



# E-NEWSLETTER

## July News

### A Step by Step Quest to Declare My Independence

by Shawn Dean



*For most Americans the Fourth of July invokes thoughts of fun, sun, heat, fireworks, cold drinks, grilling with friends and family, etc. But what sometimes gets lost in the mix is that the day commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the nation forming document created by a group of men who cherished their independence from the King of England so much that they declared that they were their own independent states.*

By analogy I tend to cherish my personal independence similarly. But when you are a spinal cord injury quadriplegic like me who heavily depends on personal care attendants, accommodations, disability services, and things of that nature to live my daily life then realizing my full independence is elusive. Rather, in my world achieving independence is something that I've gained more of bit by bit as the years have gone by, best signified by a carrot perpetually dangling just out of my reach on a stick rather than a flag planted firmly in the ground. I am very independent for a quad, but I always crave to be much more so, and therein lays the rub.

So staying within the spirit of July 4th I thought that I would offer up a few examples of what have been important personally historic steps to me becoming more and more independent as a person with a disability over the past fifteen years since my paralyzing diving accident:

**Moving into my new room:** At the time of my SCI my bedroom was in our inaccessible basement, so while I was in rehab my parents broke ground on a new, fully accessible addition to our house that would become my new room. While construction continued for about three months after my discharge from rehab I was forced to sleep in my parent's bedroom. When I could finally move into my room it was awesome to have my own space again which included my bed, bathroom, desk, and private ramped entrance to the garage. It was like an apartment that allowed me to come and go as I pleased. It felt like my independence increased tenfold after I moved in there.

**Driving my van:** Around April 1997 we got a minivan with a fold out ramp and fitted with hand controls. Not only did that mean that doing very annoying car transfers every time I ventured out were a thing of the past, but I could drive myself wherever I wanted to boot. My van and my wheelchair are by far and away my primary outlets to the world. Getting my own wheels was the biggest step to increasing my overall independence.

### A Very Special Day at the Races: Quality Time with the Stars of Motorsports



*"This is the third car I've driven today", boasted 3-year old Mathias S. as IndyCar driver Alex Tagliani gently lifted him from his tiny walker and into the cockpit for a photo op. "Do you have a smaller helmet?"*

Over 50 guests, including Mathias and his dad (Tony), joined us on June 18 for our Day at the Races Milwaukee Mile. Nobody really got to drive a racecar – except in the imagination of a precocious 3-year old, but they all had a great time.

We welcomed guests from the Spina Bifida Association of Wisconsin, the Des Moines VA; Froedtert Hospital and a Wisconsin Renegades quad rugby player.

To start the day, Kody Kohlman led an informative garage tour highlighted by a hearty group "shout out to the troops" via internet radio with Steve Tomaszewski of The Soldiers Family blog talk radio program. The tour also included an exclusive trip through the pits to watch the IndyCars practice on the track just a few feet away. *Did you know that an IndyCar at speed can travel the length of a football field in one second?*

Our next stop was the Andretti Autosport hospitality tent for a tasty lunch. Sam Schmidt Motorsports' IndyLights drivers Esteban Guerrieri, Josef Newgarden, Bryan Clausen and Victor Carbone came by to autograph hero cards and pose for photos before heading off to a public autograph session. After lunch Sam Schmidt told his personal story, stressing the importance of going after what you want most in life, no matter what obstacles are in the way.

Trevor Mitchenor, a longtime friend of the Sam Schmidt Paralysis Foundation, offered a tour of the USF2000 garages where we met upcoming racing stars including Wayne Boyde, Luca Forgeois, Shannon McIntosh and Timmy Megenbier.

Later in the afternoon, our guests also had a rare opportunity to visit the IndyCar Series tech inspection area and talk with the tech crew, followed by a stop at the Sam Schmidt Motorsports IndyCar transport, where the team's IndyCar driver Alex Tagliani posed for photos and signed autographs.

Eagle-eyed race fans among us spotted chances to ask for autographs from IndyCar drivers including Pippa Mann, Sebastian Saavedra, Alex Lloyd and several more. While only the smallest kids in our group could be lifted into racecars for photos, teenager Nick actually scored a coveted autograph from 3-time Indy 500 winner Johnny "Lone Star J.R." Rutherford himself.

Our Day at the Races Milwaukee Mile would not have been possible without the generosity of these sponsors: Andretti Autosport, United Medical Providers, Firestone, Stem Cell Action, New Mobility, the Milwaukee Mile/Milwaukee 225 and Avocado Motorsports Marketing.

Thank you for all your support and for making our Day at the Races Milwaukee Mile such a memorable event for everyone!

To view photos of this event, click [here](#).

### Accessible International Destinations

Switching to my power wheelchair: When I started college in 1997 I made the switch to using my power wheelchair full time. I remember feeling really hesitant and conflicted by it because using my power chair made me feel lazy since I was fully capable of wheeling myself around in my manual chair. But as my very awesome physical therapist at Craig Hospital in Denver (an ex-NAVY S.E.A.L.) put it, I would be "kicking my own ass" wheeling myself around campus if I didn't have a power chair. I look back on that hesitancy now and shake my head because my power chair gives me much more independent access to the world than my manual chair ever could.

My first solo "road trip": In the fall of 1997 I felt cooped up at home one night and decided to go for a drive. I had no destination in mind; I just got behind the wheel and went. About twenty-five minutes later I showed up at our old lake cabin, where I knew that my dad and our neighbor were sitting by the fire. It didn't seem like a big deal to me but showing up unexpectedly like that shocked them because it was the first time that I had done anything on my own like that post-SCI and it ended up leaving a big impact. It signified that between my power chair and my van I had the independence to go wherever I wanted whenever I wanted to.

My first solo shopping mission: Going shopping at the mall is no big deal for me now, but once upon a time I never went shopping without assistance. The first time that I went to the mall by myself to buy my sister a birthday gift and went into a bookstore, pulled a book off the shelf, paid at the counter, and got my change and shopping bag back without dropping them was a big deal for me. It meant that I didn't have to wait to shop until someone could go with me.

Moving to Minneapolis: When I moved to Minneapolis, MN from Eau Claire, WI it not only meant moving to a much bigger city but it meant that I was moving away from home for the first time. I went from a very insulated lifestyle surrounded by family at home to living completely by myself. When I moved into my very own accessible apartment the plan was to get a roommate that was a live-in PCA. When that fell through I decided to give it a go without one, and save for a few hours of PCA assistance every morning I've lived alone for seven and a half years now.

The first time I bought milk by myself: This may seem like a strange one but when I lived at home I never had a need to buy milk because there always seemed to be some in the fridge. Even after I moved into my apartment I timed most of my grocery trips around visits home so my mom could help me out, often getting a few gallons of milk at a time so I could stretch out my milk use until the next time I had shopping assistance. Or I would give my PCA money and she would buy it for me. The first time that I went to a grocery store after my law school classes to buy milk on my own felt like a big breakthrough for my independence. It was a gateway purchase that would soon lead to me doing quite a bit of my own grocery shopping without waiting for assistance. Now I'm not sure why buying milk by myself seven years ago was a big deal, but it was at the time.

Taking myself to the emergency room: Within the first month after I moved into my apartment I cut my pinky on a pizza slicer. When I couldn't get the bleeding to stop I bandaged it as best as I could with my quad hands and drove myself to the emergency room where they gave me four stitches. Nothing makes you feel independent quite like taking yourself to the ER around 10 pm in a big city.

So although as long as I am a wheelchair using quad I probably won't be able to declare my outright independence, but by the same token the key is to keep chipping away and discovering inroads towards that ultimate goal. It's an ongoing learning process and almost every month I figure out something new that gives me an extra independence boost. Sometimes they're little things but they provide an opportunity to improve my lifestyle nonetheless. Let independence rule!

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To read *EasyStand* blog, click [here](#).  
To read Shawn Dean's blog, "One Man's Access", click [here](#).

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## Gettin' It Done: A Need for Speed

Guts and (the Pursuit of) Glory: Danny Pollock



Whether it's a day trip or a long excursion, looking to explore or unwind, traveling in a wheelchair requires advanced planning.

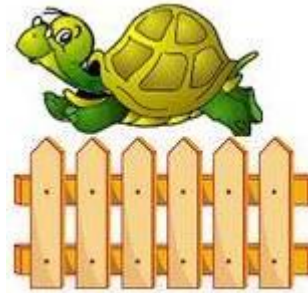
The website, [www.wheelchairtraveling.com](http://www.wheelchairtraveling.com) exists to give the person in a wheelchair the tools to plan his or her adventure accordingly.

People can also register on the site to share their favorite travel destinations or create their own list of places to see.

Find [wheelchairtraveling.com](http://wheelchairtraveling.com) on Facebook and Twitter to get updates when a new destination is added.

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### Turtle on a Fencepost



"If you happen to see a turtle on a fencepost, he didn't get there by himself."

Finding a cure for spinal cord injury and paralysis isn't going to happen by magic. The Sam Schmidt Paralysis Foundation is leading the charge to a cure. Success will depend on the combined efforts of researchers around the world and the support of every person who becomes involved by making a donation to the cause.

For more information or to make a donation, visit our website at [www.samschmidt.org](http://www.samschmidt.org). You can also find us on Facebook.

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### 2011 Schedule of Events

The Sam Schmidt Paralysis Foundation has a very busy schedule in 2011, which includes several Day at the Races quality of life events, Run, Walk 'N Wheelathon fundraisers, local fundraisers, the annual May Gala and the annual Racing to Recovery Golf Tournament.

To view the entire schedule, click [here](#). The schedule will be updated as further information becomes available.



The dictionary defines

"courage" as the ability to face danger, difficulty, or pain without being overcome by fear or being deflected from a chosen course of action. In other words, "guts".

Danny Pollock, from Bainbridge, Indiana, drives a [sprint car](#). By definition, Danny has guts. He happens to be paralyzed from the chest down.

In 2001, go-kart racer Danny Pollock was moving up to the sprint car level when he was severely injured in a recreational ATV accident. After some time at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, the famed facility known for treating injured racers, he moved on to the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana (RHI), where he met Sam Schmidt. The uniquely skilled staff at those two medical facilities repaired the physical damage as much as possible and prepared Danny for life in a wheelchair. Sam inspired him to pursue his dream. Says Danny, "he told me to never give up and do as much as you can and you will succeed in what you want from life. If Sam can run an IndyCar team with no legs or hands I can do a lot even though I'm paralyzed from the chest down."

What sets Danny apart from the hundreds of other sprint car drivers out there chasing the dream is that Danny does it on almost no budget, and he does it using hand controls.

The cockpit of a modern sprint car is a confining space. The driver sits bolt upright within the car's narrow frame rails, surrounded by the roll cage, and strapped tightly into a seat that holds the driver on all sides. Just climbing into his race car is a unique challenge for Danny, but worth the struggle. "I was reborn in 2003 the first time I got back in the race car. I felt like I just came back alive again."

Utilizing rods, cables and hydraulic cylinders, and after a lot of trial and error, a team from the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology was able to design and build a workable system of hand controls for a sprint car. Danny says, "I squeeze the gas when I need to and I squeeze the brake when I have to. It's a handful."

Danny Pollock has the guts and initiative to follow his dream of racing sprint cars. His greatest challenge is not his physical limitations – he doesn't believe in those. His greatest challenge is finding enough financial backing to race.

"Racing is what I love. Nothing more. Just gotta race. If I can't do that, I don't know what I would do. I'd just sit at home. No, I can't do that. That won't work. Not for me at least, says Danny. No wonder he and Sam Schmidt found they had a lot in common!

While he relentlessly pursues financial backing to continue racing, word of Danny's accomplishments as a sprint car driver who uses hand controls has spread far and wide. He has become an authority on hand controls and vehicle modifications to accommodate disabilities. He consults by email with people around the world who seek his advice. One of those is Mark Dowdy, billed as America's first paralyzed [late model](#) race car driver.

Racers traditionally offer hero cards to fans, showing the driver's accomplishments and sponsor information. Danny gets requests for hero cards from as far away as Australia. By example, he inspires anyone in a wheelchair to never give up. In the words of [thunder roadster](#) racer Ray Elliott, "Danny is a one in a million type of person who is willing to help anyone. Danny is the type of person this world needs a lot more of."

For more information about Danny Pollock racing a sprint car with hand controls, visit his website at [www.dannypollock.com](http://www.dannypollock.com).



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[www.samschmidt.org](http://www.samschmidt.org)

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