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ABILITY



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Holiday Hoopla

HUMOR THERAPY



The holidays are once again upon us. Many people believe it's that special time of the year when we take a step back, stop thinking about ourselves, reach out, give to the needy, and become a little closer to the ones we love. Oh, please. Let's face it, the holidays really mean… time to par-tay! And, isn't that the real reason for the season? In the words of the highly astute intellectual Charlie Sheen, "without a party, life has no purpose."

Women are the backbone of a party. They put up decorations, buy cute snowman paper plates, and light the scented pine candles. Men are just good at buying the liquor at the store. The poor ladies are stuck slaving in the kitchen for days, making holiday dishes: appetizers, dips, cookies, cakes and pies; and then, their fat husbands come in and eat everything in five minutes. Frantic women run back-and-forth to the store, because they forgot to buy the brown sugar or butter, while the lazy men watch football. But, it doesn't bother the wives, they have learned over the years that if they ask their husbands to help them out, he'll screw things up worse and add to the workload. "I said I needed a pound of flour. Not this. This is a jar of olives."

During the holiday season, there are three significant parties that are usually attended: the office party, the Christmas party, and the New Year's Eve party. After all, it is the only time of the year where it's legal to wear a bright green and red wooly reindeer sweater.

The Office Party: This is the time of year when you really get to know the person you've been working with every day for the past year. It is the one workday you can throw professionalism out the window, and let folks see the real you. It is the moment when the nerdy shy computer guy comes to life. Dr. Techyl becomes Mr. Hyde-tech. At some point, he'll be on the dance floor busting a move to a Christina Aguilera song, while employees sit back and snicker, "Damn, I didn't know Habib had it in him."

Conversations usually start out with "shop talk" (the company sales, projections, new ideas for next year) then after a few holiday cocktails the loosened-up employees start talking about their colleagues, "I don't know what the hell he does. He always acts so busy, but he doesn't do anything." After a few more drinks, someone has a meltdown. Janice tells a co-worker that her husband has been cheating on her, and then she's in the corner, crying by the copy machine decorated with a sparkly garland, being consoled by the old lady who's had the same job since the company was started in the 60's. Then you have Bob, the bs-ing salesman telling jokes to the hot new

intern as he makes sure her punch cup is always full. Bob is the guy that always has a big deal in the works, but no one can ever get a hold of him. For Christmas gifts, he usually gives out promotional items like magnets with logos of companies he does business with.

It's a given that someone is going to get sloppy drunk and make a complete buffoon of themselves. It's usually the quiet one who never ever drinks. These are the people who are more often stellar employees, but for some reason, the office party brings out the beast in them. With each drink, their comments get ruder and crazier. They morph into a hyper drunk as they zip about the room, groping and hitting on anything that moves. They stagger about, joining in on everyone's conversation, eventually knocking something over or falling down. Everyone's like "and this is the guy in charge of our 401k plan." Eventually, he's totally sloshed and yelling out things like, "I hate my job! What are you looking at?!" And the infamous, "This Company can kiss my ass. I don't need them! I don't need anyone! What are you looking at? You're pretty." At some point, he'll have to return back to work and do the walk of shame through the cubicles, which will be a long treacherous one indeed.

Yes, it is a given at the office party that some co-workers will "hook up." Sometimes it's the ones that are always chatting by the water cooler, but many times, it's the unlikely pair… like Habib and the mean accountant lady. He's the short one and she's the tall one with a moustache and a dark side—but, for one night, they click. And this is the magic of a holiday office party, it brings people together and you get to see another side of your colleagues that you never knew they had.

The Christmas Party: This is when family unites for that special time of the year. You get to see how the ones you grew up with have changed… and it's never pretty. The cast is usually individuals like: the drug addicted brother, the bible thumper, the gay one, the conservative, the liberal, the world hater, a depressed sister, the AA member, or the dude who has all the investment tips, but is actually broke.

This party is typically on Christmas Eve or Christmas night. Relatives and close neighbors are invited. Everyone will bring cookies to sop up the booze in everyone's tummy. The daughter helps the mother in the kitchen all day, which means a thirty round fight. The men hide, watch football, and drink… as usual.

At some point in the festivities, a family member gets too drunk, claiming that they were neglected as a child and that nobody ever liked them. They are usually right. Everyone imbibes, because isn't that the true meaning of Christmas? Old memories and stories fill the room. The same ones that were told the year before, except there's more lies and exaggerations piled on. When all's said and done, you realize one of two things; how much you miss your family or why you moved way in the first place.

The New Year's Eve Party: This is known as rookie night out. All the people who typically stay indoors all year, watching lame reality shows, finally keep the resolution(s) they made last New Year's Eve to go out at least one night in the next year. It comes down to the wire, but they make it out. And speaking of making out, the goal of any New Year's Eve is, and always will be, to have someone to kiss when that ball drops. It's a big night for the chubby, loud mouth, girl and the introverted, shut-in, nerd as they try to position themselves, at 11:58, next to an unsuspecting dupe for a midnight smooch. That kiss is extremely important. It can save what was a dismal 365 days and end it on a high note giving a smidgen of hope for the next year. However, if there's no kiss to be found, it's an exclamation point that says, "Sorry Charlie, game-over. Suck it up and prepare yourself for another let down year." You know the girl hasn't had enough to drink when she gives you a measly New Year's Eve hug. It's even worse when she follows it up with, "I'm so glad we became friends this year." The worst is when everyone around you is kissing and you're twirling noisemaker acting like it's the best time you've ever had.

I'll never forget my first New Year's Eve kiss. I was in New York City and it was snowing in Central Park. I was standing on the sidewalk and this horse drawn carriage pulled up right in front of me with a girl, dressed in a long gown, sitting inside. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. Then the church bells rang to bring in the New Year. I was so excited. I ran up and planted the biggest kiss on her. The people all around were so astonished. I guess they've never seen a man kiss a horse before, but I'll never forget it.

New Year's Eve seems to be the one holiday where it's acceptable to become a sloppy drunken stodge. As a matter-of-fact, it's expected. Tired old people somehow find the strength to stay up later and drink more. I guess they figure they have a whole year to recuperate before they go out to party again. Champagne is usually the drink of choice. It's also a guaranteed headache for the next day. It is scientifically proven that the bubbles float up and lodge in your brain. Your head throbs as a result of the bubbles popping the next day. New Year's Day is also known as national hangover day. It's where the body can only handle three things: sleep, watch a parade, or stare at a football game.

After another year of life, let's face it; we all deserve a few parties. It's a chance to unwind and escape from the hardships we endure throughout the year. We get to take our troubles, our trials, our disappointments, and pour them into a big punch bowl of rum and eggnog, guzzle it down then drunkenly slur, "You didn't beat me, life. I made it another year." So cheers, here's to the merry-making celebrations, shindigs, and bashes this festive season. End it all with a blast. ■ ABILITY



by Jeff Charlebois



It's been a crazy life for me recently! My best friend and I went to Europe for a three-week vacation. We booked the tickets so long ago that I thought the day would never arrive, but then we were leaving New York and buckling up for the flight to Italy. Ashley—my friend's name, as well—and I were both so excited to begin our journey!



We had a game plan all set: We were going to explore eight different countries as cheaply as we could. Aside from Italy, our list included Switzerland, France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Prague and Austria.

After we landed in Milan, we headed out in a rental car. All in all we drove from country to country for about 60 hours, going everywhere we could to see new things, from Big Ben, to the Eiffel Tower, to Einstein's house, Etretat Cliff, the Atomic Bomb Museum, along with assorted cathedrals. London is the only city where I had to drive on the opposite side of the road, but I've been to Europe before for racing events, so I was used to it!

We also took a long train ride into England—wait that's nine countries!—to see Big Ben and the Changing the Guard. The food was delicious. My faves were meatballs in cherry sauce, meat and duck spread on bread, and Nutella crepes.

In France, we stayed with Cherub, an old friend who owns a stone house in Saint-Pierre-D'Autils, about an hour northwest of Paris. From his window, we had a view of a charming nearby castle. Our family met Cherub some years ago when my dad and I first started racing. It was generous of him to welcome us and show us the sights. Of course we went to the Eiffel Tower and ate as many chocolate croissants as we could.

In Belgium, we stayed at Gino's; he was my mechanic when I used to race in Europe for team L S Motosports. Our families became good friends, and they've traveled to the US to visit us, too. I grew up with their two daughters, so it was great to see them again and hang

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out. Of course we got some of their famous Belgian fries, but skipped the mayo, which they like with theirs.

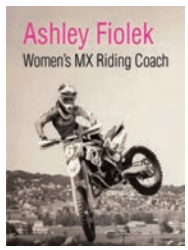
I would have to say that Austria is one of the most beautiful countries that I've ever been to, and Hallstatt is an absolutely stunning town. They have gorgeous mountains and cute villages. It's just breathtaking. If you are ever thinking about going to Europe to explore, you definitely need to check out Hallstatt as well as Salzburg, Austria! That was my favorite memory of the trip.



We were lucky to find that the Eurochocolate Festival was going on in Perugia, Italy. That event was my second favorite thing we did while in Europe! I was having a (chocolate!) melt down, because I didn't know where to start first! There were like a million different kinds of chocolate, presented in unique and fun ways. The small shot of liquid chocolate topped my list. I was in cocoa heaven!

Communication in Europe is always so funny to me. It seems like hearing people struggle so much more than deaf people (Sorry, Ashley!). It was so difficult for her to try to get her point across. I simply use gestures and most everyone understands me, but Ashley would keep saying the same word in English over and over. I guess her brain doesn't work like a deaf person's brain. Ha ha!

We left Europe October 19th, and I made in home in time to celebrate my 25th birthday with friends at Knott's Scary Farms. I can't wait to head back to Europe again next year. I think I'll start doing motocross classes over there. ■ ABILITY



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Earlier this week I awoke with a massive headache at 4 a.m., but instead of trying to go back to sleep I stayed up and asked Spirit to guide me through the pain.

The throbbing at my temples was intense, but I'm wise enough to know that sometimes if we remove blockage in our spiritual realm, physical hurt will ease as well.

What I discovered that morning is something I've always known, but sometimes forget: There are *no* missed opportunities in life, it's just that not all opportunities are meant for us, like roles I haven't gotten over the years. That just meant they were someone else's blessing, not mine... So instead of feeling bad about something that didn't come my way, healing the sting is about feeling joy for the person who did get the opportunity.

Have you ever run to catch a train, only to watch the doors close and the train pull away? You stand there feeling frustrated and cheated? Trust that the Universe had a very good reason for you not being on that train! A friend's father sometimes reminds her: "People rushed to get on the Titanic."

As I lay there with my head hurting, I trusted that it could feel better. What came up for me was that I had not called my friend Ralph Richeson earlier. Granted, I had only heard, via a private Facebook message, that Ralph was in hospice care the night before. Still, I had every intention of calling him when I awoke. However, by the time I went online to get the phone number that was in the Facebook message, it had been updated and read: "Geri, I regret having to tell you, but Ralph passed early this morning."

I cannot tell you how horrible I felt that I hadn't called. However, during meditation a message came through that even if I had made the call earlier, I still wouldn't have been able to reach him. So I spoke with him that morning through a much better connection than Verizon could ever offer. I expressed to him that I was grateful for knowing him, and was thrilled that we actually had a scene together in the final season of HBO's *Deadwood*.

For those of you who are not familiar with Ralph, he is one of those rare background players who caught the creative eye of David Milch and became the eccentric, lovable character of Richardson, who resided at the Grand Central Hotel and had the oddest fixation with a deer's antler. If we had gone into the 4th season of *Deadwood*, we probably would have had more scenes together. However, that wasn't meant to be. As I opened my eyes from my meditation, my headache had already begun to dissipate, making room for his beautiful presence. In my mind I saw his smile.

Although I didn't know him really well, we both shared the journey of appealing to David Milch's creative vision, and our characters were very similar in nature. *Deadwood* put both of us on the map, allowing a dream to come true for both of us in a different way. I guess in some ways we were both inspirations for the underdog. I only had one scene with him in the last season of *Deadwood*, and as with all of us, we were looking forward to a *Deadwood* movie, eventually.

The movie is back on the table, and may still be a reality, but there will be some actors who will not return because either their characters were killed off, or the actor didn't live long enough to be killed off. In any case, there are no accidents in life, and we all must be grateful for every day that we live, because another day is never promised…

Ralph, I raise antlers in honor of your eternal journey.

■ ABILITY

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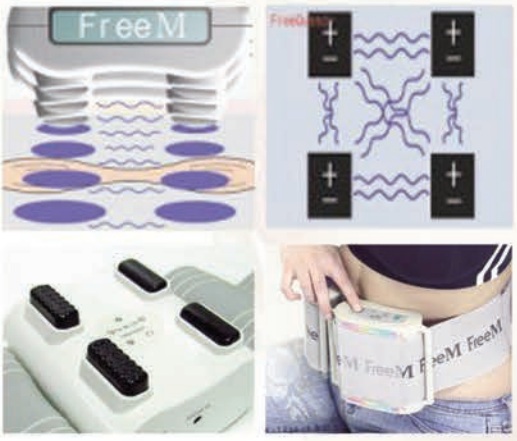
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HIGHWAY TO HEALTH PART III

Coast to Coast AND A Chat with Chet

My road trip began with unexpected coronary surgery and a two-wheeled dash from New Hampshire to the Arctic Circle in Alaska. The second part of this trip-of-a-lifetime was heading south through hellish heat in Vegas and Los Angeles. After 10,000 miles in less than two weeks, I would finally get to rest a few days in sunny California. Relax, wash my clothes and do some much-neglected maintenance on my motorcycle. Part three, and the final leg of my June journey to raise awareness for multiple sclerosis (MS), included stops along the California coast and Oregon before boomeranging back across the country to New Hampshire, where I had a life and a wife anxiously waiting for my return.

A friend, who had just relocated from Rhode Island to Huntington Beach, offered up his home and garage space for the weekend. Kevin Nixon, who was the former marketing manager for *Twisted Throttle*, one of my very first sponsors, was now the marketing manager for AIMExpo, one of the largest international motorcycle shows in the world.

I had picked up some spark plugs, oil and a filter at a Yamaha dealer earlier in the day and was anxious to get to work, figuring out why my bike was barely running, burping and sputtering, and unable to idle. I have to admit, I beat the crap out of my motorcycles and gear; after all, I ride more miles in a month than the average rider does in years. I don't pay attention to regular maintenance schedules or wait for stuff to break or fall off before attending to it. My bike had been having rough running issues for about 20,000 miles, and I just kept applying Band-Aids. Sometimes a back flush of the fuel pump helped, while other times fresh spark plugs would get me a few more thousand miles down the road. This time it was pretty serious. It was barely running, and when I reached Kevin's driveway, it conked out all by itself. "Done," it gasped out loud. I could not fault the machine for I had truly beaten it to death and yet it still managed to get me to my destination. Kevin was still at work but had left me a key.

I pushed the tired bike into the garage without much worry. I decided to let it cool off a bit and retrieved a cold adult beverage from the house. I searched boxes marked *kitchen stuff* that I saw in the corner of the garage for a bottle opener. It was pretty obvious a single guy had recently moved in because the boxes were still sealed with packing tape. I ended up peeling off the bottle's cap with a screwdriver and took a long swig. The two weeks of grueling miles were over. I had made it all the way to the west coast.

I got back to the task at hand and removed the fuel tank to access the heart and lungs of my 1200cc riding companion. I extracted the fuel pump from the inside of the



Paul got to meet the top dogs at Yamaha's US headquarters

fuel tank and flushed out the dirt and gunk from the little fuel filter sock inside. After reassembling it, I set about removing the ignition coils and spark plugs. Nasty roads and 10,000 miles at high speeds clearly had an effect on the motor's state of tune. I replaced the oil filter and drained the thick, black oil that stunk of adventure into a container I'd found in the garage, hoping it was not my host's favorite salad bowl. The four spark plugs were dirty, rusty and showed signs of fouling so I replaced them all, despite only being three weeks old.

By the time my friend arrived home, I had the bike back together and running like new again. I never had any doubt—I picked this Yamaha bike for a reason. Even with 88,000 strenuous miles on the clock, it was a faithful companion.

We rode a few blocks to the Pacific Ocean for dinner, enjoying the sights and sounds of the famous Surf City beach, a beer and a bunch of fish tacos. On Saturday I slept late, did laundry, worked on updating my social media sites, talked about motorcycles and my journey, and headed off to a local dirt track to watch some exciting motorcycle racing. On Sunday we met up with a few of Kevin's friends and took a casual ride up the coast to check out some motorcycle hangouts. We don't have many motorcycle cafes on the east coast, so it was a real pleasure!

Monday came quickly, and I had two important meetings on my agenda. Networking had finally paid off and some of the big wigs at Yamaha Motors had heard about my quest and expressed interest in meeting me. Yamaha headquarters was only a few miles away, and I had left a message on Friday afternoon that I was only in town until Monday morning and if possible I would like to get a few minutes of their time. This was not an opportunity I wanted to miss or mess up. I had been trying to get noticed by Yamaha for two years, and this would be the first real connection that could lead to a factory sponsorship.

The other connection I wanted to make while in Southern California was to finally meet the man who gave me a voice, *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper. We had communicated back and forth for years, and I always said that when I get to California, we would have to meet up. When I did not hear back from Yamaha, I called Chet to see if he had any time available to meet up that morning.

I was giving Chet directions to my buddies' place when Bob Starr, the GM of Yamaha Communications called on my other line, and I toggled between them. Chet was already heading over to where I was, and Yamaha said they wanted to meet with me in about an hour!

Of course, Chet wanted to show me his prized chopper, and we ended up riding together to the Yamaha corporate offices in Cypress, CA. Together, we met with a



Alaska is its own world

few of the top people from Yamaha, and they all wanted to see my motorcycle. I hadn't washed it, so it reeked of dead bugs and was covered in dried Alaskan crud and calcium from the famous Dalton Highway. Not washing my bike before presenting it to potentially my biggest sponsor ever was a gamble I knew paid off as soon as I saw camera phones being unilaterally whipped out of three sport coat pockets.

"You just came from where?" asked one of the smartly dressed men.

"Arctic Circle."

"How many miles on this bike in two years?" He continued to ask questions.

"88,000."

"What have you had to do to the motor? Any major work?" asked the group's leader.

"Why don't you ask me if I have ever checked the valves?"

"Holy &*^%!" As they clicked more photos.

"Yep, when I couldn't find a manufacturer to sponsor my journey, I chose a bike that wouldn't need factory sponsorship. This bike has been the perfect tool for me."

"So, Paul, what can we do to help you?"

It was a short sentence, but one I had never thought I would hear. I was unprepared and had no answer ready. I stuttered and muttered, falling back on what I was doing, my fundraising, my website popularity, but never really answered their question. *What did I want from Yamaha?*

Chet was quick to chime in, explaining all the press I was getting and my columns in *ABILITY*, and how a sponsorship from Yamaha would make a great feature story in the magazine and how much publicity it would bring Yamaha. I should have said he was my agent instead of my publisher! Thankfully, I was able to put together a more legible proposal later on and have since had many conversations with Yamaha. They are now supporting me in a variety of ways, including helping me get a second bike and publicity. Chet and I rode back to Huntington Beach, and I begged him to stay for dinner. I had gone shopping earlier and filled my friend's fridge with goodies. Chet, Kevin and I then had a great evening exchanging stories over an array of grilled meats and vegetables. Good times!

I gave a presentation the next day to a group of people living with MS in San Luis Obispo and then San Francisco on Wednesday. I rode along the Pacific Coast Highway, visited elephant seals and another great sponsor of mine, Bill Mayer Saddles in Ventura. The last stop on my three-week speaking tour was in Eugene, Oregon, where my sister-in-law, Stacy, and my mother-in-law, Beverly, who live there were able to attend and hear me share my story.

After being on an amazing three-week adventure encouraging others to continue chasing their dreams, the bike was pointed east for the finale of my June trip. The Wheels Out West for MS tour added 15,000 unforgettable miles to the Yamaha's clock, but at this point, I couldn't wait to get home, wrap my arms around my wonderful wife and my hands on the toenail clippers!

I think everyone should take a trip of a lifetime at least once a year! ■ ABILITY

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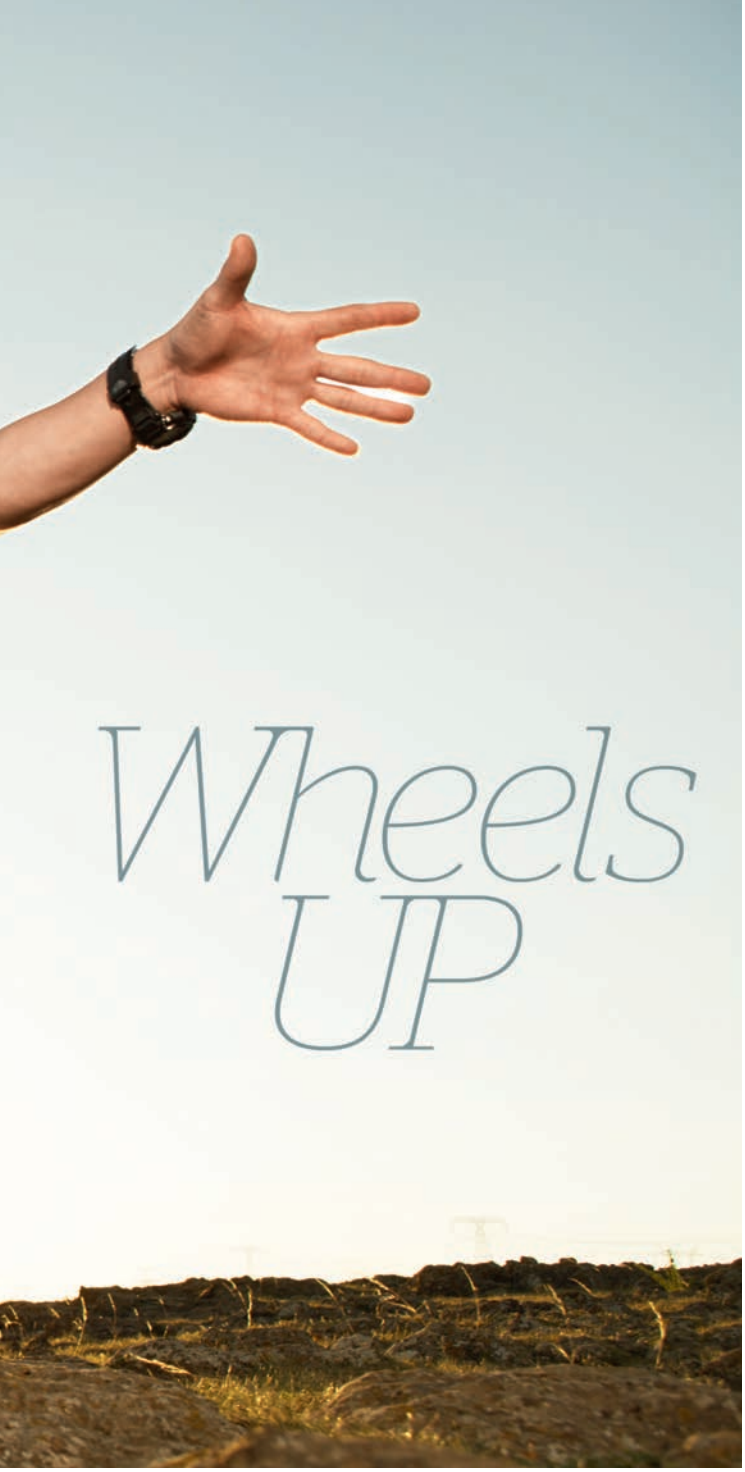
River is a 39-year-old senior paragliding pilot who is passionate about extreme sports. Originally from Datong Shanxi in China, he became a paraplegic in 2013 after suffering a traumatic spinal injury during an international paragliding competition. But within two years, River, whose birth name is Zhang Baoyu, was up in the air again, only this time with wheels. Today, he is known as China's first wheelchair paragliding pilot.

RIVER'S COMEBACK FLIGHT

River drove about 200 miles over country roads from Datong to Beijing in his red Ford Raptor pick up. After he parked, spectators gathered and observed the truck's back door open first and a folding wheelchair "pop" open to the ground. The truck was then backed up close to the wheelchair. The truck was turned off and the driver's door swung open. River bent over his wheelchair, reaching to make the armrest and foot paddle the same height. He stretched out one arm to hold onto an armrest and the other arm to tightly grip the handle of the truck's roof. He turned to position himself in the wheelchair and, at last, put on his artificial legs. It was July 18, 2015, and he was ready to fly again. "I will not stop flying as long as I have wings," he said.

A SUDDEN FALL FROM THE SKY

It happened on August 9, 2013, during a test match on



Wheels UP

the Yili Nalati prairie. It was the last day of a paragliding competition, and the weather changed suddenly, making flying conditions unsafe. But River, ever determined, decided to fly anyway. "I was so stubborn that I wanted to finish flying," he recalled. He thought to himself, "I wanted to fly to the plain, but I was too close to the mountain." His other two teammates had dispatched a rescue parachute to land safely, but River didn't have enough height and his sail failed to open in time. He crashed into the mountain and lay unconscious for a long period of time. When he awoke, his entire lower body was numb. After a two-hour wait, an emergency crew finally arrived and flew him to Urumqi Hospital. The diagnosis—a burst fracture of the thoracic spine, sections 1 and 12, with a dislocated nerve—meant River was now a paraplegic below the waist. This was particularly devastating to his family, for he and his wife were newlyweds and expecting their first child in three months.

Although time has sped by since his accident, River missed his flying sport; he missed his double wings; he missed gliding at low altitude and drawing a perfect arc in the sky.

River first discovered paragliding in 2006 and fell madly in love with the adventure sport. He came to love every minute of flying. Sometimes he hovered above, sometimes he tumbled, and other times he dove. "Just with a few pieces of cloth and a few cables, you can fly like a bird" he exclaimed. "It's a fantastic feeling!" Flying brought so much joy to River that any concerns for safety outweighed the risks. Although his life was irrevocably changed, River remained light-hearted and joked about his condition, often calling himself an injured raptor.

RIVER'S DETERMINATION

River lay in the hospital for nearly 40 days. Once discharged, he was deep in debt. To pay for his surgery, he sold his car and all his sporting equipment. Despite his physical pain, he felt an even greater pressure to face the reality of taking care of his family and himself. He simply had to learn how to manage. With his strong sense of determination, he quickly learned how to take care of himself and to use a wheelchair to do whatever he needed to do—be it using the toilet or learning to drive again.

To make a living, he started an on-line business selling antiques. He also opened a photography shop and worked long days. His best part of the day, however, was always watching his young daughter play on his lap.

One day his wheelchair broke, so he went to a repair shop and while waiting happened to meet an elderly man, and the two struck up a conversation. When he found out the man had been in his wheelchair for 45 years, he became distraught. This was the first time he had tears, even for himself, as he glimpsed his own future in 45 years. He realized then that he wanted to be defined by more than just his wheelchair, but how?

In July 2014, the first 500 km cross-country paragliding activities of Inner Mongolia were held in accordance with the sport's requirements. The goal for all participants was to either paraglide or run to complete a 500-kilometer race. Many choose to fly, but River used his wheelchair to "run."

A French coach noticed River's passion and asked him, "River, do you want to fly? I can take you flying!" River was initially unwilling to fly, since his injury had occurred less than a year earlier, but his friends





encouraged him to accept the invitation. Everyone helped carry him over to the hang gliding instructor. The coach sat in the driver's seat. At the moment of take off, River felt the familiar freedom of flying: "At first, I felt excited!" he said. But the wind was very strong and the airflow unstable. The experience left him feeling uncomfortable and brought out his injured psychological self. After flying for a while, he asked the coach to land. He later told his friends: "I felt like a passenger, but next time I want to fly by myself!"

RIVER'S DREAM

Last June, River began to write his autobiography and twittered to his friends: "I want to return to the sky." He called himself, Footless Raptor, and said: "If I'm on the ground, I can't stop to look up at the sky, but I will be there one day! "

Not long thereafter, his old friend Leiming Zhao phoned and asked: "Do you want to fly?" Without hesitation, River responded, "Of course, I want to fly!" Once his friends learned of his wish, it became their dream as well. Despite the many risks of paragliding, their passion to fly had made them fearless.

So they ordered River a 'flying wheelchair' from Finland and carefully selected a special flying airfield. They all wanted to help River back to the sky. River felt strongly about pushing the boundaries of his disability. He and his friends also wanted to inspire and give hope to people with people with disabilities.

On July 18, 2015, River was at the National Paragliding base at YongAn Mountain in Hangzhou. The sky was blue and the sun shone brightly over the mountains after days of a torrential typhoon.

At 9:00 am, the host announced: "River can take off." On the lawn, crowds of people eagerly watched River's ascent. He smiled confidently in his fluorescent green flight suit as his flying team assisted him by opening his umbrella-flying seat. With his huge white paragliding sail rolled out over the green lawn, River positioned himself in his flight wheelchair.

"Coach Zhao, River is ready for takeoff." River gently took a deep breath and said, "Go!" Assisted by his running coach, he thrust his white paragliding sail up over his head like a pair of huge wings. People cheered and cried as River flew upward into the sky.

At that moment, River felt completely weightless, his soul touched by the wind, mountains, cliffs, canyons, rivers and sky. While listening to the gentle sound of the wind blowing, he realized his dream had come true. ■ ABILITY

by Huan Liu

This story is part of a series of articles published as an exclusive editorial exchange between *China Press for People with Disabilities & Spring Breeze* and *ABILITY Magazine*.

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NORMAN LEAR

PART 1

Even This...

After a delightful visit that kept everyone wanting more, *ABILITY*'s Geri Jewell and David Zimmerman were invited back for day two of an informal interview with television producer and writer Norman Lear. Only this time, they met up at Lear's LA office—Act 111 Communications—where they joined the crew of PBS's *American Masters*, who were filming a documentary of Lear's exceptional life.

David Zimmerman: I want to thank you for this amazing woman (looking towards Geri), *who is an incredible actress—funny and beautiful, too. If it weren't for you, who discovered her at the Media Access Awards, I wouldn't have had all the joy I've had, so thank you for that.*



Norman and Geri might have a secret?

Norman Lear: You're welcome. It's among my blessings also.

Zimmerman: So you two met at the Media Access Awards.

Geri Jewell: Yeah, we did. Fern Field asked me to perform that night. Somebody told Fern that I was doing standup comedy. I started doing standup comedy in 1978. Fern started the Media Access Awards, and she produced a film called A Different Approach [about the positive benefits of hiring people with disabilities]. I know you were involved with it—

Lear: Oh God, I was very involved in it.

Jewell: And that was way before its time. I still remember it to this day how profound it was. And wasn't Michael Keaton and Charlotte Rae in it? Anyway, I was doing standup comedy, and somebody went to Fern and said, "You've got to see this girl. She's a kid with cerebral palsy, but she's funny." And Fern was like, "Oh no, I'm not ready for that. Oh no, I can't deal with that." And whoever that was, made her come and see me at The Comedy Store, and she was blown away. And she asked me to perform at the Second Annual Media Access Awards, and that's where I met you—and Charlotte Rae. That changed my life.

Zimmerman: I have to tell you, I Love Liberty *is one of my favorite specials ever. I still have the copy of the VHS tape from that night. With Robin Williams, Barbra Streisand, and one of my favorite moments was this woman named Geri.*

Lear: Geri Jewell.

Zimmerman: Tell me about that experience.

Lear: Well, it was an hour-and-a-half special on ABC. The part I think of first and foremost—telling this story at a time when politics was so ugly. When hate is rife in the land and in the Congress. The network wanted to be sure it was non-partisan. I said, "Well, how can I prove to you it is non-partisan? It's the way we all feel about America." But the way it worked out, I said, "If I can get a major Republican and a major Democrat to co-chair…" "Who?" "Well, like Gerald Ford and Lady Bird Johnson." President Johnson had passed. And I got them. And it wasn't hard. I had Barry Goldwater and Jane Fonda on the same stage. Jane Fonda was known at the time for "Hanoi Jane".

Jewell: And John Wayne.

Lear: And Barry Goldwater had run for the presidency on the Republican ticket, so he was an ultra-conservative. And yes, John Wayne. It was just a delight. A little while ago, you heard me order some flowers. They're for

Nancy Reagan, who turned 94 today. We're good friends. She invited me to come to her husband's funeral. It says something about the American possibility. We disagree politically, but we can be close and work things out. We have no ability to do that right now. The Democrats can't work things out amongst themselves. The Republicans can't work things out amongst themselves.

Zimmerman: Republicans and Democrats don't know that we're all one here.

Lear: Well, we're not all one here. And we were not all one then. But as humans we all were one. So the Reagan's and I were very friendly. On I Love Liberty we heard all sides of why we love America from our different political viewpoints.

Jewell: You know, my saving grace was that it was supposed to be live remember?

Lear: Well, it was live, on camera. *I Love Liberty* was a two-hour special on ABC with 20,000 people live, in the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

Jewell: And I was the only actress in the show that night who wasn't well-known. I was a newbie. And I was performing alongside celebrities that I had idolized as a kid. It was surreal, like a dream. It was my idea to use crutches that night. The reason I chose to do that was because you wanted me to the play the American disabled person. On the one hand, I thought, "Yeah, I could do that, but am I really disabled enough for this role?" So I had to gimp it up a notch or two. So I walked with crutches and climbed up three platforms of steps to get up there with my monologue. In front of 20,000 people… And I followed Shirley MacLaine that night. I probably followed her in her last life, too.

(laughter)

Jewell: I went into the comedy routine and nobody laughed. All of 20,000 people were staring at me. But I couldn't just quit!

Lear: What you didn't know was that the microphone wasn't working, and they never heard you.

Jewell: Yeah, I had no idea. I thought they hated my guts. And I dropped the crutches on the stage and now it looked like a miracle had occurred. And I'm looking out there, and I need help. And you come running up on stage and you're holding me in your arms. I think you thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I was moving all over the place, I was nervous, and I had tears in my eyes. And I remember you asking me, "Geri, are you alright?" And I said, "Norman, I'm fine, but the material sucks." That's when you backed me up and said, "Geri, read my lips. Your mic isn't on." A lot of the celebs that night thought that when you came up on stage to grab me, that you were going to politely walk me down the stairs and just cut me from the show. Everybody thought you were going to do that. And what you did was totally the opposite, and I have never forgotten it, ever. You turned around, and you had your arm around me, and you looked out at that audience and said, "How many people out there want to give this girl a second chance?" At that point, tears were streaming out of my eyes and 20,000 people gave me a standing ovation. You gave me a second chance.

Lear: But then you killed. You killed.

Jewell: I did. And I even ad-libbed, and you told me not to.

Lear: It was a great moment.

Jewell: It was amazing. And I remember the first celebrity backstage that welcomed me when I walked offstage was crying. It was Patty Duke, and she hugged me and she said, "I knew you could do it. I told them you could do it. Norman was right on."

Lear: That's lovely. I loved that show. Then you knocked them out.

Jewell: That was a night I never forgot, even to this day. The first minute I thought my career was over, and the next minute I got a standing ovation. You created that experience for me.

Lear: It was a great evening.

Zimmerman: Now what was it about this woman that made you say, "I have to have her in my life?"

Lear: Look at what she has struggled with to become this woman. It's a life lesson. She gives life lessons, just walking into the room, on how to be a human being. That's what she teaches.

Zimmerman: (To Geri) *When, after the Media Access Awards, did you get on the show,* The Facts of Life*?*

Lear: Was *The Facts of Life* before *I Love Liberty*?

Jewell: Yes, it was before I Love Liberty. The Facts of Life *came after the Media Access Awards performance. You came up to me in the elevator and told me, "You'll be hearing from me, kid, so don't forget the name Norman Lear." I said, "Okay, I won't." And you know Hollywood. A lot of people say a lot of things. And you were a man true to your word. You called me three months later, and you wrote Cousin Geri, Blair's cousin. And that changed my life 180 degrees.*

Lear: People still remember that, don't they?

Jewell: Oh God. I did 12 episodes of The Facts of Life *in four years. And that's not a lot of episodes. To this day… I mean, I did 24 episodes of* Deadwood*, and I can*



go anywhere and nobody recognizes me from Deadwood. *They come up to me and go, "Oh my God, from* Facts of Life*." Thirty years ago. That's a hell of an impact that you gave me.*

Lear: Amazing.

Zimmerman: Did you know it was going to have such an impact, to have the first person on TV with a disability? Or was that just you being you?

Lear: No, I don't think I was thinking about that. I was thinking about what an attractive human being, with the ability to do what she's doing. And wouldn't America love to know this person?

Jewell: You know, I'll tell you something, Norman. In the '90s, I was doing a lot of colleges, and these college students were The Facts of Life *audiences from the '80s. And the college students were coming up to me in the '90s and telling me how my character on* The Facts of Life *changed their lives. I had so many people tell me that they were bullied, that they were suicidal, that they were dealing with so many things, and then they saw Cousin Geri. "Oh my God, you changed my life." And you know what that was? And I know you do. That is God working through me. I just happened to be the vehicle. You opened the door for the vehicle, and God did the work.*

Lear: Well, I believe you did both. Somebody created the universe. I'd just as soon call that somebody God, as anything. But also responsible for you having the palsy—that you needed like a hole in the head. But you accepted it, and you have worked through it and taught us all how meaningful life and every breath is. You're a life lesson, and I repeat, you give how to be a human being lessons by just being. You do that with the help of the universe, and you can call it God or anything you want.

Jewell: Yeah, Higher Power or whatever you want to call it.

Zimmerman: Thank God both of you have a book on tape, because to hear the voice is amazing. I remember when Katherine Hepburn came out with her autobiography, "Me", and it was like, oh my God, to have that! Geri almost didn't get hers on tape. They were saying, "We're going to audition people." For her book!

Jewell: For my own life story.

Zimmerman: It's like, why would they want to have somebody else?

Jewell: What was said is that they had celebrities who do this for a living. "So we might want to have a celebrity read your autobiography." And my response was, "So what you're telling me is that a book I wrote, in my own words, my life story—you're going to have a celebrity slur their speech to sound like me? Why waste the time? Just use me."

Lear: I was very glad I did mine, too. I loved doing it. I didn't know I would, but I did.

Zimmerman: You had fun doing it. I could hear it in your voice.

Lear: I had a great time doing it.

Jewell: But it was different from writing it, wasn't it?

Lear: It's very different. I had a very experienced guy who has directed book readings for 30 years. So he was very helpful.

Jewell: Oh really? But when you write a book—and I say this from my own experience—it's a different energy to write your life story. And then to read what you wrote is a whole different emotional experience. Was it for you?

Lear: Oh sure. I'm still dealing with it, experiencing it, growing with it.

Jewell: Because there were sections, when I was reading what I wrote, and I actually had to stop reading because I was crying. I thought, "Where did that come from? I thought I emotionally overcame this."

Lear: Yeah, I had that experience also. Just living through something again.

Zimmerman: You had your shows all at once in the Top 10.

Lear: We had five in the Top 10 for several weeks.

Zimmerman: That's pretty nice.

Lear: Six in the Top 15.

Jewell: That's amazing.

Zimmerman: That is amazing. What about "The shit in your head," as you say? I love that quote.

Lear: I call the writer's block "shit in the head." It says it better than "writer's block" to me.

Zimmerman: And you were scratching your head, and that's how the hat came about?

Lear: Yeah.

Jewell: I never knew the significance of the hat.

Lear: Well, that's how it started. The significance is not the same as how it started. The significance is over time. It just became, "Where's your hat?" If I went somewhere without it, people would ask me, "Hey, wait a minute, where is the hat?" So it became significant.

Jewell: Up to this moment in your life, what has given you the most joy?

Lear: Living in the moment.

Zimmerman: I'm going to ask that of you Geri. Up to this moment, what gives you the most joy?

Jewell: You want me to top what he just said?

Zimmerman: No, it's not about topping.

Lear: I agree.

Jewell: You know, the greatest joy is continuing to overcome, and to meet the challenges. Every victory that I make brings me tremendous joy. I think that you're the same way. We went after our dreams. We didn't let our lives stop us. There was no such thing as, "No, I'm not going to do it." Oh, I've got to tell you this. You're going to love this. Facebook, it has pros and cons. Maybe four or five months ago, I was on Facebook, and a stranger sent me a private message saying, "I have your scrapbook, I'd love to return it." And I wrote back, "No, you don't. I never kept one." He wrote me back, "Yes, you did." "Oh no, it wasn't me." And he was insistent that it was my scrapbook. So I said, "Okay, upload a few pictures. Prove it." So he uploaded photos, a letter from you, handwritten, a telegram from Carol Burnett, letters from Brandon Tartikoff, my first contract from The Facts of Life. *This scrapbook contained the first five years of my career. Everything was in it.*

Lear: My God.

Jewell: What's interesting is that in the mid-80s my apartment was broken into, and I lost everything. I lost videotapes of my work. I lost that scrapbook.

Lear: So you had been keeping one and didn't remember.

Jewell: Yeah, I had just mentally blocked it. I can remember being so devastated that so much was ripped off, that I didn't know I'd blocked it that deeply. So he returned it just this year—30 years later—and I was going through it, and it was a gift. "Oh my God, a handwritten letter from Norman Lear."

Lear: So this was the guy who took it? Or you'll never know?

Jewell: No, he told me it came into his memorabilia store about 25 years ago, and a woman brought it in and wanted money for it. He paid for it. He buys that stuff and resells it at higher price. He paid for it, then opened it up and was like, "This is too personal. I can't resell this. This belongs to Geri Jewell." He felt horrible about it. He tried to find me for years and couldn't find me.

Lear: And then on Facebook.

Jewell: Yeah, just recently he was closing his shop, and he found the book again in a filing cabinet and said, "I'm going to try Facebook. She really needs to get this back." And what that scrapbook did for me? When I wrote my autobiography, I'm Walking As Straight As I Can, *I wrote it strictly from memory. I had nothing—no notes or things saved over the years. When I opened that scrapbook, it validated every single thing I wrote in the book. What a gift to get back 30 years later.*

Lear: Yeah.

Jewell: I'll show it to you when we get together again. You'll be amazed.

Zimmerman: I want to thank you so much. The thing that brings me most joy at this moment is to just be here and see the love between you two.

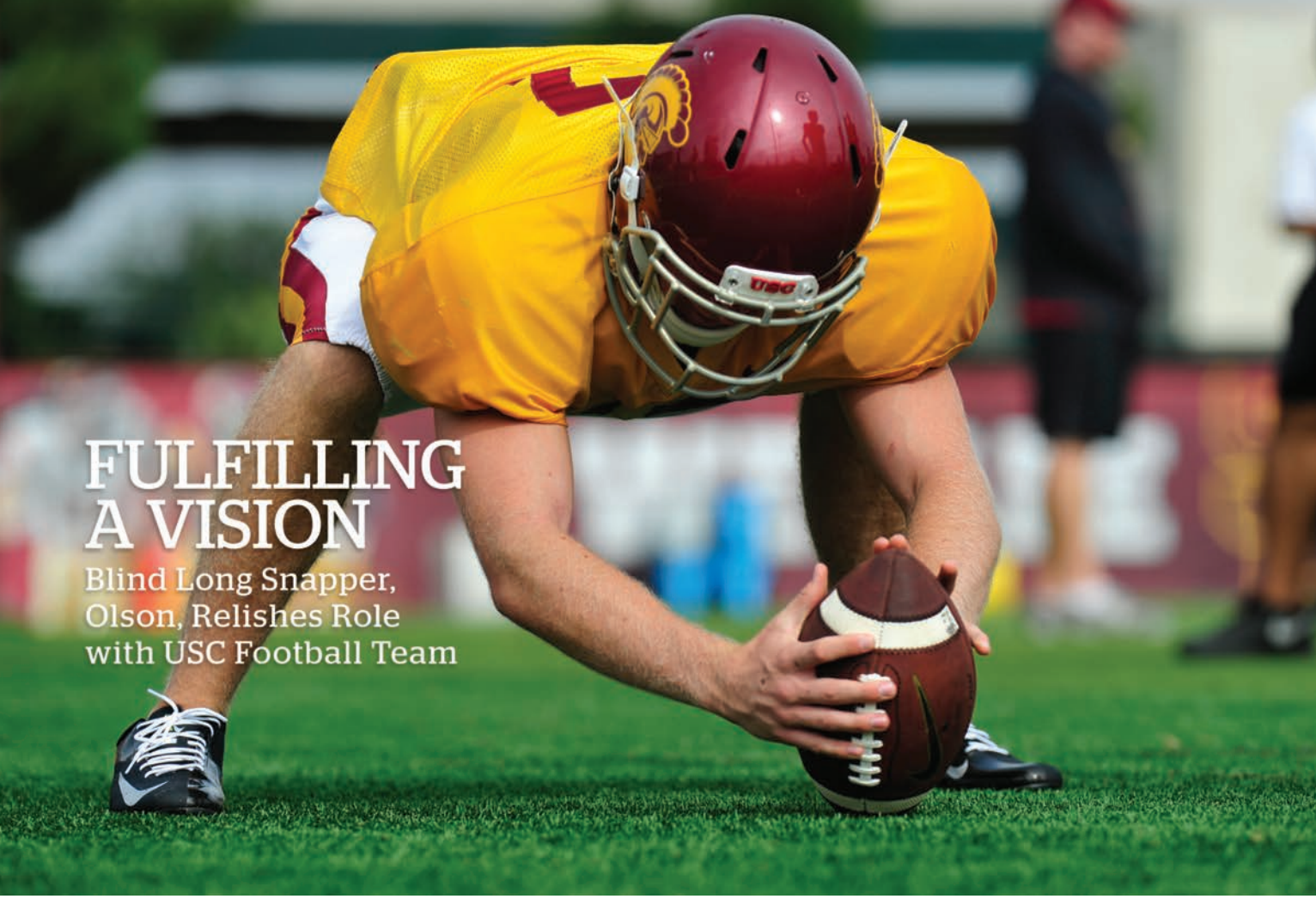
Lear: Look at that. They think we love each other.

(laughter)

Jewell: We do it so well.

Lear: Oh, Geri. ■ ABILITY

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FULFILLING A VISION

Blind Long Snapper, Olson, Relishes Role with USC Football Team

When it comes to Jake Olson's ability to snap a football, nobody knows better than Dean Vieselmeyer.

Olson is the long snapper for the University of Southern California's football team. He grew up wanting to wear the USC cardinal and gold colors. Vieselmeyer was Olson's high school position coach at Orange Lutheran High School, where Olson graduated as an accomplished math student with a 4.3 grade point average. In addition, he was the snapper on the varsity football team for field goals and extra points.

Vieselmeyer remembered when Olson first came to try out for the team.

"I saw him and the head coach talking at a practice," Vieselmeyer said. "The coach told me he had another snapper for me, so I walked over. Jake and his dad both had shades on. I told him that tomorrow we'll start working, and he said, 'Great!' I shook his dad's hand, then I stuck out my hand, and Jake didn't shake it. He just walked away."

A few minutes later, Vieselmeyer told head coach Chuck Petersen the interaction concerned him since Olson didn't shake his hand. Petersen shared one more detail with Vieselmeyer: "Oh, I forgot to tell you. He's blind."

Olson was born with cancer of the retina, called retinoblastoma. His left eye was removed when he was 10 months old. His right eye was removed at age 12.

Olson grew up a huge USC football fan, and then head coach Pete Carroll invited him to attend a game as a guest of the Trojans when he heard of his story. Olson grew close with the former Trojans head coach and the team as they continued to host him on campus and give him a chance to experience the Trojan family as a youngster. Olson's relationship with the Trojans has been well documented, and the day before his surgery to remove his right eye, the USC team hosted him at practice and one-by-one, the players and Carroll wished him well.

"The tough part for him was when he still had his eye and knew it was going to come out," Vieselmeyer said. "He was trying to look at his parents, look at everybody around. He wanted to visualize things."

After surgery, Jake dedicated his life to only moving forward.

"I asked him, 'What was it like when you woke up, and you didn't have sight anymore?'" Vieselmeyer said. "He said that wasn't hard for him because he prepared himself by saying it would be a new chapter in his life, and he was going for it. Once he came out of surgery, he

said it was a new part of his life, and he was not going to look back."

Since then, Olson hasn't turned back.

Olson was an athletic high school student, and he played on the golf team. He also wanted to play football, so he worked with Vieselmeyer to learn how snap. And he worked hard. He had to, because he wasn't that good.

Vieselmeyer puts it a little more bluntly: "He was absolutely terrible. We had constant drills I was putting him through. He had the audacity to ask me at the end of that first day how long it would be before he was snapping for the varsity team. I told him at the speed he was going, that would be never."

The next day before Olson arrived at practice, Vieselmeyer wondered why his snapper wanted to play so badly and what it was like for him on the field. So while a few other players began practice, Vieselmeyer closed his eyes and just listened.

"After a few minutes, I realized that this kid really wanted to do this," Vieselmeyer said. "When he got to practice, I told him that if he's willing to learn then I'd be willing to meet him as much as he wanted, in practice or outside of practice."

Olson worked 90 minutes each day just snapping with Vieselmeyer from May until late July. Vieselmeyer was the instructor, but he learned, too. He couldn't just show Olson how to change his delivery of the ball; he had to position Olson's arms and walk him through the process step-by-step after each mistake. He couldn't throw the ball back to Olson after each snap; he had to walk it back (despite Olson pleading for him to throw it).

For Olson, he learned how to listen for a clap to know where to snap the football. He also had to learn how to listen to feedback. If the ball didn't spiral or it was wobbling, he had to understand how to correct it. The procedure goes like this: A guard on either side of him taps his leg when the kicker is ready. The holder or the punter claps his hands to allow Olson to locate his position. Then it's up to Olson to snap the ball when he's ready. He can snap it right away, or he can wait to confuse the defense.

He got so good that the head coach named him the starter going into the season. In the first game, his team scored a quick touchdown, and Olson snapped it perfectly for the extra point. The team ran to the sideline in excitement, but Olson was nowhere to be found. Vieselmeyer realized they never created a protocol for Olson to get to the sideline with his team.

"The next day, the coach's first order of business was not the game but to get Jake off the field," Vieselmeyer said.

The high school rulebook stated that long snappers could not be hit if they did not pop up after snapping the ball between their legs, so Olson stayed in the bent-over position after the snap. In his second game, a frustrated defender crashed into Olson and received a personal foul. He did it a second time, and Olson's teammates came to the rescue, applying their own payback with a couple of late hits to the opposing player. Olson's coaches were furious, but Vieselmeyer realized the team was unifying around Olson by defending him.

"We didn't condone what they did, but I told the coach right away that Jake was now accepted," Vieselmeyer said. "He was on our team. He was one of us. That was a big turning point."

Now he's applying those adjustment techniques to the college football field and the campus at USC.

"Anything you do with a disability, it's harder, but it doesn't mean it cannot be done," Olson said. "Is it harder to get to class sometimes? Yeah, I can't just put some earphones in and hang my head and get lost with it in my thoughts to go to class. I always have to focus on which way I am going, which turn I am doing, how long. Just doing homework, I can go on a computer and I am thankful to live in the 21st century where we have the technology to do that with voice-activated systems."

But Olson doesn't dwell on the difficulties.

"It is different, but I really don't want to get hung up on that. If you sit there and think about all the hard stuff you have to do, that's when people get in trouble. Why can't I go to a school like USC? I am able to walk to class because I have a guide dog, Quebec. I try to find a positive in everything."

That is what has led him to USC to wear the Trojan helmet, although it was a bit of a process for him to be cleared by the NCAA to become part of the team.

Coming into this football season, head coach Steve Sarkisian (who has since been fired) invited Olson to become a walk-on with the team, which is typically reserved for practice players who do not receive financial assistance. However, Olson received the USC Swim With Mike Scholarship for athletes with physical challenges. Therefore, Olson was technically counted as a scholarship student-athlete, and his participation with the football team pushed USC over its NCAA maximum of 85 football scholarships. USC appealed to the NCAA, and Olson was cleared to practice and play with the Trojans in September.

"The NCAA was very cooperative," Olson said. "We didn't ever think they were going to deny it; we just had to figure out the details. That was a great feeling to know I could go out there without any roadblocks and start doing what I was prepared to do."



Once cleared, Olson dressed and was on the sideline as USC's backup long snapper.

"You do realize the significance of it and the impact of what you're representing," Olson said of wearing the USC uniform. "In that aspect, it's humbling to know what you play for and who you play for is so meaningful to people. It's also so fun to be playing with great athletes. It's a tremendous opportunity."

The opportunity has come with some adjustments along the way.

Olson began his relationship with USC when Pete Carroll was head coach and hosted him at games and practices as a teenager. Carroll, however, left USC after the 2009 season to coach the NFL's Seattle Seahawks. Lane Kiffin took over as coach and welcomed Olson, but he was fired during the 2013 season. Steve Sarkisian was hired and invited Olson to be part of the team, but he was let go earlier this 2015 season.

The turnover among leadership, Olson said, has been difficult to see. Yet, that's not why he is at USC.

"Like any relationship, when things change there is a little bit of sorrow there," Olson said. "Coach Carroll gave me an opportunity to come in here and be part of the team, but it wasn't like Coach Carroll was the only reason why USC was important to me. Coach Sark (Sarkisian) wasn't the reason USC was important to me. It's USC as a whole family—the players, the program, the history, and everything about it—that drew me."

"At the end of the day, all of that is still here, and they are the things I absolutely love about the Trojans. In the locker room, I think a lot of guys have that attitude as well. We're Trojans. We fight on. We're loyal to the university and the program that gave us a shot to represent the university in the best way."

Olson, for one, is doing his part. The freshman is seeking a degree in business with a concentration in finance. He hopes to get his MBA. He knows there's already a starting long snapper, but he'll keep working with the goal of one day starting for the Trojans.

His mentor, Vieselmeyer, believes he will.

"We had so many great discussions, and those were the most meaningful things," Vieselmeyer said of his many hours practicing with Olson. "He has so much insight and is so mature for a kid his age."

Even Olson's maturity can never squash the emotion he carries when he runs onto the football field for USC.

"I don't think it ever will," Olson said. "Such emotion is built into this place, I don't think it will ever leave me."

■ ABILITY

by Josh Pate

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MUPPET DIPLOMACY



Sivan is a perky little girl with a bright pink face and floppy red hair. She also happens to be a Muppet character that uses a wheelchair. Sivan made her television debut several years ago on the Israeli version of Sesame Street, called Rechov SumSum. She is the brainchild of Hop! Media Group, who co-produces Sesame Street in Israel, and who sought the expertise of Beit Issie Shapiro, a non-profit that promotes the inclusion of people with special needs. Since then, their work together has spawned numerous education initiatives and outreach programs for children with special needs.

Hop! operates three channels in Israel dedicated exclusively to young children. Their educational, entertaining, and violence-free programs are cyber safe havens for children and their families. Founded in 1999, the multi-media company produces, distributes, and acquires content across multiple platforms. *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper and Lia Martirosyan caught up with Hop!'s co-founder, Alona Abt, to learn more about the company's genesis, its fruitful collaboration with Beit Issie Shapiro, and the media group's future plans.

Lia Martirosyan: We were first introduced to you through Beit Issie Shapiro in Israel a few months ago. Can you tell us about what you do and how you connected with Beit Issie?

Alona Abt: We are the content provider. We started our broadcast 15 years ago. We were the first in the world to launch a preschool channel. Today it seems like a very basic concept, but 15 years ago, we were the first who felt that there's a need in the market for a channel that would be a safe haven for young children and for parents to trust their children to sit and view. That's how we set up HOP!, our multi-media company. We now have an additional two channels, so we have quite a large market share in Israel. The broadcasting is a mix of content that we acquire and content that we produce ourselves. Among our productions, we've also had a long partnership for the last 15 years with Sesame Workshop, and we co-produce with them an Israeli version of *Sesame Street* called *Rechov SumSum*.

In one of the seasons that we created, we were thinking about what character to introduce next, and we came up with the idea of Sivan, a little Muppet girl who sits in a wheelchair. When we started thinking about adding this character to the cast, we felt that we needed a professional to guide us on the different issues and the best way to explain things to kids and their families. So our cooperation with Beit Issie Shapiro started back then.

Since then, our relationship has grown in many directions. We have benefited from their input on this series and on other initiatives that relate to children with special needs. We, in return, have designed, in the seasons to come, content that from the beginning was aimed to be not only for broadcast but also as media units to be used as an outreach program. Beit Issie Shapiro and our education team created a teachers' guide, which Beit Issie introduced to kindergarten teachers in training seminars. This not only offers suggestions for instructional activities for teachers, but also video clips that teachers can show to the kindergarteners. In addition, we also offer supporting material on the Internet. We also initiate activities in the real world; I say the real world, but I mean in places where children can meet other children who are different than they are.

Beit Issie has a wonderful initiative called the Friends Park in Ra'anana called *Park Chaverim*. It's a park that has games for children with special needs. It's built in such a way that a child who is blind or who doesn't hear well or who needs to move around in a wheelchair can participate. The concept of the park is to bring together children with and without special needs so they can become friends.

We branded the park with our characters using the connection that we had already created in the public with Sivan. That's just one of the highlights that we've done together. It's been a very good partnership for us. We are media people. We're not educators. But we do aspire to use media in a way that benefits children's lives and their families. Whenever we meet a group of professionals with a big heart like the staff of Beit Issie Shapiro, we can benefit from their know-how, experience and continual interest in expanding their influence. It's very stimulating for us.

Lia: That's wonderful.

Cooper: You have the little girl who uses the wheelchair. Have you developed any other characters with different disabilities?

Alona: Before Sivan, we had a character who wore glasses. Glasses compared to a wheelchair can seem minor, but in the life of a child, it's a big frustration, especially when they're first told they have to wear glasses. In general, we try to incorporate into our various shows children with different disabilities—not necessarily *Sesame Street*—but in other shows that we produce. The problem is that as we are television, so the viewers have to understand that they're looking at a child who is different from them. It pushes us to make choices of a very physical, external difference between the child on the screen and the majority of the children. That doesn't always necessarily promote the needs of children who maybe externally don't look different than other children, but do have different challenges, such as children with autism. We ran a story about a child with a hearing aid and one who is blind.

Cooper: Have you thought about having characters who have visible disabilities but not having to build a story around them, meaning they're just there as part of the fabric of any society?



Sivan (left), having a good time dancing with her friend.

Alona: Yeah, we do that. We make it a point in different shows that whenever we show a group of real children, we include children with different disabilities.

Cooper: That's good. Any plans that you could talk about for the future?

Alona: We are looking into the possibility of following the launch announced recently in the US of the autism initiative that Sesame Workshop did in the US, so we're discussing what can be done here in Israel with local partners. Perhaps using the power of the Muppets through our channels and our Internet. In general, we'll be creating a campaign that deals more with empowering children to believe in their strengths. In whatever we do next, we want to weave into our shows children who have all types of strengths.

Cooper: When you say "strengths," can you give us some examples?

Alona: By strengths, I mean empowering children to believe in their abilities. We are very concerned about violence, and it's very difficult for children in general and children in Israel specifically not to be confronted with violence that threatens or violence that is within. It's about making the differentiation between how you can be strong, without using your physical strength.

Lia: Fantastic. How did you get into this? Please share a little about your background.

Alona: I was a producer of children's programming in documentaries. My partner and I had a distribution company. When the multi-channel environment started to happen, we understood that there was an opportunity to cater to children. That's when we became interested in creating a destination for children and families and when we came up with the idea of creating a channel.

Since then, my partner and I not only share HOP!, Luli and Yaldut Israelit channels, but most importantly, we also share a family of three children of our own. We had the opportunity as parents to be inspired by our children, and to use this inspiration in our work and vice versa. We are able to see things from around the world and hopefully bring them back to our children in a way that benefits them.

Our children are now beyond preschool, but we have stayed in the very innocent and wonderful world of the preschoolers. Our business has expanded in that we focus on more than just our linear channels. We are also very active digitally, so we have YouTube channels, and we are creating VOD and game apps.

Cooper: That's very nice. When you say "preschool," I'm curious to know at what age does your content stop?

Alona: We aim our content at first graders, which is six or seven in Israel. It doesn't mean that a nine-year-old is not welcome. On the contrary, we know from the audience response that many families have several kids of different ages, so a nine-year-old can still find content that is interesting for him or her. But we know that once the children enter school, they also feel peer pressure, and they want to feel like big boys and girls and don't want to admit they're watching a channel for younger children. It's dealing with a brand new question of, what do six- and seven-year-olds watch today?


Alona Abt of HOP!

How do they want to position themselves in the eyes of their peer group?

Cooper: In terms of production, how much content do you produce per year?

Alona: We produce about four series per year. Most of the series have about 20 episodes each. Most of our episodes are up to 10 minutes long. I would say that about 30 percent of our airtime is composed of our own local productions.

Cooper: You've talked about reaching a more international audience. Have you done anything on the airwaves with digital technology that would allow you to connect with and see other children around the world and/or teach technology to these kids?

Alona: Not yet, although it's very interesting. There are many questions of children's privacy and protection that have to be considered. We have done many things that invite children to create their own personalized version of content that we provide and that allows them to give their own personal artistic expression to the topics we address. For instance, we'll request that children send us pictures about different things. Just now, we're running a PSA in which we ask children to send us pictures of things made of recycled materials. It's amazing. We've received such beautiful pictures of things that kids made at home. On our website, we've created a virtual gallery where we can display the pictures. In the future, I think we would love to have the possibility of children just presenting themselves and their lives and having them be good facilitators to make connections. I think it will open up many possibilities, especially for children who have difficulty participating in regular day-to-day social activities with their age group.

I think the possibility of transmitting from their sheltered homes and protected rooms can open up new dimensions. But we're not there yet.

Cooper: Are you connecting with any other countries yet?

Alona: No, not really.

Cooper: What's slowing you down? Come on!

(laughter)

Alona: (*laughs*) Thank you. OK! No problem!

(laughter)

Cooper: While you were talking about all the great things you've done, I was picturing an episode where one or more of the characters are looking at either a desktop or a mobile device and watching something. What they're watching becomes live on the screen, but they might be watching, let's say, somebody like Lia, singing wonderful music. As they listen, they realize that abilities vary.

Alona: You're right. For instance, we have different guests on our shows. One of our guests was a member of Israel's Olympic swim team. She won a medal and she was relatively known in Israel, so it was very interesting to see the children's amazement that someone in a wheelchair could not only be a sportswoman, but could also win an international award. I'm sure media can be very instrumental in bringing people together with different abilities and needs.

Cooper: That's powerful awareness building.

Alona: Just to revert back to your question about contact with other countries, we did go a little beyond our Israeli borders with our character Sivan. Sesame Workshop found her so efficient and good that when they were working on a new production with their Brazilian partners, we flew Sivan over to them, and they hosted Sivan as a special guest on the new series that also related to children in wheelchairs.

Cooper: Oh, good.

Alona: So Sivan did travel abroad. And not only that, we were very happy to hear that the digital work the Brazilian producers did around Sivan was nominated for a digital kids' Emmy award. With that, we felt that we did something right. It's not only good for Israel, but it's good for wherever there are kids and for those who care for kids. ■ ABILITY

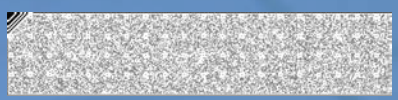
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NAKED AMBITION
Mark Povinelli

You've seen Mark Povinelli in such films as *Water For Elephants* or *Mirror, Mirror*, or if you've been really lucky, you caught him on stage in such shows as *Mabou Mines Dollhouse*, an adaption of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* or playing French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in *Belle Epoque*. On a beautiful fall morning, Povinelli greeted David S. Zimmerman with a batch of fresh berry scones and hot rich coffee. His cats and dog made cameo appearances.

David Zimmerman: Is that your Pez collection?

Mark Povinelli: Of course! When my wife, Heather, and I moved into our apartment some years ago, I wanted to collect something, but I didn't have the money to collect art or something of value. So I thought, "Pez are really





Nancy Villere - CrushPhotoStudios.com



cheap. Let's collect Pez." It's a perfect thing to look for during garage-saleing, which my wife loves to do. But now that we have kids, it's torture for them to go "garage-saleing," but if they're looking for Pez—

Zimmerman: But why would garage-saleing be torture for them?

Povinelli: Growing up, did your parents ever say on a Sunday after church: "Let's just drive around and look at stuff"? It was just torture. We would all sit in the car, and they'd look at houses or stop at some little fruit stand or something, and it would just be miserable. That's what it is for my kids. Hey, it's Saturday morning. Let's get up and stuff you in the back of the car and drive aimlessly around neighborhoods looking for people's crap. But now we have—I don't know exactly—it's between 500 and 600 Pez.

Zimmerman: I have another friend who collects those, but I don't know if she has as many as you.

Povinelli: This top middle row, that's the valuable Pez. Some are worth hundreds of dollars. Once you tell people that you collect something stupid like Pez, and then they find them for you. They're a conversation piece. A friend was moving into a new house and moved out the old fridge, and behind it was a bag of old Pez from like 40 years ago.

Zimmerman: Do you ever find Pez in other countries?

Povinelli: They do have different ones with different characters in Europe and Asia; I've picked up some.

Zimmerman: I still have a few somewhere in a box.

Povinelli: What do you have? Go find them!

Zimmerman: Now I know what to get you for your birthday. Let's talk about your work; you're constantly working.

Povinelli: Eh! I want to work more! There are 10 actors on the planet who are like, "I work too much," but the rest want to work more. But yes, I shouldn't complain. I'm very fortunate.

Zimmerman: You traveled around the world as the male lead in A Doll's House*?*

Povinelli: Yeah, it's kind of a woman's show, but she needs a husband to play off of. I workshopped it in New York and then at the Sundance Theater Lab before we mounted it in New York City in, like, 2003. At the time, I was playing Dr. Rank, the supporting best friend of the husband, who was played by a guy named Peter Dinklage, whom you may have heard of before.

We were roommates at the Sundance Theater Lab and became friends. He's one of my favorite people. He's awesome. But the theater didn't have any money—no theater does—so they didn't have any rehearsals beyond our workshops. They got a run in New York for five weeks, and they paid the theater company enough for, like, one week of rehearsal, to get us up to speed again. Basically it was a tech rehearsal. And a day before that rehearsal started, Peter left the show, because he had shot *The Station Agent* that spring, and it was being released that fall, and that's when we were up, and he was gonna have to do

all this press junk, and he couldn't do it. And he told them, like, seven days before we opened. So they came to me, and they were like, "Mark, how would you like to be Torvald, the main guy?" I was like, "No, I don't want to do that."

Zimmerman: Oh, no!

Povinelli: I didn't want to because I was comfortable in the part I had. I thought it fit me. I didn't have the confidence or the gravitas to play the other role, which is funny, because I'm married in real life, and I was the same age as Peter.

Zimmerman: It's interesting how we put ourselves in boxes like that.

Povinelli: I absolutely did. I was like, "Hey, I come onstage, and I do funny stuff." And my Rank was very funny and charming, or so I thought. And Peter had this undeniable presence. He has that *je ne sais quoi*.

Zimmerman: That magic.

Povinelli: You can't teach it, although he's well trained and very talented. There's just something else, too. So I didn't want to try to do what he did, 'cause I can't do that. But I said, "yes" after some plotting and pleading [on their part].

Zimmerman: You had only seven days to learn the lines?

Povinelli: There wasn't really much of a choice. And then we did a couple of rehearsals, and I was terrible as that character.

Zimmerman: From your viewpoint?

Povinelli: No, pretty much everybody's. (*laughs*) Torvald is the quintessential male. He's very alpha. That's the whole point. He's domineering and comfortable in his position, so Nora feels trapped like a doll, because she's just being puppeteered around by him.

So after a couple of rehearsals, Lee Breuer, the director said, "Stop trying to play him like Peter played him." I was doing a bad impersonation of Peter playing Torvald. Because every day in rehearsal that's what I heard and saw. So the director was like, "Play him like Rank would want to be Torvald." Which is the essence of the play also: Rank dreamed of always being Torvald and was always too sickly and too weak—

Zimmerman: Opposites, those characters.

Povinelli: He's totally the wannabe Torvald. So it worked.

Zimmerman: Wow!

Povinelli: Lee's brilliant. Peter played it scary and intimidating, and I played it very like a guy trying to be that powerful guy and not always succeeding. So it's funny a lot because you could see that not every guy is cut out to be a domineering prick, some just try to be one because that's how society tells us we're supposed to be. The show was a huge success, and it changed me as an actor so much, 'cause it did give me that confidence that, "Wait a minute, there's a whole other side of me." The show had a lot of sexual tension and a lot of sexual dynamics that—

Zimmerman: Don't you get naked onstage?

Povinelli: I got all nudey onstage.

Zimmerman: This just takes me to another thing: I remember when Corey Allen saw you audition for The Beautiful People*, and said, "That's him. That's the lead of the play." So you have that power.*

Povinelli: You've been so kind to let me do workshops for Meet the Biz. What I try to express more than anything to actors is: You have to know yourself in and out and know all the tricks you use to cover up the things you're insecure about and really understand them. You may not always get underneath that, but you have to be aware of them. I think a lot of people think of acting as: I'm playing somebody else, so I'm gonna put on this façade and be somebody else. But you can't unless you really know yourself.

Zimmerman: You went to Edinburgh, Scotland, with this show?

Povinelli: Yeah. We went to about 35 venues throughout the world. About 10 of them were in the US, and 25 were outside of the country, including Stuttgart, Paris, Oslo and Moscow.

It was the best, because somebody else was paying for it, and I knew I had a job. It was very grueling, but I loved it. This was powerful theater with a message. It got people uncomfortable, shocked them, and made them think. Some people hated it, and it changed some peoples' lives. That's the kind of theater you dream of doing.

We would fly into a city like Oslo. We'd land, and they'd start erecting the set, and the actors would have a day and a half just to play around Oslo. And you had a built-in group of friends that you were traveling with. Oftentimes there'd be a local assigned to you, who would take you around. And then you'd start doing the show. You'd have your days free, and then they'd have some kind of state party for you, because all these were government festivals.

Zimmerman: Were you married at the time?

Povinelli: That was the only drawback. I was married and had two young kids. I'd get a phone call saying, "Hey, you're goin' to Paris for three weeks." And half





of me would be thrilled, and the other half would be like, "Oh, sh*t, I have to tell Heather that I'm gonna go away, and have fun taking care of the kids and pets." I'd be in these places and go, "This is amazing. I wish I could show it to my family."

Zimmerman: You couldn't just bring them with you.

Povinelli: I've been to every corner of the world and literally every continent, and they came three times, so that was nice. But three out of 25 is nothin'. My wife has always been crazy supportive. And she's not in the arts. She's a teacher. I think what attracted her to me was this actor side of me that wants to go off and try new things. But that's also the part that drives her crazy, because then I have to travel. It's been hard, but we've gotten through it. We just celebrated our 17th wedding anniversary.

Zimmerman: Happy anniversary!

Povinelli: Thank you. We've worked out well, and absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Zimmerman: Where did you meet?

Povinelli: I met her when I was 16, and she was 14. I lived on the East Coast, and she lived in Santa Barbara. We were at a dance, and I saw this girl, she was a teenager. Me and my buddy were like, "Hey, let's go stand with them!" So we did that, like, sort of the stand-near-each-other dance, and she does not remember that. And during the dance, she was like, "Whatever. Here are these two tools dancing with us." So two years later we actually became friends at one of those conferences hosted by Little People of America. Every year they have a national conference somewhere around the country. It's like a combination educational seminar, therapy session, frat party, and wedding—all smashed together in one week. They're really lively.

So we became good friends. Right away there was a connection. And then four years later—'cause we'd see each other for a week and then go away for 51 weeks—we started dating. But we would get together for Christmas sometimes. One of the guys would throw a big party, and we'd all fly in.

Zimmerman: I love that, because sometimes people say, "If you don't click right away, it's not a relationship." But I've always thought that you could build a relationship.

Povinelli: Definitely. It takes a while for me to wear somebody down, so having the time was helpful.

(laughter)

We dated long-distance for a few years, and finally ended

up in the same city. I had moved to Minneapolis to be an actor, and she moved out to Minneapolis to start grad school at the University of Minnesota. Then we really started dating. We were in the same city; it worked.

Zimmerman: I've met her. She's amazing.

Povinelli: And beautiful.

Zimmerman: She is. Let's talk about Lincoln Center?

Povinelli: Oh, yeah, that little up-and-coming theater.

(laughter)

Zimmerman: You performed there.

Povinelli: I did. I probably shouldn't say that I get all my good jobs from Peter Dinklage bailing out, but…

*Zimmerman: (*laughs*) Is that, like, the thing?*

Povinelli: I'll take his scrap. "You can't get Peter? Get Mark, then." They were doing a workshop of a play, a new piece about Toulouse-Lautrec, the French painter. They were workshopping it, and Peter lived in New York. He was the guy. Then The Public Theater hired him to do *Richard III*; he couldn't turn down *Richard III*.

Zimmerman: Of course not.

Povinelli: So he went off and did that, and then they were like, "We're gonna mount this show and now we don't have a lead." So they auditioned around, and I got cast. I used to walk totally out of my way, across the front steps, past the Met, past the whole front of Lincoln Center, thinking: I can't believe I'm here. There would be a big poster of Lautrec, this painting of his. It was an amazingly beautiful show. It didn't quite work because it didn't know if it wanted to be a play or a performance art piece, so it was good in spots but never truly coalesced. There hasn't been a successful piece about him yet, and he's one of the most fascinating people who's ever been on the planet. Brilliant, troubled, complex, dark, and so crazy talented.

Zimmerman: That must have been fun to play.

Povinelli: I dived into his life and read all these books about him and went to the New York Public Library and found all these old writings of his. Went to every museum I could. I was on tour with *A Doll's House*, and luckily the year before, I'd gone to a museum in Paris that's basically 80 percent Lautrec, a Lautrec museum. So I was like, "I'm glad I did that. That was fortuitous."

Zimmerman: Not every actor does this, but you do your research. And I know that you say at times, "I don't know if I can do [this part]," but you have such a command as an actor that people can't stop watching you.

Povinelli: My wife makes fun of me all the time, 'cause she says I'm so safe. I pretend I'm this artist/theater/dangerous person, but it's not by accident that I have the life I have with a dog, cats, two kids, a wife, and a picket fence around my front yard… But in the theater I'm like, "All right, you know what? I am gonna go naked. I am gonna literally and figuratively just bare whatever I can." It's like my playtime, my therapy.

Zimmerman: Your amusement park.

Povinelli: That's a good way to put it, but I don't want to be on a roller coaster in my real life. Some people do.

Zimmerman: I think maybe because they don't have the outlet you do.

Povinelli: I think you may be right. I think I got into this because growing up different, and so profoundly from birth size-wise, I was on stage all the time. I'd walk out of my house, and I was on stage. People would stare at me. I'd go to the grocery store, ride my bike… I could never be anonymous. So when I found the stage, it was the only time I could control people looking at me, and how they felt about me. I couldn't control those things when I was out at the grocery store.

Zimmerman: How is that sometimes?

Povinelli: It's really annoying, but I've come to the realization that it's them not me, so I feel very comfortable with that. It's like, "You really can't handle this? How stupid of you?"

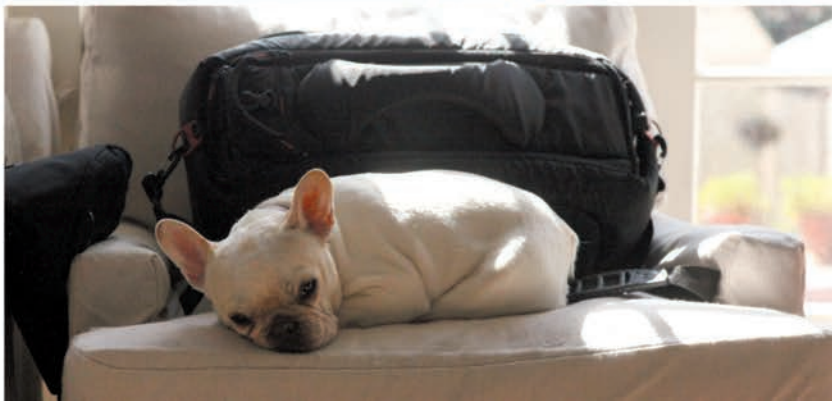
Zimmerman: So you think some people can't handle it?

Povinelli: Oh, my God, no! It's amazing, because there's little people all the time now on reality TV. Now we're getting the, "Hey, you're on that show." And I'm like, "Really? What show is that?" And it's usually a reality show, like little people doin' whatever they do on reality shows. … I had this experience 10 or 15 years ago when I was doing *Doll House*, and flying to Australia. It's an 18-hour flight. And the guy sitting next to me was from LA—and this was in the infancy of reality television—so he's a producer/content/creator guy. He said, "I've been watching you the whole time." And already I'm a little creeped out by this. Then he goes on: "It's just amazing how you navigate and you exist and you can do all this and get on this plane." I'm like, "What's my other option? I'm just doing what everybody else is doing." And he was like, "I want to make a reality show about you and your life." And he started asking me a bunch of questions, and he was like, "Can I film some of this." I'm stuck in the window seat for 18 hours. So I say, "Sure, okay."

Then we get off the plane, and he's like, "Can I film you while you get your bag?" I'm like, "All right, fine, if you want to." So I'm standing there waitin' for my bag







like everybody else, and he goes, "You know, this isn't that interesting."

*Zimmerman: Oh my God! (*laughs*)*

Povinelli: It's not freakin' interesting… I mean, my existence shouldn't be entertainment for you. It shouldn't scare you or make your day or make you feel better about yourself. Some people will be extra-friendly and walk away like they did a good deed. But then again nobody's perfect. Before I knew more people who were in wheelchairs, if I went and helped a person in a wheelchair, I'd feel really great about myself. I'd think, "Isn't my life better than his because that was easier for me than for him."

Zimmerman: I guess it's human nature?

Povinelli: Right. And check this out: About 20 years ago or so, I'm just out of college. I'm at an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training seminar. My future wife, Heather, had somehow gotten into it, 'cause she was doing training with the Burbank police or something as part of her studies. So the woman speaking is introducing the next speaker. Meanwhile there's this guy over in the corner in a wheelchair with—at the time I didn't know it—cerebral palsy, and he's really making a big ruckus, making loud sounds, being disruptive... I'm like, "This is really great that they included him, but somebody needs to take him out of the room so we can get down to business here." So you know where this is going…

Zimmerman: Right.

Povinelli: So when she says, "The next speaker is Ted Johnson, a lawyer from northern California who has won the biggest case for the ADA against the government...," and it's him, and he's brilliant and hilarious, I feel like the biggest a** ever. Then one day, after Ted and I had become good friends, Heather and I were walking to dinner, and he was riding next to us, and he says to me: "So, is she your girlfriend?" I say, "Yeah." And he says, "How do you guys have sex?" And I'm like, "Yay! You're an ignorant a**hole, too!"

(laughter)

Zimmerman: Good one. So let's talk a bit about Water for Elephants. *I remember when you said, "I've auditioned for something, and I can't say what it is," and then you got it, and it was so thrilling.*

Povinelli: When I auditioned for *Water for Elephants*, I knew it was a big deal. I read the book in one night and thought: "It's such a great book; I've got to do this part." Two days later I was in the casting director's office. But I gave only an average audition. Like, I walked out of there and felt, "That's not good enough."



I questioned why I was even in this business.
Zimmerman: What made you think you weren't good enough?

Povinelli: I have to do enough prep work to get in the right mindset so that I go in there with my choices of what I want to do and then execute them. As opposed to going in there thinking, "God, I hope they like me. I wonder what they think. Do they want somebody who's older? Do they want the guy sitting next to me?" So when I gave a very safe audition of what I thought they might want, based on 10 things that I have no control over, I felt really down, because those kinds of roles come along so infrequently… Those defining parts that could change something.

Zimmerman: Filet mignon.

Povinelli: Yes. So I was bemoaning all of this to a friend, and he was like, "You just need an acting coach to get you right." So I went to an old friend who's an acting coach, and 30 minutes later, I was like, "Yeah, that's right. That's what I need to do." And I went in there (for the callback), and I did exactly what I wanted to do. So I got *Elephants*. It was so much fun. It was a big-time movie set and very intimidating, because you suddenly have license to do stuff. So often you're on a set, and they kind of wheel you around, "Stand here, say this. We don't have time, get out of it." This was, "All right. We're gonna sit down and figure this out. We're gonna rehearse, and we're gonna make moments," which was exciting, new and terrifying.

But there was a giant elephant on set. I'd be talking to the trainer, and this trunk would come and start sniffing me as I was talking. There'd be lions. My character had this Jack Russell terrier that was his best friend, which went on to be way more famous than I'll ever be. It was in *The Artist*, that Oscar-winning silent movie. Uggie was on the cover of every magazine. I was on an airline flight, and Uggie was on it.

Zimmerman: I think he just died.

Povinelli: Recently.

Zimmerman: That's what I heard… So I'm gonna throw out a name and see where you go with it: Marlon Brando.

Povinelli: I once took acting class with Marlon Brando, which makes for the best bar story ever. So when I was shooting this summer and there were four main guys in the cast, Steven Zahn, Michael Imperioli, Romany Malco, and Ben Chaplin, I'm thinking, "How



do I endear myself to them?" So one night when we were out, I just casually dropped it on them: "I took an acting class with Marlon Brando." I had the floor for the next two hours.

Zimmerman: How did you ever get to take a class with Brando?

Povinelli: One night I'm sittin' at home, and a buddy, Marty Klebba, calls me up around 10 at night and says, "Hey, do you want to take an acting class with me tomorrow?" I said, "Nah, not really." He's like, "Uh, it's being taught by Marlon Brando." I said, "What time? Where do I need to be? Let's go!"

Zimmerman: Wow!

Povinelli: So sure enough, in 2002, Marlon Brando taught an acting class, and I think he had the intention of making it into a series of videos or DVDs called *Acting by Marlon Brando* or something, that you would buy so he could make some serious cash. Like Michael Caine's got these acting technique videos, and Brando wanted to have his. So we were at this abandoned warehouse in Hollywood. You had to sign all these waivers, which I'm probably breaking now by talking about it. But anyway… you walked into this room, and there's a bunch of folding chairs set up, a playing space, a dais, a giant throne in the middle of the dais, a lamp, an oriental rug, and a giant fern. It seemed so preposterous, and you're just sitting there with maybe 30 other people in the class.

And then out walks this giant, giant man in a black muumuu, and he comes and sits down on the throne and says, "I'm Marlon Brando." And then for another two or three weeks, I went to acting class with Brando. He wanted a kind of "United Colors of Benetton" acting class where he'd sit there and be like, "I want two Chinese acrobats in my class," and then the next day somebody went and found two Chinese acrobats and they'd be there.

Zimmerman: And they were acrobats and not actors?

Povinelli: Right. And one day he said, "I want two little people." And the First AD knew Marty, and Marty knew I would be all over it, so he called me, thank God. So Marty and I show up, and Marlon puts us in the front row, and he's like, "So we have two very special guests. Your names?" "Mark and Marty." "Hank and Bill?" "No, Mark and Marty." "Hank and Bill?" "Okay, Hank and Bill."

(laughter)

And then maybe my favorite moment in my entire career: He stops and looks at me and goes, "Are you in a Pepsi commercial?" At the time I had been in a Dr. Pepper commercial that had been running. I'm like, "Yeah, I'm in a Dr. Pepper commercial." He's like, "I saw that last night. That was a nice job." I'm like, "Oh, my God, Marlon Brando has seen my work, and he's talking about it! It's amazing!" It was some silly holiday Dr. Pepper commercial, but I didn't care.
So he took a break and had us come up. The whole class was improv. He had us do an improv with his Samoan bodyguard, who was also not an actor. The three of us did this improv, and then the class talked about it. He was lovely. He was so gracious… Well not to everybody; he could be volatile. But to us he was super nice. He was out of this world.

Zimmerman: I hope those sessions get shown on TV.

Povinelli: They will never be on TV. *Variety* or somebody did an article about it last year, like, "Whatever happened to—?" They've talked to his estate, and whoever controls it said, "No one will ever see those tapes. It will never happen."

Zimmerman: I love that story!

Povinelli: And there are so many stories within that story. Like Sean Penn and Edward James Olmos and Harry Dean Stanton and Whoopi Goldberg and Thomas Jane and John Lovitz, the homeless guy he had in the class… One day Marlon was outside in the alley having a cigarette or whatever, and there was a homeless guy sifting through the garbage, and he's like, "Hey, you want to take my acting class?" The guy was like, "Okay." And then there was a homeless guy in our acting class. Philippe Petit, the guy who walked across the wire on the World Trade Center—

Zimmerman: He was in it? Oh, my God! Did you stay in touch with any of these people?

Povinelli: No, because then they were a bunch of no-name actors like myself, and I would love to see some of them again. There were probably only 15 or 20 of them who exist, but to have a reunion and say, "Okay, what do you remember? What happened from your perspective?"

Zimmerman: That would be a great documentary.

Povinelli: You'd have to get a hold of the registry. I have no idea how you'd find those people. I don't know how many of 'em are fessin' up like I am. It was wild. It was so bizarre. And the next day I was like, "Do I go back? Am I invited back?" I said, "I'll show up and if they kick me out, they kick me out. How can I not show up?" And I did, and nobody said anything, and I was there for the rest of the class, which was maybe two weeks.

But then what happened was, Marlon comes in one day and sits down. He's telling us about this actor he knows that is the greatest actor of our generation, and we're all intently listening. By the time he's done with his little spiel, we're like, "He's totally right." Marlon could tell you anything. I talked about Peter having magnetism. Marlon was like nobody else I've ever seen or will ever see. He started talking about this guy, and you're like, "That guy is the greatest actor of all time, absolutely. He's amazing!" The person he was talking about was Michael Jackson.

Zimmerman: Oh, my God!

Povinelli: And then in walks Michael Jackson. And he's in our class. He wants to be an actor now.

Zimmerman: Did he have bodyguards?

Povinelli: He came in with, and I wish I were makin' this up, he came in with Brando's grandson, who's like nine, and one of the producers kids who was 12 or whatever. They flanked him and sat down, so then Michael Jackson was in our class. He sat there, and he didn't say a word. It was so bizarre. He's like as far away as I am from you, just watching this class taught by Marlon Brando with Whoopi Goldberg sittin' behind me and John Lovitz on the other side of me, whatever, and then the next day Michael wasn't there, but Marlon said that Michael had had such an amazing time that from now on he wants to have class up at the Neverland Ranch. "So tomorrow there will be a bus, and we'll all get in the bus and ride up to Neverland Ranch and have class there." (*laughs*) I'm thinking, what is happening? What the hell is this? So the next day we show up ready to get on this bus, and Marlon's not there. He's sick.

Zimmerman: Oh, no!

Povinelli: So Harry Dean Stanton fills in and plays Mexican country western songs for, like, three hours, and we never had class again. Marlon got too sick, and we never went to Neverland Ranch. There's no end to that story.

*Zimmerman: (*laughs*) It reminds me of a David Lynch film.*

Povinelli: It *was* like a David Lynch film. It was insane. Marlon would spend 15 minutes taking his teeth out and putting 'em back in in the wrong places and smiling and taking 'em back out and putting 'em back in correctly. The best piece of theater that I've ever seen in my life. I'm not even kidding you. We were enraptured. He didn't say a word, he just sat down, put 'em in a cup, and then smiled, and they were all going in different directions.

Zimmerman: That's an amazing story.

Povinelli: It was preposterous.

Zimmerman: So what would you say that you want most at this moment in your life?

Povinelli: Oh, boy. You love to ask these super-over-enthralling questions. What do I want? I want to be challenged again. And scared again. We were talking before about doubting whether I can do something, and then finding that moment where I'm like, "F*ck it, I'm gonna do it. Screw it, I'm gonna do it." The Lincoln Center show this summer challenged me… Even things like *My Next Breath* just kind of create themselves. Or the radio show. With those two projects, there's no character to play. It's just me. That's scary.

Zimmerman: You did The Hot Flashes *with Wanda Sykes and Brooke Shields. You were in* The Polar Express... Mirror, Mirror... *The list goes on. Your body of work continues to flourish and grow.*

Povinelli: And it's about the challenge. But don't you feel like acting sometimes is vapid? That you aren't really contributing to society.

Zimmerman: Yes, but sometimes I feel that acting can help.

Povinelli: It's true. You can do important work, and it may not change the world, but if it brings people three hours of happiness, that's something.

Zimmerman: Yes. Now I want to go back to your Pez collection. Do you have the Marlon Brando one?

Povinelli: (*laughs*) Oh, my God! I totally need a Marlon Brando Pez. Like, the whole *Guys and Dolls* Marlon Brando collection, or the *On the Waterfront* collection!

■ ABILITY

Liu Fusheng
WHEN I PAINT



Professional painter Liu Fusheng had the distinction of winning a prestigious Young Artist Award in his native Singapore. Both museums and private investors have collected his work, and he's been the subject of solo exhibitions in China and the US. Liu's distinctive glasses, decorative crystal, and shoes hint he also might've made a compelling rock star or fashion designer. But a serious health condition that struck early in life almost derailed him. Here he talks about his journey:

I was seven years old in my backyard playing soccer when I first noticed it. And all of a sudden I fell down. I start hitting myself and screaming. And every night I saw a spirit. In fact, it was a dark shadow from a long time ago, many thousand BC.

It was a Chinese silhouette holding an axe and chains, and every night he whipped me until I cried. And when I woke up and told one of my parents, they said, "What do you mean?" I said that the spirit "was holding an axe and chains to take me away." Singapore has four races: Malay, Chinese, Caucasian and Indian, and my father thought I was like Chinese children who, in the daytime, play too much, and at night are haunted by their dreams.

They thought it was just a nightmare. But it happened every night. So they went all over the country, and some Chinese people said: "Maybe take your son to see a medium, maybe pray and that might kill it." But that got me more scared, because sometimes in Chinese stories the spirit went to a person, and he became sick. To heal me, they took a sword and a chicken and cut its throat right in front of me. This spirit that was haunting me was supposed to go into the chicken and be taken away.

One time we went to Indonesia, and they said there was someone who could cure me. He was four times my size. So he's going around and around me. Then he started pulling my hair, and when I wanted to run or crawl away, he overpowered me. He sat on my back like I was a horse. He chanted and pulled my hair. I even went to a church, and the pastor said I was possessed.

By second or third grade, I was considered too tense to attend school. I took medication, which they increased. I went through so much, but I didn't know what was going on.

THE GHOST HAS A NAME

It wasn't until 1995, when I was studying in Tasmania, Australia, and "disturbing the other students" that I was told to go and see a psychiatrist. That doctor finally diagnosed me as having Tourette's syndrome. (See sidebar.) He told me it was congenital. I said that's bullsh*t. "Why can't you tell me that there are ghosts that came into my body?" He said, "Doctors don't believe in ghosts. It's a medical condition."





Liu's "Michael Jackson" shoes

And of course, I was very resistant to the idea. It was very painful for my parents to see me go through this. No one wants his or her child to be ill. But we had to fight against it, that was the only way.

I realized that if I accepted my diagnosis, my life could be colorful. I was so used to being depressed. Growing up, I had no friends because I felt that they might not be able to accept me. I always felt inferior and alone. I always looked down at the floor instead of facing people. I felt so strongly that no one would ever love me.

What made me blossom was dancing. I love to dance. Of course I tried to talk to the ladies, and of course I wanted a partner on the dance floor and in life, but I didn't know how to have a partner.

I always wondered if I had a future. Because I have a normal body, but I have jerky movements, and I was always hitting myself, being noisy and shouting. With Tourette's you have to have courage to overcome it.

I told myself that God is crazy. Not in a bad way. God is fantastic. But God will make you move. He will shine through you and put you on a path… God doesn't want anyone to take his or her life; He wants you to face your

In the Dance at Keong Saik Street



Mohamed Sultan Road



life. To overcome the pain. If you stand in it firmly, people will start to change their minds and look at you with new eyes.

'I WOULD CUT MYSELF'

I used to hit my own cheek. It would be bruised and black and get callouses. I wanted to be like everyone, talk softly, and not make obscene movements, like hitting my bottom or other parts of my body. I used to use my finger to poke myself until I bled. When I hit myself, I got tense. When I got too agitated, I would cut myself more, so I try not to get too agitated.

When I'm shouting, sometimes I'm trying to tell myself to stop hitting myself. People with Tourette's may say vulgar things, but I don't. When I say vulgar language, it's because I'm angry. But my mom says it all stops when I sleep. She tells me: "The best thing that you have in your life is sleep because then you don't make noise. So can you sleep more?"

They would give me drugs to slow down portions of my brain. But the side effects made me sleepy. I couldn't even see straight… It was painful and didn't work. It slowed me down and made me tired.

My parents would say, "How come our bloody son always wants to go to the bed? He will become a lazy bum." My mom always says that I don't belong on this planet. I say, "It's true, I don't." But I'm here, so what do I do now? I can't go back. If my spaceship passed over this planet, and I dropped down, how come I'm here? What's my purpose?

I heard this little boy with Tourette's say to his mom, "This condition is so ugly. Will someone love me when I grow up?" And she said, "Don't worry. If nobody loves you, I'll love you."

I told her, "No. You'll kill him. Let's say one day when you leave this world, he will say, "The one who loved me is gone." You should tell him, "There's nothing wrong with you, and someone will come into your life that will love you. You have to believe that, despite the fact that you have this."

Recently a woman proposed to me. A lot of people have said—even my parents, and past lover—"No one will marry you. You are just bloody noisy." But sometimes people will stay with you, be your partner. Your partner has to face a lot of obstacles too; because of the way people look at her because of your condition.

HEALING POWER OF ART

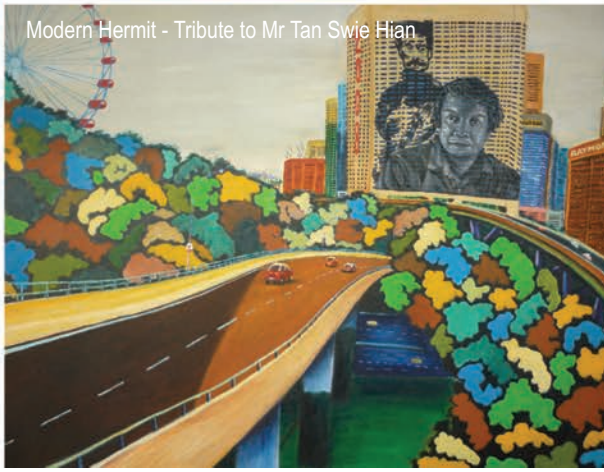
When I'm dancing, I don't jerk at all. I used to jerk when I was painting, but it stopped. A mentor once told

Busy Chinatown



The Stage





me, "When your brush jerks, leave it in the painting." Some people at an artists' residence in Singapore complained I was too noisy and wanted to ask the National Council to make me move out of my studio. But my mentor was quite powerful in art circles and also filthy rich; he had the authority to talk to them and told me, "Don't be frightened by the National Council. Whoever tells you you are shouting and screaming, just tell them it's God screaming and God shouting, not you." That's a good answer.

In the mid-90's, I won a painter of the year award. I would paint almost every day from afternoon until 4 or 5 a.m. The moment when I stopped, I would pray; "God, let me be like a child playing with my toys. Even though it's a brush, it's a color, let me treat it like a toy. Let me have no commercial thinking, realistic thinking, and greediness. Let me take it all the way. Let me paint in peace. Let me believe that my work is all guided by you."

In 1997, I was invited to this very important artist colony called Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs, NY, which is upstate. I believe I was the only artist with Tourette's to be invited. I had no idea this place was so important in the art world. I was given a place to work, live and paint. They wanted to know about me.

I once painted a series that a Singaporean bought. Before the gallery opening, he said: "How many pieces did you paint? I will collect them all; I will support you." That's how I was able to buy a small house for myself.

I just keep painting. It's not easy. After my appendix ruptured during grad school in Australia, I could've died. But I believe God let me live for a reason. I had to have two operations. I felt like the doctor believed it was hopeless. The moment you're in a very dangerous situation, the only "person" who can pull you up is God. I prayed and got cured. Food had been stuck inside my body for seven days. It was very dangerous.

After I got better, my godmother asked me to do some volunteer work with people who have visually conditions. From there I started to gain confidence and was shocked to find they were so happy; so why shouldn't I be happy, despite my condition? I gained strength from them, mingling with them, being their friend and learning their spirits.

And now God has given me a woman who wants to marry me, so I have no complaints. People reject things and call them ugly. Everything can be beautiful if we just say to them that they are beautiful. That can change a mindset. In fact, I'll just live life to the fullest and try my best to create as God calls me to do, praying he'll send the angels, touch my work and bring it to the public. ■

TOURETTE'S SYNDROME

"Don't cuss, call Gus. He will cuss for all of us!" Gus may even be of Nobel descent.

Actually, it's a common misconception that spontaneously blurting out swear words is a prominent feature of Tourette's syndrome. In 1885, Dr. Georges Gilles de la Tourette, a French Neurologist, described the disorder in an 86-year-old noblewoman. A detailed account of the syndrome is available on the website for the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke (ninds.nih.gov)... but here are a few highlights.

Tourette's Syndrome (TS) manifests in early childhood, gets worse into the teenage years, and then begins to improve throughout adulthood in most who are afflicted. It is three or four times more common in males than females, and approximately 200,000 Americans suffer from the most severe form. However, about one in 100 people may have a mild "tic."

Symptoms range from an occasional facial twitch or vocalization, like a barking sound or blurting out an obscene word (coprolalia), to complex bending or twisting motions involving the entire body (simple vs. complex tics). Simple vocal tics may include sniffing or snorting or just clearing the throat. More complex tics may involve movement in several, but a limited number of motor groups and even be combined with a vocal tic; for example, clearing the throat, turning the head and shrugging a shoulder all at once. Many sufferers describe an urge to complete the tic prior to doing so, and this can only be relieved by its completion. Tics are often worse when the person is excited or anxious and better when they are relaxed or asleep, though they are not absent in sleep. They may also be triggered. A tight collar may precipitate a tic involving neck movement, or hearing another person clear his/her throat may precipitate the same in a Tourette's patient with that particular tic.

While tics are involuntary, some people can suppress, control or camouflage their tics temporarily to limit the social disability. However, those who do, usually report a buildup of tension relieved only by an occurrence of their tic. Most individuals with TS also experience some sort of pre-tic sensation just before a tic starts (such as a feeling of flushing or energy in the area), although identifying these warning signs may require some training.

The exact cause of TS is not known, and given its myriad of manifestations, it is likely to involve many and varying brain structures and neurotransmitters. There appears to be a link between TS and other neuropsychiatric disorders such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), both of which occur more frequently in people with TS than in the general population. Diagnosis of TS can sometimes be missed because people with TS (and their families) may not realize that the repetitive actions or vocalizations are tics until someone knowledgeable about the condition points it out or they read about it.

Treatment of TS often involves the combination of medications and specific behavioral therapies. If the tics are mild, do not cause injury and do not cause substantial interference with the individual's educational, social or work performance, then effective treatment with behavioral therapies and without medication may be possible.

A variety of medications are used in the treatment of TS, affecting different brain chemicals. Most medications used for TS were initially developed for other neuropsychiatric or medical conditions, but then secondarily found in research trials to reduce the symptoms of TS. The choice of medication is often guided by whether there are other neuropsychiatric conditions (such as ADHD or OCD) to treat concurrently. Finding the best medication (or medication combination) for a particular individual may require trial of a few different agents, as well as careful adjustment of doses.

Behavioral therapies for TS can greatly reduce the severity and frequency of tic behavior. They should be undertaken with a therapy professional that is both knowledgeable about TS and trained/experienced in conducting the specific type of behavioral therapy being used.

The most thoroughly studied behavioral therapy for TS is Habit Reversal Therapy (HRT). This treatment is divided into two main components: 1) developing tic awareness and 2) creating a competing response. During tic awareness training, people with TS learn to identify all their tics; notice their tics are occurring and become aware of the pre-tic sensations warning them a tic is imminent. During competing response training, people with TS choose (in collaboration with their therapist) a new behavior to implement when they start to feel a tic coming on. The key is to choose a behavior that is incompatible with the tic behavior. For example, if the tic involves shrugging the shoulders, the individual might choose to cross the arms in front of the body. Since the brain cannot initiate two opposite motions at the same time, with practice the new behavior can replace some of the tic behavior.

Another behavioral therapy approach that has recently been developed and studied is Comprehensive Behavioral Intervention for Tics (CBIT). CBIT includes HRT as one component, but also includes strategies such as relaxation training, education about TS for the individual and family (and sometimes others, such as teachers) and assistance in identifying and altering environmental triggers that worsen the tics. For example, if tics are particularly bad in a specific class at school, the therapist might help the individual determine why and develop a plan to reduce the stressor (e.g., discreetly moving the child's seat away from a stressful social group or arranging tutoring if poor academic performance is increasing the tics).

■ ABILITY

by E. Thomas Chappell, MD and Gillian Friedman, MD



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The Jack Mishkin Memorial Golf Classic
The Jack Mishkin Family
The Jack Mishkin Memorial Golf Classic
LIFORNIA
ITED BANK

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

To Find a Cure for Cancer

Everyone can have a role in curing cancer: from patrons, to researchers, to doctors, and even celebrities who lend their faces—and give generous checks—to the cause. At a recent Tower Cancer Research Foundation event, more than 125 players to a swing to benefit the Second Annual Jack Mishkin Memorial Golf Classic. Jack Mishkin was a philanthropist, businessman and an avid golfer whose life was cut short by mesothelioma. He and wife Nancy, the current chairwoman of the Tower board, have helped the foundation raise over $25 million in the last decade.

Here are a series of interviews with some of the participants of this year's tournament, including Nancy Mishkin, actors Kevin Nealon and Donald Faison, and oncologist Solomon Hamburg, MD. They chatted with *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper, Lia Martirosyan and Jeff Charlebois at El Caballero Country Club in Tarzana, CA.

NANCY MISHKIN: NO STRESS

Jeff Charlebois: Do you have anything to do with paralysis research?

Mishkin: Hebrew University is doing unbelievable things. Have you looked them up?

Charlebois: I just sent Chet an article about a trial in England.

Mishkin: I want you to look up Hebrew University and call them. Find out if they're doing some trials, and if you can be in one.

Charlebois: For years I've been reading about rats. I'll be their lab rat.

Mishkin: Well, let me tell you something about rats. My husband died of mesothelioma. It's a cancer you get from asbestos, and it's a death sentence. Most people die right away or 12 to 14 months out. One trial that he was accepted into, it was on phase 2, which means that it's another step towards 4, which is the best… Jack was accepted, and, as it turned out, he got the real McCoy. We were very excited. Then, about seven weeks in, he got pancreatitis. And then he got colonitis. He was in the hospital for a long time. Because he was cramping in the stomach area so badly, they gave him a drug that Crohn's disease patients take. And that drug has rat or mice—whatever they're using from those animals in the drug.

Finally the colonitis got better, the pancreatitis got better, but he was off the trial because it was gonna kill him. And then we found out about another trial back east, because when you have a cancer that kills, you're praying for a miracle. He was accepted to the trial back east, and we were so excited. But two to three days before we were supposed to leave, we found out he couldn't take the trial because he took that particular drug.

Cooper: Almost impossible to know if you've done something to block you from entering a trial.


Nancy Mishkin



Mishkin: Right. I was just talking to one of our doctors, and cancer is cunning and baffling, like a lot of diseases are. Someone can have four or five lymph nodes affected and die, while somebody who has 24 lymph nodes affected, lives. Five people have the exact same tumor, and the drug helps one and not the other four. There's no 'splaining it, there really isn't. I don't know if it's luck or genes.

With about 80 percent of cancers, the immune system gets turned off [and can't fight], that's why we get chemotherapy and all of that, because it helps your body fight the cancer. What we're doing now is looking at drugs and things that activate the immune system so it can help fight.

Charlebois: We need to get immuned.

Mishkin: (*laughs*) Yeah. We have to get that immune system working. I'm involved with a women's group that I founded called the Magnolias. I tell the women all the time, "Listen, guys, it's all about your immune system. It's about trying your best to be calm, identifying when you have those feelings, because those feelings turn off that immune system. And you may have multiple sclerosis (MS) in your system, you may have cancer in your system that kind of lays dormant until something—"

Martirosyan: —triggers it.

Mishkin: Yes, "—that affects the immune system, and that disease is gonna pop up." They look at me kind of funny, and I know it for a fact because stress and anxiety are real killers.

Rachel Schwartz: *(who does PR for the tournament)* And you've survived it as well.

Mishkin: I'm a breast cancer survivor. I think about four or five years prior to having my diagnosis, I had a lot of stress and anxiety. It was family-related, and it went on for about five years. I take everything to heart. It's hard for me not to. Had I dealt with those feelings properly—I'm not saying that I wouldn't have gotten cancer—but maybe my immune system would have been there to fight the cells that were in my system.

Charlebois: I think you're right. Four years ago I was filming a sitcom and had laid out a lot of money for it. I got headaches, and one morning I woke up and half my head was covered in blisters. It was shingles.

Mishkin: I had that before. It's the stress. Interesting story: A group of us went on a cruise with my mother in Russia *(laughs)*. My mom was in the beginnings of not senility, but something wasn't right. And I thought it was unfair for my mom's friend to have to share a room with her. I loved my mom, she was a wonderful lady, but she was a little out there. *(She's since passed away.)*

So I was with her, and it was hard on me. I tried to be very calm. "Come on, Mom," I would say, "let's go eat breakfast." And I'd hold her when she walked and do things to make it pleasant for everyone else and for her to feel all right. But by the fourth day of the cruise, I got these blisters on my face. And there was a doctor on the cruise, this large Russian woman with very short white hair, who was in the military, so she had that military stance, you know?

Charlebois: Was her name Olga?

(laughter)

Mishkin: Yeah! Must have been! But you know, she was a wonderful lady who didn't speak English, but she had that "I'm a doctor" authority.

(laughter)

So I went to see her, and the first thing she said through an interpreter was, "I think you caught a cold on your face," I said, "A cold on my face? It's killing me!" So they decided it was shingles. She was giving me very strong shots in my derriere. The shingles still hurt but not as badly. I could function with bangs and glasses. I don't think my mother was even aware I had gotten shingles. But when we got to Moscow, there was an ambulance waiting for me, and they took me to a fabulous American hospital, where I saw a neurologist, dermatologist and ophthalmologist—because you can lose your sight.

Schwartz: Yeah, it's very dangerous.

Mishkin: And she said the medicine they were giving me was a good thing.

Charlebois: Shingles is the worse thing I've ever had. I was screaming in pain.

Mishkin: Being treated in Russia was an interesting experience, because the doctors come out to the waiting room to get you, and they were lovely. They walked you into their offices. They had old-fashioned instruments. The ophthalmologist opened this wooden box, and all the things were laid out.

Anxiety and stress can do a number. I'm out there preaching about it. A lot of it is maybe just turning around and walking the other way. I don't know what the answer is.

Martirosyan: There is a lot we hear about the correlation of previous dormant illnesses developing into cancer.

Mishkin: There could be a lot of things we're not aware of. We're finding a lot of young girls are coming in with breast cancer, and a triple-negative type, which is a bad, very aggressive cancer, and they're in their 30's. It's alarming.

Charlebois: I think there's a lot to this stress thing; it can lower your immune system.

Mishkin: And inflammation, interestingly enough. When I was at Hebrew University, which I contribute to, I was listening to a whole group of brain scientists. I didn't understand a lot of what they were saying, but the gist of it was that they think we have inflammation in our brain that's causing all these maladies. The doctors there recommended we take an anti-inflammatory every day. He said it's important because inflammation is not healthy and not good for our systems. Who knows? I'm pickled.

Charlebois: You said your husband went through some beginning trials. Are those hard to get into? At one point I'd like to try.

Mishkin: When Jack got sick, there were conference calls like you wouldn't believe. You have to qualify. It's a controlled study, and millions of dollars go into them. The drug companies put in a lot of money to get to that point.

Martirosyan: Are you focused mainly on mesothelioma or melanoma as well?

Mishkin: Everything. Jack took breast cancer drugs, and it slowed the growth.

Martirosyan: So immunotherapy is the latest treatment your researchers have been working on?

Mishkin: Yes, we give support for the research: we give grants. This year we gave out three $100,000 grants and two half-million dollar grants.

My sister had stage-3 colon cancer, and she got pancreatitis and colonitis, or maybe just pancreatitis, and she called me and said, "I can't do any more than two chemotherapies. The pancreatitis is gonna kill me." I started to cry. I was devastated. I called Solomon Hamburg, who's here, who was Jack's doctor, and he said, "You know, we don't know if two is enough, three is enough, or six is enough." As it turns out, two treatments were enough. It's a crapshoot. My sister came through it; she'll be here later today.

Martirosyan: Wonderful for her.

Mishkin: I don't know the answer; but I do know that it'll be found through research.

Charlebois: Will they admit people like me?

Mishkin: First of all, they want anybody who will pass whatever their requirements are, because it's a controlled study. It's like any other kind of study you do. For instance, you can't have smoked for 25 years or been a drinker for 10 years. They're really, really careful with that, because the results are very important. So you have a control group of people who are all very

similar who have the same cancer, and you're using the drug on them, and that's the only way you can get positive results. There are trials going on in Europe. I think they're a little bit ahead of us. Our government doesn't have money, so they're only giving the top 7 percent of applicants' money. That's why it's so important for foundations like ours to raise funds to support studies. We give money to some of these young kids who don't have labs yet. The $100,000 grants are for the young ones, but I feel the young ones are our future.

A $100,000 grant we gave to one of them generated $4 million. I'm not sure if the research was on lymphoma, but we're getting a big return on our money. And our panel of doctors is from all over: UCLA, Cedars… The doctors who reviewed our grants were very impressed this year with the quality of our applicants, and what these kids want to do.

Cooper: Do you fund anywhere?

Mishkin: Just in California, and mostly in this area. But if somebody needs anything from San Diego, we'll certainly take a look at it. But people won't give us money for New York or Ohio. They want it to stay here. We're donor-directed, which means that instead of giving your money to Cedars, which is okay because they need it, but some people want to see what their money is doing. So we will find a trial, if they're interested in any kind of kidney cancer or whatever, we will try to find a trial, we won't take just anyone that comes up, but if there's one that looks promising, we'll go to that. That's how we operate.

So far everybody's been very happy. And some of these young scientists come out when we have events, and they're pleased. We've developing a really nice reputation.

Charlebois: Is the science community good at sharing research and things like that?

Mishkin: Nobody's keeping anything a secret. I get these naysayers who think that [these researchers have] got the answer but don't want to give it out because they're making too much money. I look at these people and say, "Do you think for one minute if somebody had a cure they'd keep it a secret. Why? They'd be trillionaires! Their picture would be on every publication." If it's not them coming out with it, it's certainly somebody working with them, because that's how everybody gets exposed, usually. Bernie Madoff got exposed: everybody gets exposed if they're not doing the work. They're doing what they can. There are so many different kinds of cancers, and we are as different as our signatures.

Charlebois: Would you think that Hebrew University or Israel, in general, is further ahead of us?

Mishkin: I don't know, but I know that they're doing wonderful research, and I think if you're looking, certainly go there, because I do remember some things there. And see what Germany's doing, what Italy's doing…

Cooper: We've been around the world, and they all talk to each other. We're deep into China, and they're talking with the scientists in the US.

Mishkin: Right. I know Jack's doctor was looking everywhere. We would have gone anywhere.

Charlebois: I once read that in Iran, or some country, they were implanting stem cells in the spinal cord or whatever, but some people had died because the stems cells grew tumors. But they said, "We can't corroborate that. We don't have access to those studies. We don't know if it's true. We don't know if they had anybody up walking."

Mishkin: The study may not have been exactly put together with the most complete study guidelines. And most countries are studying different things. Let's say, Italy. If their research is government-subsidized, they're all working on the same thing. That's how we're a little bit different. Listen, researchers don't make a lot of money, and I think any way you can support them is so important. If you're in it for money, you're not going into research.

Charlebois: I just think about all the money the government wastes that could go to these studies.

Mishkin: I can't think about that, because I'll get anxiety *(laughs)*. I just have to keep doing what I'm doing. I'm very passionate about the work. There are so many worthwhile charities and foundations working on diabetes. It's all about what's closest to you. I'm passionate about cancer research. I had it. My husband died from it. So that's what I'm doing. All of us are looking for money. The only way is through research, as far as I'm concerned, the only way. And prayer. There are a lot of miracles out there. I've seen a lot of miracles. But it just so happened that my husband's kind of cancer, everybody who gets it dies of it. When he was first diagnosed, he was given four months, and he lived 15 and a half months. There was no quality in it, because he was going through these terrible trials. The chemo makes you sick, and he was dizzy. I was the cheerleader. But looking back, I wonder if he hadn't done all those things, if the quality of the remainder of his life would have been better.

Cooper: That's always a big question.

Mishkin: We just do the best we can. I so badly wanted Jack to live. He had a real positive outlook. He was a wonderful man. He thought he was going to beat his cancer. My son tried to talk to him [about his prospects] once, and Jack got angry. So we all took on the attitude that he was going to make it, but he didn't.

The other day, I was talking to a young man whose



Kevin (left) speaks closely into the recorder as the helicopter hovers above. Lia (center) nervously hopes we're getting all of this. While Jeff (right) naturally strikes a pose.

father was very ill with pancreatic cancer. He said, "My dad sat down with me and started talking about things." I said, "This is your turning point. When they're ready to talk, they let you know. They've reached a point where they're not doing great. So if you have any questions you want to ask, now is the time, because he's talking."

Charlebois: My second cousin just died. He got cancer when he was 13 or 14, and died at 17. When I would go and see him, and he'd look fantastic, I'd think: "There's no way he's gonna die; everything's gonna work out."

Mishkin: Cancer's a terrible, terrible disease.

Cooper: When I died I was really surprised.

(laughter)

Charlebois: I know a lot about dying. I die on stage once a week.

Schwartz: It's overrated, right?

Mishkin: I don't take anything for granted any more.

Charlebois: There are times when I'm having bad days, and then I catch myself and say, "What are you complaining about? You don't have cancer or this or that. Think of all the blessings that you do have."

Mishkin: You're not gonna die from what you have.

I'm telling you, it's our genes. And there are a lot of miracles. Bad things happen to good people. I know some really jerky people, and they're fine. I don't wish anybody any harm, but I'm telling you, all I know is, the people I meet who have cancer, they're so wonderful, while these jerkos—are walking around.

(laughter)

Charlebois: Speaking of that, I ran into a jerk the other day at the grocery store. The ramp of my van comes down, and I've never had this problem before, but I had some groceries on it, and there was a guy there, and I said to him: "Would you mind giving me a push up the ramp here, it's just a little ramp up to my van." He's like, "I can't do it. If something happens, I don't want to get sued." I should have said, "Look, I'll sign a waiver."

Mishkin: No, you just say, "Push me, 20 bucks."

(laughter)

KEVIN NEALON

Martirosyan: What is your connection with the event today?



Reunited and it feels so good.

Kevin Nealon: Steve DiMarco, who runs Golf On Earth Events, puts these fundraisers together. They'll call, and if it's something I believe in, I'll participate. But I have relatives who've had cancer, who've passed from cancer. We all know somebody who has been affected by it. The disease affects so many people, so I continue to support these types of events to help find a cure. It's fun to come out here and see everybody joining in together for the same cause. They've been making a lot of inroads on finding cures for cancer. It's not necessarily a death sentence any more. It's something I think we can ultimately beat.

Martirosyan: Hopefully. Do you golf?

Nealon: I do.

Martirosyan: Regularly?

Nealon: No. That's why I don't golf that well. But I like to golf. It's one of those sports where I think, "Maybe I could be good at this." Unlike something like football or baseball, which takes more physical endurance.

Martirosyan: What are you competing for?

Nealon: I always compete against myself. I'm always trying to beat myself and be a better player. I do love that they have different incentives on each hole, and some of the holes, like the hole in one, you get whatever, a helicopter.

(helicopter passes overhead, making announcements)

Martirosyan: What are you working on these days?

Nealon: I'm on the road doing stand-up. People can go to my website to see me. I have a film I'm shooting next spring or summer. It's a dark romantic comedy.

Martirosyan: Oh, that'll be fun.

Nealon: It will be. It's gonna be a crowd-funded movie, just like this event today.

(laughter)

Everything is good.

Martirosyan: Can you tell us the name of the movie or is it a secret?

Nealon: Right now it's called *The Pleaser*.

Charlebois: Tell us a little about yourself. That's enough, I'm bored. No. If a train leaves Chicago going 45 miles an hour, and a bus leaves Indianapolis going 40 heading east, when will they intersect?

Nealon: I would take the train, 'cause it's a lot quicker. You save yourself; I don't know how many miles it is. They would intersect probably in Evanston.

Charlebois: I think you're right, if I recall. The math of that is about right.

(laughter)

Martirosyan: How did you meet the Mishkins?

Nealon: I like to keep that a secret.

(laughter)

Martirosyan: Okay, that's good! Let's go with that!

Charlebois: Are you gonna be up at the Ice House any time soon?

(laughter)

Nealon: Is it still there?

Charlebois: No wonder no one's at my shows!

(laughter)

Nealon: Jeff performs out at the Ice House occasionally, when they can't get anybody else. But he likes it out there.

Charlebois: I'm not half the man my sister is.

Nealon: Jeff is a very, very funny comedian… Whoa, I better get in my cart.

Charlebois: Did they team you up?

Nealon: Yeah, they team me up with some donors.

Charlebois: What's your football team?

Nealon: I don't own a football team.

Charlebois: If you were gonna root for a team, which would it be?

Nealon: Probably Green Bay.

Cooper: Jeff and Kevin dated in college.

(laughter)

DONALD FAISON

Martirosyan: So, you play golf?

Donald Faison: Do I play golf? No. I pretend to play golf. I'm far from what you would call a good golfer, how about that?

Martirosyan: I wouldn't know.

Faison: You don't play golf?

Martirosyan: Mini-golf doesn't count, right?

Faison: Yeah, it does. It's great for dates, too.

Martirosyan: Maybe. How did you get connected with the event today?

Faison: My kids' pediatrician, Peter Wallstein, is a member here, and I think he's on the board as well. He invited me. And then Steve DiMarco, does a bunch of golf events, and he was like, "This is the one you've got to show up for, buddy," and I was like, "All right, I'll be there."

Martirosyan: So how have you been doing?

Faison: Today I've been having fun. That's all that really matters.

Martirosyan: Isn't it a competition?

Faison: Yeah, it's a competition, but if you treat it like a competition, you're not gonna have any fun. This is one of those things where you're competing, yes, but for the most part, it's just great to be out in the open air on a Monday with weather like this. It's not too hot and not too cold. It does look like it's gonna rain on us, but we'll see. And if it does, even better—no, not really.

Martirosyan: A little rain is good. We haven't been getting any.

Cooper: Wasn't it in Caddyshack *you went out on the course—*

Faison: —and got struck by lightning—and lived!

(laughter)

And lived! The Reverend, actually, the Father.

Cooper: Yeah, he curses!

Faison: Yeah and gets struck by lightening.

Cooper: So remember that.

Faison: If it starts raining, I'll remember that. Even if it doesn't start raining, I'll remember that.

Cooper: Has cancer affected your life?

Faison: Oh, man, I lost my aunt and my grandma to



Donald and Lia posing with Jeff's half-eaten breakfast.

cancer. It's tough because we all feel invincible, and that can be a quick takedown.

Cooper: Did they die of different types of cancer?

Faison: So far it's been breast cancer. My aunt beat it the first time, but it came back. She had such a horrible experience with chemo the first time that she was like, "I don't want to do chemo again." And she passed away really fast.

Martirosyan: It's monstrous.

Faison: I miss her every day, especially when her birthday comes around.

Charlebois: Are you from out here?

Faison: New York, born and raised.

Charlebois: Do you want to get out of the sunshine?

Martirosyan: A little bit ago he was soaking up the sun.

Faison: And enjoying it.

Cooper: But the sun'll give you cancer.

Faison: Everything will.

Martirosyan: What are you up to these days?

Faison: Enjoying life, man, playing a lot of golf, hangin' out with the family, working here and there.

Cooper: Do you have a handicap? Oh, no, I went there!

*Charlebois: You son of a b*tch.*

Faison: *(laughs)* Mine is a 12. What's yours?

Charlebois: I don't have one! Do you get to play a lot?

Faison: I do. My wife allows me to get out and play. We have two children, and even with that she's like, "Go have fun."

Charlebois: 'Cause I heard you shot a 38 or something, but they weren't sure about what you got on the second hole.

Faison: Well, yeah. I don't know if it was that high.

(laughter)

I'd give myself a 32 on the first hole, but 38! Come on, man, that's just like—that's nuts.

Charlebois: I know, that's crazy.

Cooper: How old are the kids?

Faison: Two and six months.

Cooper: What kind of work do they do?

(laughter)

Faison: I've got the youngest one right now; she's got a lemonade stand going. But it's really crazy, 'cause she can't really talk or hold her body up because she's only six months, so nobody sees her sitting behind the table. But hey.

(laughter)

Cooper: Jeff interviewed Kevin this morning.

Charlebois: Yeah, I know Kevin.

Faison: Nealon? Nice. I hope he can play golf.

Charlebois: I've known Kevin since he was a little girl.

Faison: Right on. Now he's all growed up.

Martirosyan: I have a serious question. Are we gonna have any more Clueless *reunions?*

Faison: We've had a couple of them. I don't know if we'll ever make another one. It would be nice, but I don't think so. That's it.

(taking pictures)

Faison: Make sure you Photoshop the food out.

Cooper: Of your teeth?

Faison: *(laughs)* Yeah, that, too!

SOLOMON HAMBURG, MD

Martirosyan: Where do you do your research?

Solomon Hamburg, MD: We're at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. I'm a medical oncologist there. We have a cancer institute, and I'm a member of Tower Hematology-Oncology Medical Group. There are now 12 of us in that group, and there are another 20 oncologists over at Cedars. We research all types of cancer.

Martirosyan: Do you practice?

Hamburg: Yes, I see patients as well. We do a lot of clinical trials trying to find new drugs for cancer patients that will hopefully help. There've been some exciting advances in the past few years.

Martirosyan: Is your focus mesothelioma?

Hamburg: My particular interest is in that area. We have a million-dollar grant to study mesothelioma. We'll be looking at some of the basic science involved with some of the biology to understand it better. We'll do some clinical trials, and we'll do some screening. There's a population of carpenters and plumbers who've been exposed to a lot of asbestos, so we're gonna be screening people like that as well to see if we can catch the disease early.

Martirosyan: When did you meet the Mishkins?



Hamburg: Oh, I met Nancy and Jack probably 20 years ago. I was fortunate to have them participate in the Tower Cancer Research Foundation, and Nancy took a lead, and then unfortunately Jack came down with mesothelioma, and we cared for him. But they were both very motivated to help do things for this disease.

Martirosyan: It's great what everybody's doing, tough, but necessary.

Hamburg: You're exactly right.

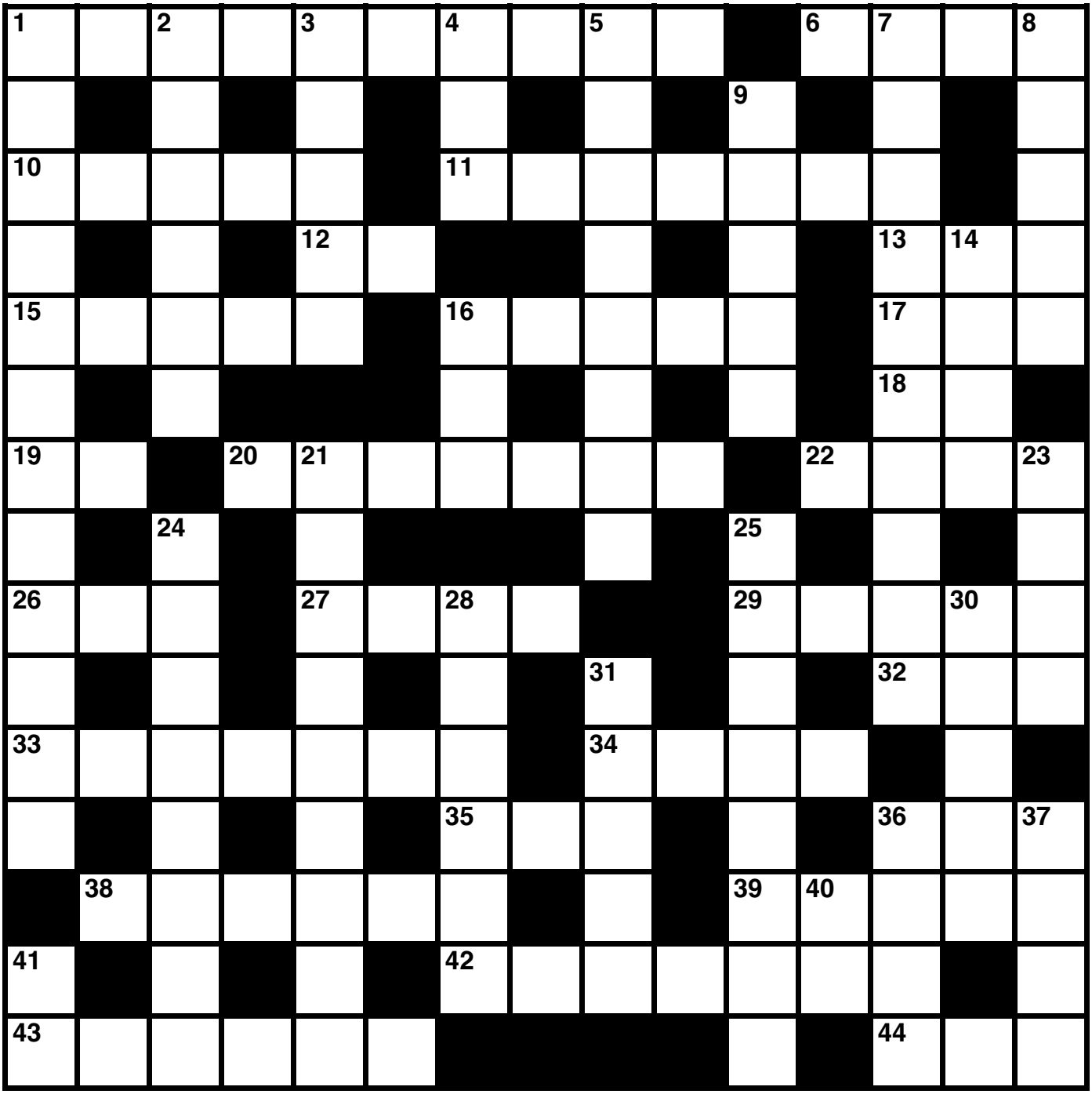
Martirosyan: Are you going to play today?

Hamburg: I'm going to play poorly, as I always do. And I'm hope I don't get people angry with me. If so, I'll duck when the swinging starts.

(laughter) ■ ABILITY

towercancer.org
cedars-sinai.edu
mesotheliomagroup.com
kevinnealon.com

ABILITY's



Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. "All in the Family" producer who has released his memoir, "Even this I get to experience," 2 words
6. Anyone can have one, it's free but you can't see it
10. Symphony composed by Beethoven after he had become completely deaf
11. "The Theory of Everything" was based on his life, _____ Hawking
12. Previous
13. Ending for patriot and magnet
15. They're always advancing
16. Prepare like a Paralympian
17. "I'll stay on the ___, forget about us" by Dawn
18. Either mate
19. Fashionable
20. Silent movies comic
22. Enthralled
26. Hawaiian wreath
27. Long-running PBS science series
29. Tin Man's request
32. Floor vote
33. Cocktail loved by "The Dude" in "The Big Lebowski," White _____
34. Diarist __ Frank
35. Wee devil
36. Moisture on the lawn
38. New smart phone designed for the mobility impaired
39. Medical TV drama or its incorrigible leading character
42. First name of the actor who played "Ironside," the detective in a wheelchair
43. Complete the race
44. It may be lent or bent

DOWN

1. Overcoming breast cancer led to this Orange County artist realizing her painting talents, 2 words
2. Legally blind athlete who represented the US in the 1500 meters at the 2000 Olympic Games, Marla _____
3. Best seller "Angela's ___"
4. Rock's Tex Mex band, ___Lonely Boys
5. Popular Schubert masterpiece, 2 words
7. 18 year old with autism who is an animation guru, 2 words
8. First occupant of the White House
9. Perform exceptionally or sparkle
14. 100% convinced
16. Drafts may be served on it
21. Disadvantages that may lead to exceptional performances
23. Moral obligation
24. Scientific genius who could not speak will he was three and was severely autistic, Albert
25. Although he has no legs, this Chinese man climbed the Five Sacred Mountains and now gives inspiring speeches
28. Founder of L'Arche, a global network of communities for the developmentally disabled, Jean _____
30. Political and athletic contests
31. Song from Pharrell Williams that brought a smile to every one's face
36. "My man!"
37. Men's 1500m Paralympic gold medal winner in the 2013 Paralypic Games, David _____
40. "Bring it __!"
41. Word before only

Crossword Puzzle

answers on page 62

Crossword Puzzle


Body language can tell you all sorts of things.
Like someone is having a stroke.
F
FACE DROOPING
A
ARM WEAKNESS
S
SPEECH DIFFICULTY
T
TIME TO CALL 911
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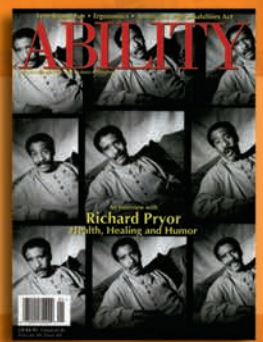
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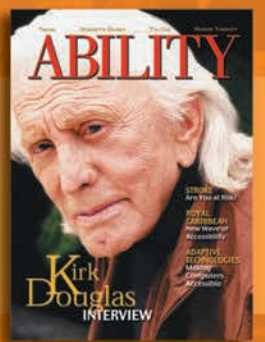
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