

Merry Christmas

Slow down, Laurie McCabe



Laurie walks away from RIO with smile and parents following.

"Slow down," the photographer called to Laurie McCabe as she walked down the ramp outside the Rehabilitation Institute of Oregon (RIO).

Laurie winked as she picked up her pace. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest McCabe, smiled.

Laurie McCabe, slow down? Not now, it feels too good to move again.

Severely injured in a car accident last summer, Laurie entered Good Samaritan's rehabilitation institute in a wheelchair.

"I was told," she said, "that I was a quadriplegic—that both arms and legs were paralyzed. I learned to move my left ankle and left thumb first. Then my right ankle.

"Would I be able to move again. I mean really move. No one could tell me."

Laurie smiled, then continued. "I'm very lucky. Although I fractured three vertebrae in my neck, damage to my spinal cord was not complete."

Laurie was fortunate. But retraining her muscles to move took more than luck. It took three months of hard work and determination.

It took two hours a day in physical therapy. "Initially," her therapist, Mary Edwards says, "Laurie had difficulty sitting up. Her 'up' tolerance was poor because of postural

hypotension (low blood pressure). We worked to improve this tolerance, and gradually the length of time she was able to be 'up' increased."

Then, Miss Edwards says, we began strengthening exercises, a mat work program, and gait training.

"All gains were slow, but steady. The more Laurie was able to move, the more determined she was to move in new ways."

In learning to walk Laurie used parallel bars, then a wide-based quad cane. She also used a narrow-based quad cane and a straight cane before she was able to move on her own. When she left RIO, she could walk a quarter to a half mile without tiring.

She still experiences some weakness, Miss Edwards says, and needs to increase her endurance. So at home Laurie is learning to jog.

It took two to three hours a day in Occupational Therapy, which aims to make patients independent in daily living activities. These activities, therapist Nancy Wirtz says, include self-care, coordination, manual dexterity and homemaking.

"At first, Laurie was dependent in all such activities," Mrs. Wirtz says. "Her arms and hands were very weak. Through exercise we worked to strengthen the muscles in her

arms, hands and fingers, and by the time she left, she was totally independent.

"Changing dominance," the therapist says, "was one of the biggest problems. Although Laurie is right-handed, her strongest hand is now her left. She's still learning to use her left hand for such things as writing, eating and grooming."

Laurie spent her last four days at RIO in the Homemaking Unit. "Many patients live in the small apartment," Mrs. Wirtz says, "before they leave. It's a testing ground to make sure that they can live independently, and that they are safe."

"I couldn't go home on weekends," Laurie explains. "Heppner, Ore., was just too far. So each weekend Pam and Jim picked me up. Their support was so important."

"Actually this whole experience has probably been important. You never appreciate anything until you've lost it."

Laurie jumped in the front seat of the car. In four hours, she'd be home. She looked at the photographer, smiled and "slowly" shut the car door.



Learning to walk again with aid of therapist and quad cane.



Testing herself in the homemaking unit.



Walking, using stronger left arm, and parallel bars.

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