

northwest

Georgena's Journey Continues

Coping with multiple sclerosis is a group effort

by Megan Peura

Georgena Moran is learning how to depend on others. Since being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1998, she has made an extraordinary journey and has learned to adapt to her ever-changing condition.

The debilitating disease has left her in a motorized wheelchair that, according to Moran, doesn't prevent her from being independent and completing the projects she undertakes. With the help of friends, she has turned her woodworking shop into a place that is accessible and easy to use. Moran, who is a lesbian, has learned she doesn't have to work alone.

"I design the project, and they cut the wood for me," said Moran. "I love to create birdhouses and boxes. With their help, I can still do it."

One struggle Moran has had to face is learning that she cannot do everything by herself. "I am no longer able to feed and clothe myself some days," she said. Friends are on call to help. Even though Moran's independence is a priority, she has learned to look at herself in a different way.

"I have had to change the image I have of myself and learn not to let my ego get in the way," she said. "The disease has changed my view of what it means to be independent."

Once active in the community, Moran has not let go of her desire to help others. She talks to

disabled youth about ways to maintain their independence. She has found that those very youth often empower her.

"They have such a unique way of doing things. They make things happen and have such an ability to stay open to the possibilities," she said.

Moran has combined her passion for helping people and the outdoors. "One day I wanted to go hiking and looked on the Internet to see what would be the most accessible for my chair and found not a single Web site that gave some sort of rating," she said.

Moran stumbled upon the Universal Trail Access Process, which rates trails according to how accessible they are. She soon became involved with training people how to use this system and formed a group called Walk n' Roll. She now sits on a committee with Portland Parks, Columbia Scenic Area and Oregon State Parks to help create a Web site to rate the trails in the metro area.

Moran's biggest challenge is finding a way to stay in her house and not have to move to a care facility.

This wish is one of two goals for Georgena's Journey, an organization that raises money on her behalf. A second fund, Keep Georgena in Her Home, has been set up so that alterations can be made to her house.

Moran has reached a point that she will need a full-time caregiver. She wants to convert her garage into a space where the caregiver can live. The campaign aims to raise \$50,000 to cover the costs of the project. "The plumbing alone is estimated to cost \$15,000," friend Anne Bletcher said.

The second goal of Georgena's Journey is to help cover Moran's ongoing medical costs. In 2002, supporters of Georgena's Journey began raising money for her to enter an experimental study at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. According to Bletcher, the dates of the study were changed several times, and eventually Moran was disqualified because she was no longer able to walk. The \$69,000 raised helped pay for her alternative medical costs that the Oregon Health Plan does not cover.

Georgena's Journey continues to build a base of volunteers to assist Moran with home and yard maintenance. Friends have set up an account at U.S. Bank to donate money to the fund. Contributions can also be sent through the Web site. Donations are tax-deductible if checks are written to St. Vincent de Paul with "For Georgena's Journey" written on the memo line.

"The biggest resource is the people who believe in me," said Moran. "There are some days when I didn't think I would be able to do anything, but



Georgena Moran's multiple sclerosis has helped her appreciate her independence.

then someone would be there and ask if I could do it with them."

Even though Moran is learning new ways to adapt to her condition, she also says it has helped her. "Before the disease, I would do everything myself. Now I can't. It has increased the quality of my life, and that's what is important." 19

For more information about GEORGENA'S JOURNEY visit www.georgenasjourney.org.

MEGAN PEURA enjoys studying mass media communications, watching reruns of Dark Shadows and eating chop suey.

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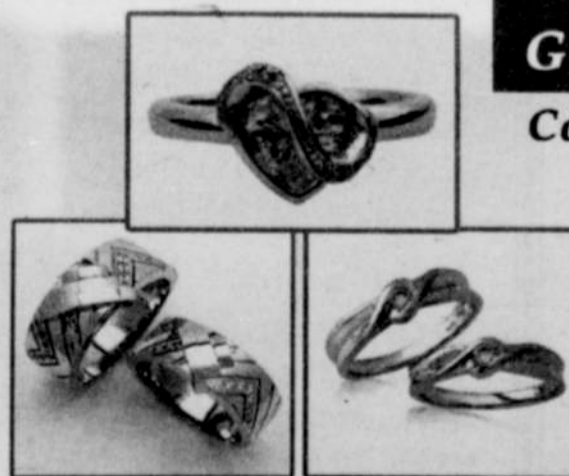
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