



Allen Schaben/Daily Nebraskan

Randy May, a sophomore political science major, whirs across campus on a motorized cart with a greeting for all passers-by.

'I am at my best here.'

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and numbers. The board rests on the arms of a chair.

Grandparents, parents, a sister and brother, professors, employees at the University Health Center and at the Handicapped Center for Students, aides and friends are among those which Randy gives credit to for his success at UNL.

But he also gives himself credit. "Let me assert something," he says. "I have to attribute my success to me because I have brought myself a long way because no one thought I could make it here."

When Randy first suggested going to UNL his parents forbade it.

Randy says he thinks his parents forbade him simply out of their own fear for his safety.

And Randy had attended the University of Arkansas for a short time after high school. Conflicts with aides and lack of support for the handicapped forced Randy to drop out.

But after he visited Lincoln's campus, Randy decided he would attend the school.

"Yes," he says. "I knew the odds were against me, but I always have the faith to give it a try."

Randy's achievements during high school in Silom Springs should have left people with little doubt about his intellectual abilities.

In a class of 400, Randy graduated near the top and was a member of the National Honor Society.

"People were always amazed that I made it through junior high and high school," he says.

Randy says he also knew he had to do something to change his life although he feared for himself.

"I was scared out of my mind," he says, "but as I've said before, my faith and the fact I knew I had to do something or I would go crazy."

Randy says he had grown frustrated with his life, which consisted of home and work and church. Only when football season rolled around did he have any form of recreational entertainment.

Coming to UNL changed his life, Randy says. It was his first venture away from home, the first opportunity to prove himself.

"I am at my best here," he says with an eager grin and a glint of his blue-

green eyes.

"When he was young," Loretta says, "I could read his mind. Now I can't read his mind. I can't influence his mind in any way."

Loretta says she still misses her son, but she understands that he has learned to rely on himself.

There's no doubt in Loretta's mind that her son will complete college.

"I don't think he'll finish in four years," she says. "But I can't imagine him not finishing."

After Randy completed a course during a five-week summer session, Loretta says she felt more assured that her son would be safe.

"I knew it was going to be hard for him," she says. "I wasn't sure he was prepared, but he was determined to do the work."

Loretta says she still worries about her son although he has made friends in a place where he knew no one.

"Sometimes, I still think, 'Oh Lord, look after him,'" she says.

"He does things which scare me," she says. "But most of the time I find out about them after he's already done them."

For instance, Randy, who regularly attends Nebraska men's basketball games, got stuck between railroad tracks on his way to the Bob Devaney Sports Center during a downpour. He sat in the rain for almost half an hour before anyone stopped to help him.

"I'm proud of him," she says. "I'm very comfortable with his being so far away from home now. There are people who have made sure he's been taken care of."

When Randy was a child, he could never walk, but only creep or crawl.

When he was administered intelligence tests at age three, doctors told Loretta that her son was retarded.

"It made me mad," Loretta says. "I knew he wasn't retarded. That made me angry."

Although Randy couldn't walk or talk like most toddlers, Loretta said she knew her son's problems weren't caused by a lack of intelligence.

He was an inquisitive child, Loretta says, constantly surrounded by adults. Although playgrounds were often inaccessible to him, Randy's grandfather, J.R. Pendley, made sure his grandson didn't go without toys and

tricycles. He put roller skates on wheels of toy tractors and tricycles, and he put innertubes in the swimming pool for Randy's sake.

"He would do anything to help him," Loretta says.

J.R. could not be reached for comment due to illness.

Along with his toys, Loretta and her family helped Randy throughout his childhood with a sort of physical and mental home therapy which helped to stimulate his senses. He continued that and other physical therapy until he grew tired of it.

Randy always displayed patience with other people, although Loretta says even she sometimes grew frustrated trying to communicate with him.

"He's always been happy," she says. "I think he sets a good example for the rest of us... but of course, I'm prejudiced."

Christy Horn, coordinator for the UNL Educational Center for Disabled Students, said Randy's happiness and determination are also a commendable trait found among students who use the computers, tutors and other facilities at 132 Administration.

But what has put Randy head-and-shoulders above some students is his education.

"Randy was very fortunate to have parents and teachers who helped mainstream him (into the education system) early," Christy says. "Not everyone has had that opportunity."

So despite Randy's physical disabilities, his intelligence and prior education help him to overcome some obstacles that other students with learning disabilities have even more trouble surpassing, Christy says.

"I don't want to take away from what he's done," she says, "because he's certainly proved himself in many ways. But people don't realize what early education and mainstreaming can do for a person."

Randy spends about 20 hours each week on the computer system at the center doing homework and taking tests. Students also volunteer to read his text book assignments onto tapes and record class notes for him to listen to in the evenings. Randy often has difficulty controlling the direction and

movement of his head, so listening to tapes decreases the problem.

Randy says he could not accomplish what he intends to in college without the help of the people at the center.

"They go out of their way to help," he says.

Randy also acknowledges that people at the University Health Center are "very accommodating." If he is sick, even if it's just a cold, he is immediately admitted to see a doctor at the health center.

But Randy is far from being a complainer or whiner, says Jill Light, a student assistant in Selleck Quadrangle.

"He never complains," she says. "He really is an inspiration."

Jill, who suffered spinal injuries in a diving accident at age 14 and has been forced to use a wheelchair, says Randy has even shown her up from time to time during her friendship with him.

"He's really stuck with it," she says. "When I first met him, I have to admit I wondered if he could do it, but he's proved more than once that's he's capable of everything that everyone else is."

But because Randy cannot verbally communicate with his friends, Jill says the group of people he hangs out with sometimes unintentionally leave him out of conversations.

"Sometimes we'll be talking a mile a minute," she says. "The conversations fly fast and sometimes Randy reminds us that he's there."

"He definitely adds something to the conversation," she says of the students who congregate at Selleck. "Most of the time he's a step ahead of us."

The more time people spend with Randy, Jill says, the more aware they become of his presence and of his way of communicating through the black board.

"We tell him he has a southern accent," Jill says, laughing.

Friends sometimes help tape messages to cards which list shopping items for store clerks, Jill says, but otherwise Randy is mostly without need of anyone's help.

Jill says she sometimes wonders how Randy deals with his own frustrations since he is unable to vent his feelings in a conventional way.

But Randy says his friendships help him deal with the emotional and men-

tal pain sometimes caused by his situation and by college's challenges.

"Every once in a while, I have to get my frustrations out," he says, "Every once in a while, I just need someone to talk to and someone to listen to me."

For instance, one day last semester after a teacher had suggested that a particular course might be too overwhelming for him, Randy spent the entire afternoon driving around in his car.

Syd often provides friendship when it isn't part of being Randy's aide. She has been an invaluable aide and friend, Randy says.

Randy also admits that his own unyielding stubbornness and faith in God helps him through difficult times. He frequently attends church and holds Bible studies in his room on Sunday evenings.

As a student with a handicap, that stubbornness and faith is sometimes a necessity more than it is a luxury.

Randy says people sometimes stare at him or they appear unsure of how to act around him.

Often, Syd says, they speak to her as though Randy is not there, asking how he is.

Part of that may be his own fault, Randy says, for not standing up for himself more.

"Even 2-year-olds don't like to be talked down to," he says.

His social life is also sometimes constrained when others forget to invite him to dances or to go out on the town at night.

"Randy is a very affectionate person," Jill says. "He shows a lot of love, but people don't always respond to it."

And because of his handicap, others also forget to consider him as a romantic interest, Jill says.

Relationships with the opposite sex often pose difficulties and pain for people with handicaps, she says.

"It's different for Randy," Jill says. "But there will be a woman in his life some day and she'll be very special, but she must be a very strong and understanding person."

Randy says that although there's nothing he'd change about his life, but a relationship with a woman would be nice.

"My mind isn't handicapped."

-- Diana Johnson