

Courageous Lincoln woman turns tragedy



Elaine Skucius lifts weights, as she works out at her weekday physical therapy sessions. The weights build upper body strength.



Elaine uses tongs to grasp objects.

Dec. 22, 1979, began as a beautiful winter day. Something was quite different about it: little snow was on the ground, but some ice had formed on streets and highways. On this day the life of Elaine Skucius was changed drastically.

She was driving to her family's farm for a Christmas holiday when her car hit a patch of ice, causing an accident that left her immobile and temporarily paralyzed from her waist down. Once very active, this career woman became confined to a wheelchair. Her friends, however, describe her as determined, courageous, and one who never gave up.

Elaine confides that her determination has wavered at times. A positive influence in her life is her therapist, Burdie Thrapp, who has become a close friend. Burdie meets with Elaine five days a week for therapy sessions, but the relationship doesn't stop there. Elaine and Burdie, with another therapist and a wheelchair friend, call themselves the "Fantastic Four." Each owns a t-shirt which proclaims the name. They go to breakfast and movies together, and last fall traveled to Kansas City, Mo.

That was an accomplishment for Elaine. Since her accident she has slept in hospital beds, even at her own home. One of the most frustrating parts of the trip to Kansas City was the search for places with wheelchair ramps.

Nevertheless, the Fantastic Four enjoyed the three-day weekend of shopping, sightseeing and dining.

Elaine also spent a week at her sister's home in Albuquerque, N.M., last month. Although her mother and a niece were along to help, this was a challenge as it involved traveling by plane. Elaine's costly wheelchair was nearly lost at one of the airports. The "thief" was a little old lady who was tired of walking and assumed that the wheelchair was one of the airport's services.

Between trips, Elaine keeps busy with her volunteer work with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Service.

One of Elaine's major interests is the League of Human Dignity, for which she is a member of the advisory board. This organization uses special funds to develop independent living centers among other services for the handicapped. The league offers a publication that lists businesses and areas which are accessible to the handicapped.

"In many respects, I think that Lincoln is ahead of many areas in services for the handicapped," she says. "I think the Handivan bus service in Lincoln is superior," says Elaine. This

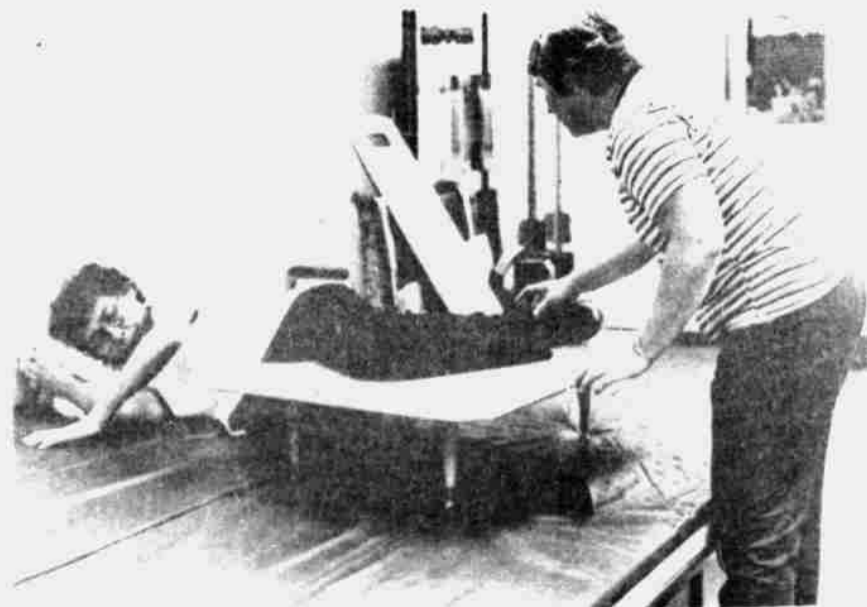
Elaine lives in her own home, a Lake Park condominium. Her apartment is on the ground level and a concrete ramp leads from her front door to the street. She has redesigned the interior so that she can perform her activities from the wheelchair. Several doors were widened, and her desk, sink and stove top were built to accommodate her wheelchair.

Although her niece, Myrna, lives with her, Elaine is an independent person. Her determination is the key to her progress. Those who know Elaine agree that she has accomplished much since that tragic day in 1979.

Photos and Story by Kathy Graff



Burdie Thrapp stands by as Elaine pulls herself up on hands and knees to improve her trunk control and balance.



Physical therapist Burdie Thrapp helps Elaine with an exercise, using a powder board.