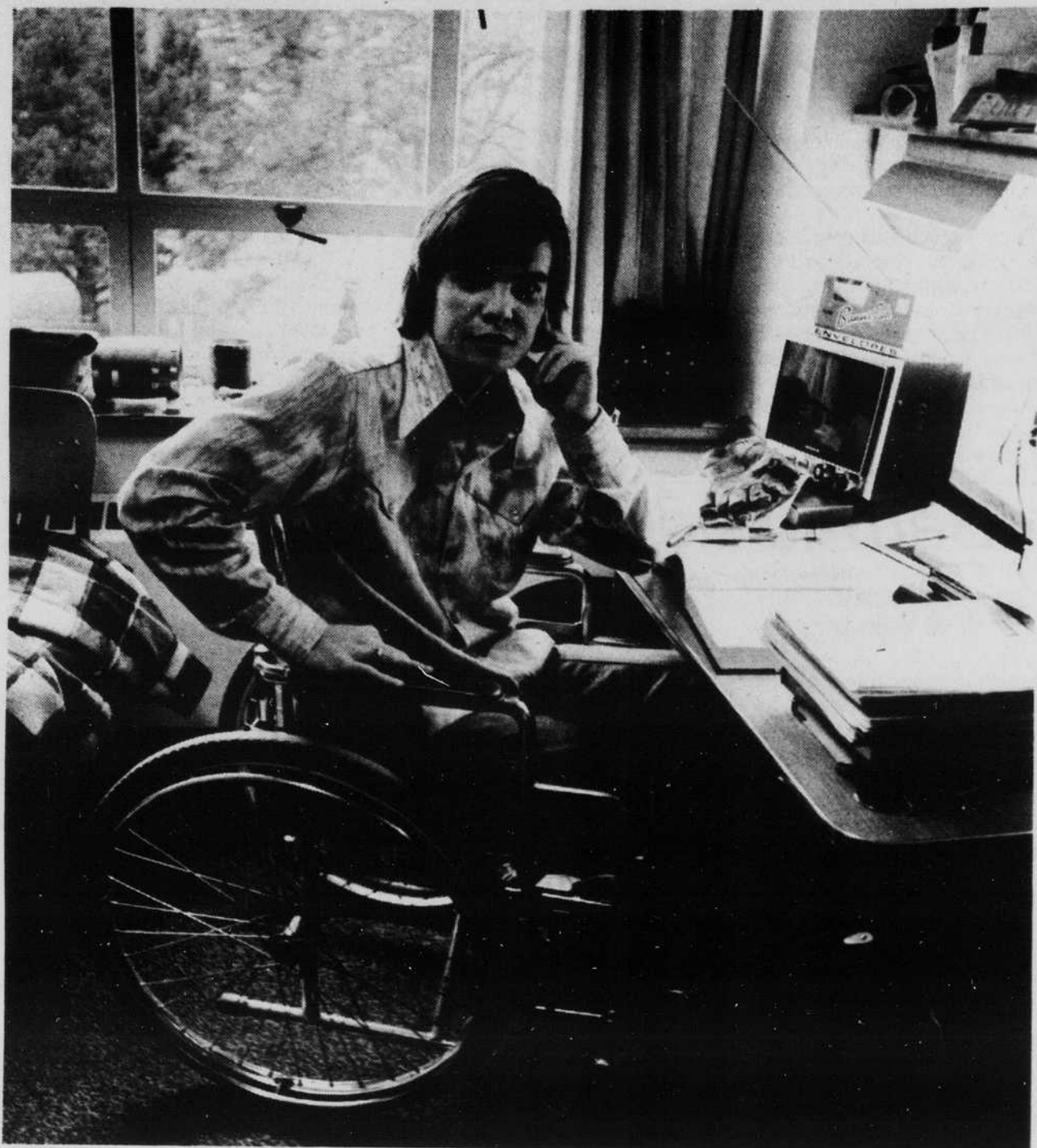




Curt Whitcomb in his dorm room at Carson hall

Photo by John Johns

Wheelchair users say access difficult

By SUSAN RYAN
Of the Emerald

Like all other University students, Curt Whitcomb, Charly Smith and John Curtis have their share of the hassles that come with going to college — the closed classes, uncooperative departments, the miles of bureaucratic red tape — but these three, while they may not beat the educational system, have overcome an obstacle some people would consider insurmountable.

"That's a good example right there," says Curtis as he maneuvers his motorized wheelchair down the uneven ramp into the street. "Instead of making it a curb-cut, they threw down a hunk of asphalt. It's so steep I usually scrape bottom with the chair."

Curtis explains more of the hazards wheelchair people encounter on campus.

"The ramp into Carson was new last year. It's pretty nice since I used to go up the service elevator in the basement, but the last part of the ramp is so steep my chair doesn't always make it up."

Curtis expertly maneuvers between people and chairs and stops at an elevator, where he hits the button.

"It can get pretty hairy during the rush hours," he says. "But you just have to learn how to operate."

Operate is just what John Curtis, a junior from Eagle Point, Ore., has learned to do since a swimming accident seven years ago broke his neck and left him paralyzed from the waist down. Limited use of his hands and arms keeps him dependent on a motorized chair. The chair, in turn,

keeps him dependent on the cooperation of class departments, which he thinks is sometimes less than vigorous.

"A building like Deady Hall," Curtis says, "is virtually inaccessible to wheelchairs, and the math department is very uncooperative about moving any classes to another building." Gerlinger and Villard are also among the inaccessible buildings since they have no elevators but plenty of stairs, he added.

Curt Whitcomb, another "wheelie," transferred to Oregon this year from Boise State. A sophomore, he majors in speech pathology. Whitcomb cites the same problems Curtis does; the need for more elevators and curb-cuts in strategic places.

"I had a class on second floor Gilbert last quarter, and the only thing you can do is get hauled up there. People are cool, but it's a drag asking," he said.

Whitcomb is quite independent, except when it comes to stairs. He stays around campus, but has his own car equipped with hand controls, so can go anywhere whenever he desires.

One thing Whitcomb would like is for people to relax and not get hung up about his being in a wheelchair.

"I'm a person. I wish people would treat the physically and mentally handicapped just like anybody else. We all have the same problems and goals."

Charly Smith, a senior in therapeutic recreation, will be the first to agree with that, as he's used to leaving a little earlier for classes, to follow the trail of the curb-cuts. Among other improvements, Smith says desks should be put in the back of auditorium rooms like 180 PLC and 177 Lawrence, for wheelchair users that stay in the back of the room. Also, ramps to various small buildings like the war barracks that house the gerontology and leisure studies centers would come in handy, he says.

Smith believes Oregon is probably the most barrier-free state in the country when it comes to wheelchairs, but says most of the progress has come since 1970.

"The Oregon Architectural Barriers Council in Salem has really helped in getting things changed," says Smith. "Not only on campus, but in cities, too. They get bills put before the legislature."

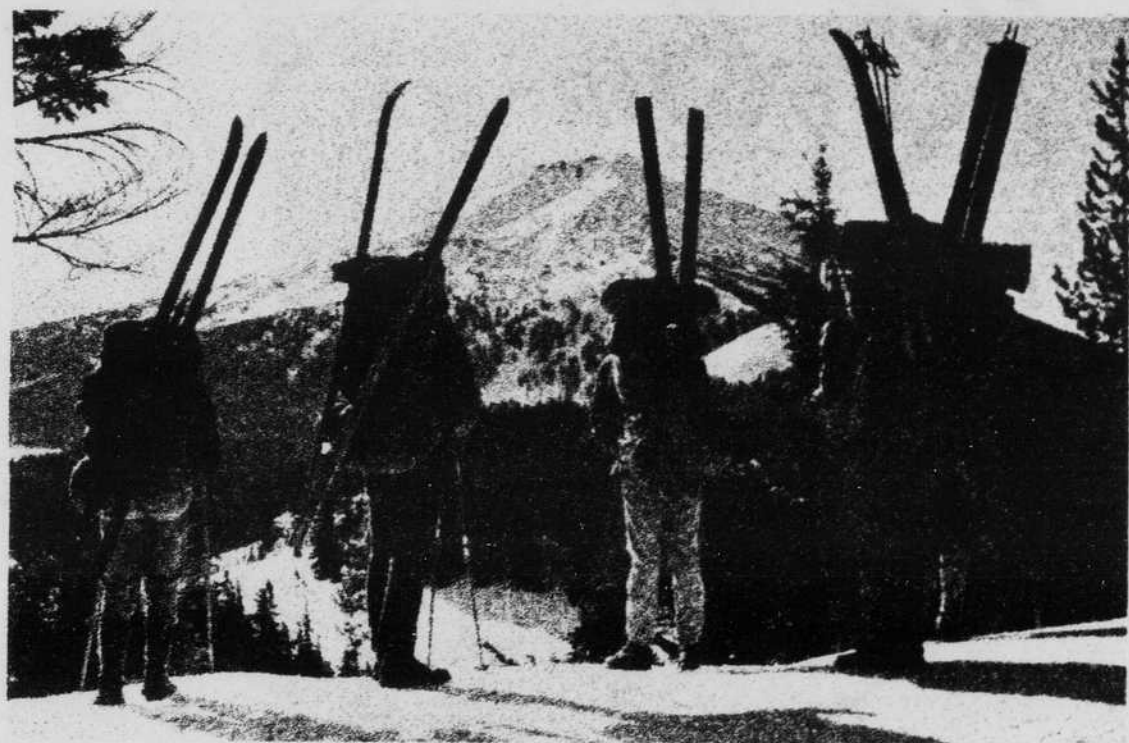
The wheelchair accessibility of the campus has improved remarkably since 1972, when Smith first came to Oregon. Then, the only barrier-free building was PLC. Now, Student Services puts out a "backdoor plan" which contains floorplans of all buildings on campus and labels them "accessible" or "inaccessible."

Smith now helps as a consultant in an architectural barriers class which specializes in designing problem-free, that is barrier-free buildings.

How do people react to people in wheelchairs?

"I've lived long enough with people to expect different reactions," says Smith. "When someone learns I'm not worried about my physical problems, they'll relax. Sometimes I do need help. When people can see that, it's good; they can decide whether to help or not — it's knowing the difference between major barriers and ones that just take me time."

Thursday, January 15, 1976



Challenge Yourself This Winter

Discover new capabilities in yourself as you meet the challenges of traveling and living in the winter wilderness world of Oregon's spectacular Willamette Mountains. It's a world where warm friendships develop around campfires, and the loudest sound is the swish of your cross-country skis sliding along on six inches of untracked powder.

Northwest OUTWARD BOUND School offers 8- and 21-day winter wilderness experiences for women and men 18 and older, January through April. All special equipment and complete instruction in cross-country skiing and winter camping is provided.

C'mon. Challenge yourself. Join us for a totally new experience.

For information: Northwest OUTWARD BOUND School, 3200 Judkins Road, Eugene OR 97403; phone (503) 342-6044.

NAME _____ AGE _____
STREET _____
CITY, STATE _____ ZIP _____

Love is
a Giving
Thing



STENNIS



CARIOCA

Priced
from
\$200

Convenient
Credit
Terms

Give the perfect gift of love. A brilliant, perfect, permanently registered Keepsake diamond. Guaranteed in writing.

Keepsake

Registered Diamond Rings

Fine Watches,
Jewelry & Gifts

Don's Jewelers

Keepsake Corner
Valley River Center