



Keeping Tab

by Terri Kelly Barta

I met a very special young man a couple of weeks ago. His story is on the front page of this week's paper. His name is Joey Wells. He lived in Lisbon for a very short time several years ago. You may have seen him hanging out at Spud's who is a friend of his family.

I only visited with him for a few hours, but he left an indelible mark in my heart. He is one of those people who come into a person's life for a very short period of time, but teach them so much in that short of time.

What struck me the most was his wonderful attitude. He has been confined to a wheelchair since he was a baby. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, he focuses on enjoying life to the fullest degree that he is able to.

Joey has had to do everything from his wheelchair. He learned to play T-ball and other sports in a modified version from his chair. He plays hard and he plays fair. His favorite sport now at the age of 21 is wheelchair soccer. He was named most valuable player in that sport.

His favorite topic is women. He enjoys teasing them and hanging out with them. He is a romantic at heart. Like most young men his age he dreams of someday having a wife and children.

Joey's focus is almost always on the positives in his life. For instance, he only has to be hooked to a respirator at night. In the daytime he is free to visit with friends, work on three books, one which will be published shortly, play soccer, and look for that special woman.

His sense of humor includes poking fun at himself and others in his family. But make no mistake, he is cognizant of who he is and comfortable in his own skin. He believes in himself and what he intends to accomplish.

His philosophy on life will inspire others. In his writings, he speaks from his heart and from his life experiences.

I was impressed with his directness, his approach to his physically-challenging life, and his determination to live life fully until he dies, no matter how long that is. His special talent in my mind is his wonderful sense of humor, which, as I got to know him in the interview process, was a lot of fun. Best of luck to you, Joey, in your promising future. I have no doubt you will accomplish your goals with determination.

I had only met one other person in my lifetime with one of the many diseases encompassed under the title muscular dystrophy. He was the son of Jerry and Mary Schneider, Gwinner, who had SMA. He was less than two years old and was also confined to a wheelchair. Sadly, he died when he was 18 months old. What struck my heart that time was he was a normal child with a sweet smile who was trapped in a body that wouldn't cooperate with him. He loved Barney, the purple dinosaur. In his short little life he inspired others to goodness. Matt and Chris Howell and a few of their friends went around collecting money so they could purchase a huge Barney that they had seen. These kids were about ages 6-10. They accomplished their goal and gave the Barney to this little Schneider boy. At their young ages they were inspired to put a smile on this little boy's face. I will always carry that memory in my heart and though I cannot remember the youngest Schneider's name (Nathan comes to this failing mind, but I don't think that is it), I can see his precious face and wisps of reddish hair to this day.

He was very sweet