones subject to the following exceptions:

- In a Rural zone, single family detached dwellings and accessory buildings, and all agricultural and farm related buildings or structures that are utilized in farming operations and by their nature do not directly serve the public and/or do not charge the public user fees, will be exempt from the site plan control provisions.
- In all zones, enlargements and/or cumulative enlargements totalling less than 20 percent of the floor area of the existing building, and new buildings or structures totalling less than 60 square metres (approximately 646 square feet), may be exempt from site plan control provisions subject to the approval of Council.

In addition, the proposed Amendment provides that road widening may be obtained without compensation as a condition of site plan approval. Maximum road widening requirements will be detailed in the proposed Amendment.

**REPRESENTATION**  
ANY PERSON may attend the public meeting and make written or oral representation either in support of or in opposition to the proposed Official Plan Amendment. If you are unable to attend, written submissions will be received up to the time of the meeting. Written submissions should include a request for further notification, if so desired.

**INFORMATION**  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION relating to the proposed Amendment is available for inspection at this office during regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). If you have any questions, please contact the Planning Department at this office.

DATED at the TOWN OF WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE this 17TH day of JULY, 1985.

Patricia G. Muir, Clerk,  
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville,  
19 Civic Avenue, Box 419,  
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