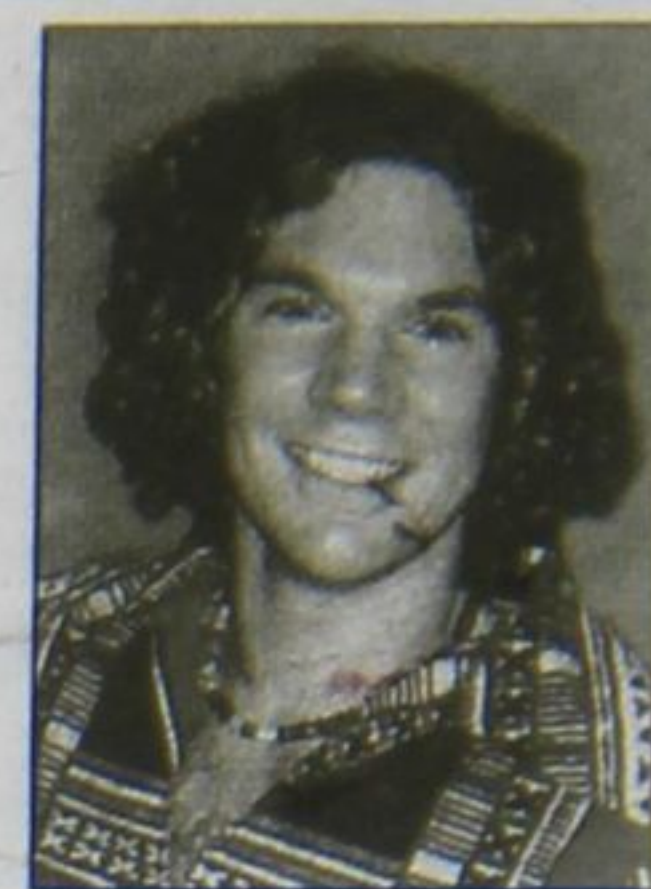


# Lake Soup... by Luke Anderson



Elated like a prisoner finding a hole in the fence, giddy like having eaten too much candy, and proud like a dog having sold a cat a bone, I exited the lodge for the first time in almost three weeks.

Oh and I wheeled! I wheeled like Forrest Gump ran after he lost his leg braces. I raced down the driveway and practically caught air while going over the speed bump! Past lush green lawns and tulip filled gardens.

I met up with a little guy and his buddies on their bikes. "Race ya!?" I yelled as they stared with curiosity at first then quickly accepting my challenge sped alongside my chair with legs pumping and faces filled with determination. I listened to the high-speed whine of the chair and laughed as I flew past those little weasels who had stopped because they had reached their boundaries.

I arrived at my destination at the end of the street with adrenaline pumping, stomach butterflying and face smirking. I performed an about-face and watched my lodge mate John putt along in his tired earlier model chariot, which given the opportunity wouldn't stand a chance against those little neighborhood speedsters.

When he met me at the end of the street we mutually agreed that there was no other option but to keep going. Patiently negotiating our wheelchairs over each curb, like a lion sneaking up to its prey, we travelled block after block further into the heart of the city.

Stopping momentarily at each corner to check street names we soon reached the intersection where all the action was happening. I soon realized why there were so many people out and about. Not only was I excited about the SARS restrictions being lifted but most of the shop and restaurant owners had advertised sales in their windows and specials on their menus in order to get the money train back on track. I really wasn't all that interested in any of the deals, I was just loving the feeling of being outside with the sun on my face and the warm breeze messing up my hair.

Up the busy street we wheeled until we were confronted by a guy urging us to go and check out the sales in the bookstore where he worked. We accepted his invitation and located the door to the building equipped with a wheelchair access button.

As I patiently waited for the door to automatically open I began to think of times when I had used such a button to enter buildings when I really didn't need to. I used to think that the whole idea behind pushing a button and having the door open for you as a result was a very interesting and fun concept. My impression of the concept hasn't really changed, I still find the idea interesting and fun, however I am way more thankful these days for such assistive devices and have a much greater understanding as to why they exist.

Once in the building I was impressed to learn that all of the aisles were not only wide enough for me to pass through but they were wide enough for me to turn around! After cruising around the first floor John and I scouted out a little elevator near the rear of the building, very convenient for guys like us.

I manoeuvred the chair, smacked the up arrow and we soon boarded the elevator. Once inside I again had to carefully manoeuvre my chair in order to get a good position to land a smack on button No. 2. After a dozen attempts I came to terms with the fact that button No. 2 was simply too high for me to reach, luckily for me button No. "open the door" was low enough to smack.

John and I disembarked, reorganized and John successfully pressed the correct button in order to get upstairs. While upstairs we decided to wet the whistle at the cafe. John with a little bit more hand control than myself grabbed a couple pops for us and paid the cashier.

Smiling, the cashier opened the beverages for us, walked around the counter and placed the drinks on an empty table. Embarrassed, I explained that I would need some assistance with sipping. Without a word, and

immediately understanding my want for independence, he dashed off and disappeared behind the counter only to return seconds later with a handful of drinking straws.

He quickly got to work constructing a long straw from three short ones, placed the long straw in the can and positioned it so that I could easily reach it with my mouth: problem solved, high fives to that guy. Satisfied with our experience and well hydrated we were ready to make the trip back to the lodge.

I have learned a couple of important things recently that have helped me get through my days. I have come to understand that patience is a key ingredient in creating positive energy. And secondly, energy is very easily transmitted between people.

Let me try to explain the latter. I woke up one morning a week ago with the sun shining through the window. Despite the perfect morning I didn't feel like I was in a good mood. Moments later I was greeted by my nurse who was sporting a huge smile appropriate for the type of weather outside.

Through the early morning procedures that day, little conversation transpired between the two of us and I saw my nurse's enthusiasm dwindling. Noticing this I deliberately tried to create more conversation in an attempt to kick my crappy mood. Within minutes my nurse's smile came back and I found myself immersed in a humorous conversation.

I'm not trying to say that everybody must try to shed positive energy all of the time; that isn't humanly possible. Many of life's dealings prove to be much too difficult to find any positive.

But what is humanly possible is to step outside the box in order to get a better look. From this angle you may be surprised to see things quite differently.

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