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Clayton Daxon was 'gift' to everyone who met him

BY LISA QUEEN
lqueen@ymg.com

Alice Daxon was a teaching assistant working with children with disabilities in a Newmarket school when she met nine-year-old Clayton in the early 1980s.

Afflicted with Costello syndrome, a rare and severe genetic disorder that left him with multiple disabilities, Clayton was about the size of a one-year-old baby.

He had been raised in an institution, but in 1980, the province passed legislation governing special education, including requiring school boards to provide programs for children with exceptional needs.

Bused in from the institution, Clayton was placed in Daxon's classroom.

"We took one look at each other and it was love at first sight," she said.

Clayton couldn't walk or talk, but he crawled along the floor, sat on Daxon's foot and wrapped his arms around her leg.

Daxon began bringing him home for weekends under a community living program.

Her family, including husband Ken and their children, Tracey, Krista and Corey, embraced Clayton into their lives.

But on Sunday nights, Clayton would sob and clasp Alice's hand when she and Ken drove him back to the institution.

"It broke our hearts to take him back in after having such a full weekend. And we had to put him right into his crib again. That's where he was for nine

years, in a crib," she said.

"My husband said, 'We've got to bring him home. We can't leave him in there. What do we have to do?'"

The Daxons committed to having Clayton live with them for two years in their Newmarket home.

He was still living with Daxon family when he died Jan. 29 at the age of 42 in Sharon, where Alice had moved after Ken died in 1999.

About three days after Clayton came to live with the family, Alice feared the arrangement wouldn't last. Corey and a friend, who were about 12, took Clayton for a ride in a wagon, but they flipped it over on a curve and sent Clayton flying.

Their case worker arrived a few days later to make sure Clayton was settling in, leaving a mortified Alice had to explain his injuries.

Fortunately, the case worker took it all in stride, saying if not for the Daxon family, Clayton would never have had the chance to play and get hurt like any other child.

The years ahead would be filled with struggles as Clayton dealt with his illness, but also love and adventures, including family vacations and a trip to Disney World.

Clayton wasn't formally diagnosed with Costello syndrome until his 20s, and was one of only four people in the world known at that time to have the disorder.

Clayton, who could only speak about a dozen words, used an assisted device computer to communicate.

Living with the Daxons, he learned to eat solid

food and walk, although that would only last about a year before his hips gave out. He then used a walker in the house and a wheelchair when he was outside.

He had surgeries on his hips, heel cords and hamstrings and suffered from severe scoliosis of the spine.

"He tried so desperately. He fought his whole life to try to do everything that he couldn't do," Alice said.

As a teenager, Clayton threw himself into activities at Sacred Heart Catholic School, joining the school band and playing the bongo drums and xylophone in school concerts.

He loved cooking and baking in home economic class. In his family, Clayton became known as the cupcake maker because he loved to help bake the treats for birthday parties he helped organize.

A fan of slapstick comedy, he was known for his infectious laugh, his love of WWE wrestling and his woodworking skills. With assistance, he made gifts such as birdhouses and crafts.

"I always used to say about him, he was an ambassador for the disabled. If he had any one job in life, that was it and he did it so well," Alice said.

In Grade 9, Clayton met his best friend, Marty Nichol, who was by Clayton's side all through high school.

"He was like Clay's brother and he became like my son," she said.

Even when Nichol moved away, he sent home-made videos pretending he was taking Clayton on adventures.

Clayton was a gift, someone who made everybody happy despite his struggles, Alice said, adding



Clayton Daxon with his mom, Alice.

more than 150 people came to his memorial service.

"Everyone said how lucky he was, what a beautiful life he had," Alice said.

"We all got so much back from Clayton. He taught more than he was ever taught. I think he was a gift. He had a purpose and he served his purpose well on Earth."