

RAINBOW CLIENT

Jonathan Spencer - interviews with Rainbow

Interview with **Jonathan Spencer & Jenny D'Angela**, Rainbow Case Manager

By Kimberly Paetzold, *Vision's Editor*

Jonathan Spencer (Jon) is witty and friendly. Just a little over 4 years ago, he was involved in a motor vehicle accident on December 11, 2000. Jon suffered a cardiac arrest at the scene of the accident, lost consciousness, and spent 6 months in intensive hospital rehabilitation. He was admitted to Rainbow with a TBI, anoxic brain injury, a basilar skull fracture, and a right thoracic spinal process fracture.

Jon has come a long way since his admission to Rainbow in May of 2001. Jenny D'Angela, his Rainbow case manager, stated that Jon has progressed nicely from phase to phase. He started out in the residential program, graduated to home, and now comes to Rainbow for outpatient treatment. He's out of the active rehabilitation phase and is focusing on fitness, maintaining his therapy gains and vocational programing.

When Jon and Jenny came to my office for this interview, Jon was bright and cheerful. Before I could even begin, he told me about his most recent achievement: He has been working with a nutritionist referred by his doctor for the past 2 months, so I asked him about this...

Jon, how long have you been seeing a nutritionist?

I have been seeing her for about 2 months and I've lost quite a bit of weight. I've been trying to drink more water, only diet pop. Either Diet Coke or Mountain Dew. It's hard to find Diet Mountain Dew.

I understand that you are actively working. Can you tell me about that?

I'm working at RipCo with Don Daniels. I've been there for 3 or 4 months. This is the 3rd time that I've worked at RipCo – I've done this type of work before,

but I (previously) decided to quit. That was stupid on my part, and now I'm trying to go back. Not that I'm trying to brag about myself, but I think I've grown quite a bit since the last time I worked for RipCo.

Before you were admitted into Rainbow's program, where were you?

A long time ago, I came from my mother (laugh). No, before my accident I was living with my pastor. At the time of my accident, I was on my way to work, training to be a cook at Bob Evans. (The restaurant) was scheduled to open the week I was in my accident; previously I worked at Denny's and quite a few other restaurants.

(Right after the accident) I went to the hospital for 6 months and then came to Rainbow. The accident happened 10 days, get this, 10 days before my 19th birthday – so no Canada drinking for me! I was disappointed about that for a long time.

Right now I live with my Aunt Kathleen and Arlene, a family friend.

You were trained to be a chef. Do you still cook?

Somewhat. Not as much as I would like to, but that's because I can't walk like you. I'm looking for work that I can do sitting down. Um, Um, another thing I have been working on, in speech therapy, is to try and stop saying **UM** as much as I do (laugh). But, as you can see that hasn't worked.

Your case manager, Jenny, mentioned that you like to work things out on your own. In her words, "Jon will try things for a while, get frustrated, and then takes time



Jon working out
at Rainbow's
Fitness Center

to absorb it. When Jon finally makes the decision to do it – then it sticks." Jon, is Jenny right?

It takes me forever to do something that others want from me, but when I finally work on it and realize I want it – it WORKS! I have an accomplishment I would like to tell you about; in 3 more days it will be 3 months since I had my last cigarette. I wasn't smoking all the time, because my therapists kept telling me not to, and now I have given it up.

I noticed you have been meeting with a literacy tutor, Ben Kerner, from the Ypsilanti Public Library. Can you tell me about that?

I'm in the Washtenaw literacy program. I meet with my tutor once a week, here at the (Rainbow Treatment) Center, for about an hour. He helps me learn how to read better.

Jenny mentioned your reading has substantially improved. At visits to the restaurant, she said you can read the whole menu.

Well, that's because it's food! You've got to remember I could never read that well, but I was a cook before my accident!

What would you like to share about yourself with others who also are struggling with a brain injury?

To all the ladies – I'm tall and good-looking (Ha-ha)!

No, I get frustrated a lot with my injury. But I think about one of my first therapists. I see him in the back of my head, or rather more in the middle of my head (laugh). Anyway, he's up there somewhere! I hear

him telling me to KEEP GOING – DON'T GIVE UP. That's what helps me.

Do you have any hobbies?

I get on my computer a lot. I like to surf the net. I am single and would like to meet somebody. I did go to my church singles group with a friend, but I don't want to go anymore by myself since my friend quit. I like tattoos and am active in my church. Last year I was in the BIA (Brain Injury Association) walkathon. This year I would like to get some BIA bracelets and sell them, because I'm pretty sure I could get people to buy them. They would buy them because I'm so sweet (laugh).

Do you have any special accomplishments you would like to share?

I'm in school right now, and I was considering quitting and not going back. After the Christmas break, I thought about it and decided that it would be quite an accomplishment to finish my G.E.D. after my brain injury. All the work that has gone into trying to get back to normal, a G.E.D. would be a great accomplishment. I want to quit, but I'm not going to.

Do you have anymore comments before we wrap up this interview?

Yes. I was in a group called IADL (Instrumental Activities of Daily Living) and

we had a meeting with Buzz Wilson, the owner of Rainbow. That was kind-of cool. We had 2 or 3 questions for Buzz, and later I saw him at the company picnic. I was able to start a conversation with him and every time I see him now, I do the same thing. It is really neat. I am able to talk to the man that started the whole thing (Rainbow) and owns it.

I am not happy with the fact that I have a brain injury, but I'm finally dealing with it. Heck Yea, I am proud of my injury! I SURVIVED! ♦