

Summer 2005

RAINBOW ALUMNI

Jeffrey Newland

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Jeffrey Newland (right)
with his wife
Brenda (left)

Both Jeff and Brenda Newland (husband and wife) were employed at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital (SJM) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Jeff worked in the Engineering Department as a Computer Systems Expert and enjoyed reading science fiction and debating. Prior to being employed at SJM, Jeff was an engineer on a nuclear submarine and spent 15 years in the Navy.

In May of 2003, the couple took a vacation on the East Coast. While driving, their car was hit by a truck. Jeff sustained a traumatic brain injury with multiple fractures throughout his body. Initially, both he and his wife were treated in a local hospital and according to Brenda, their families flew to Washington D.C. to see them. She stated, *"They all went to see us at the hospital. We had no car and no clothes, and Jeff was in terrible shape. I was never so happy to see somebody in my whole life. The incident was really hard – Nothing can prepare you and you don't know what the next step is."*

After receiving treatment in Washington, Jeff was airlifted to St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital on June 19th, 2003 where he remained until his admission to Rainbow. Before selecting a rehabilitation facility, Brenda visited a few places. In her words, she noted, *"The thing that impressed us about Rainbow was that we walked in and everybody was busy. We went to other places and at 2 in the afternoon, there was nothing going on. Nobody was in therapy. Right then and there we decided those places were not for Jeff. At Rainbow we never had to worry – They had good quality people, and I knew I made the right decision."*

On October 6, 2003, Jeff was admitted into Rainbow's Residential Program. At the time he had significant limitations; the doctors said he had a 5% chance to be able

to speak again. But with therapy and a lot of determination, Jeff was able to go from a wheelchair to using a walker and regained his ability to speak. His therapy sessions at Rainbow included: Occupational, physical and speech therapy sessions along with recreational and vocational groups including: Fitness, woodshop, aquatics, greenhouse and a social group. Brenda said she was impressed with the Rainbow staff. She commented, *"While Jeff was at Rainbow, if he encountered any problems the staff was very responsive. If I had questions or if there was a problem, they were on it right away. They included me in the treatment process, helped me with insurance issues and informed me of any problems without hesitation."*

After making significant rehabilitation gains, Jeff was discharged from Rainbow's Residential Program in August of 2004 and went home to live with his wife. He still attends therapy sessions at SJM and volunteers at the hospital for small jobs related to his previous engineering position. Many individuals who experience a brain injury have difficulties being motivated, but Jeff was determined to get better. According to his wife, *"Jeff accepted his accident and the problems that ensued. He had dignity, persistence, and was able to follow directions. That helped him do what he had to do. It was a side of my husband that I never saw before the accident. I remember speaking with a Rainbow therapist who told me about Jeff's determination. He said that Jeff would follow through on all therapies, no matter what, and that's the way he approached the whole process. Maybe it was the 15 years of military training in the Navy that served him so well."*

One of Jeff's major goals is to return to work. He is fortunate to be able to volunteer at his old place of employment. One of the consequences individuals with brain injuries face is finding something meaningful to do everyday. It's something most people take for granted, but returning to the work place is a big step in the recovery process.

When we asked Brenda what she would like say to families going through similar situations, her response was, *"I don't know where we are going to end up. Just when I think Jeff won't be able to do something, then all of a sudden he can do it. Like this goal he has to go back to work. I try not to get a false hope, but he does go to the hospital as a volunteer and remembers many engineering tasks. Where does that come from? I don't know – but there are things Jeff has forgotten and some may never come back; but miracles do happen and they happen everyday. The doctors gave him a 5% chance of speaking again and he beat it."*

I see a lot at the hospital (St. Joseph's) and the Rainbow facility, and I don't think people realize how much dignity these people have – facing what they do everyday. It's admirable.

Something you realize quickly; if you look at recovery on an every day basis it looks like you get nowhere. But look back over a year – at that time, Jeff was in a wheelchair and living at Rainbow. Now he's at home walking and getting more independent everyday. It's kind of like losing weight. If you just look at daily progress, it's hard. But look back over weeks or months and that's what helps you to keep going. It's then that I realize how far we have come. It's a long, long road, but there is HOPE! Don't give up." ♦