

# Rob's determined to lead normal life

Every time I hear of, or write, a painful story — a story of human suffering — I cringe inside.

And once in awhile you'll come across a story that makes you cry but also smile. That's the case with Rob Hill of Orangeville.

Most of us have spent time at cottages or on docks and on impulse people have pushed each other into the water. It's something I avoid because I like to have total control in the water, but it's human nature to fool around a bit. It's called horseplay. And as Rob says, it seems pretty innocent.

But the ramifications are dramatic.

The serious result of some fun with friends can turn your life around. It certainly has in Rob's case.

Now he's learning to feed himself and brush his teeth. He wears a steel halo around his head and a medical vest. And that halo is positioned with four screws that have been drilled into his skull.

It's all in an effort to prevent further damage to his spinal cord and keep his broken neck in place.

It's not the way any of us would plan to spend any of our time. It's sad, and the prospect of facing the future as a quadriplegic has to be an incredible



challenge.

Yet Rob says he's working on building himself up a little bit more each day. He comes across as the kind of guy who probably considered each day a challenge prior to July 12 as well.

He says he knew all the rules about diving into shallow water. He's an intelligent person, and probably very likeable. He's finished three years of university, and worked three years full-time before he went onto further education.

He never expected a little bit of fun would see him permanently paralysed below the chest. Yet he says he knew when his head hit bottom and he felt his neck go that he was in serious trouble. He says he prepared himself mentally, figuring he might not be able to walk again. That had to take a lot of strength.

By the time he was flown to Toronto there were a lot of people waiting for him. And we can only imagine what his friends, and particularly his family, must have felt and gone through.

And then you think of his own agony. It's difficult as an outsider to imagine how deep it went. Nevertheless it hits home. It makes me realize, once again, just how precious life is.

As Rob's mom says it could've been much worse.

But that doesn't negate the pain that's there. And Rob doesn't want it to be forgotten. He has a message. He hopes some publicity will drive home to people just how easy it is to incur severe damage, even in innocent horseplay. He says telling his story will be worth it if he can prevent even one person from making the same mistake.

His friends and family have been an incredible support for him. And it sounds as though the family was very impressed with the professionalism of and the caring staff at Sunnybrook Medical Centre.

Last week Rob was moved to the Lindhurst convalescent home, near Sunnybrook, and he's working hard at a steady program to improve his muscles.

He's very determined to lead a normal life. Heck, he's even got his friends to register him for his final year at university, starting in January. And he's got plans to go into finance.

I mentioned that this story made me sad and made me smile. It's sad that such an accident had to occur and alter a young man's life. No one likes to see that happen. Our hearts always go out to people who experience such suffering.

But he makes me smile when he comes up with statements like golf will be tough but going out for a couple of beer will be just fine.

I have to admire and respect his strength. He's glad it wasn't the fellow he pushed in who was injured. He wants to try and help others not experience the same thing. And he wants to get his life back in order — quickly.

To say he's eager is an understatement. After all it was only last month he had a terrible accident and now he's getting registered for university again.

That's strength, that's guts and that's determination. And I can only sit in awe of it and wish him the very best.