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CPD LEGACY STORY: GORDON RICHINS

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Our next CPD Legacy Story is by Gordon Richins, Consumer Liaison for the CPD. As Consumer Liaison, Gordon does a wonderful job strengthening the relationships between persons with disabilities and the organizations that serve them, and the projects and personnel at the CPD.

By Gordon Richins

I have worked the past 13 years as the Consumer Liaison for the CPD. It wasn’t my career plan of choice, but as things have turned out, it has worked pretty well for me. I’m still a farmer at heart!

Twenty-three years ago I was an arrogant, red-necked, Republican, self-employed dairy farmer in Fairview, Idaho. In August of 1987 that all changed in the blink of an eye when I was hit in the back of the neck with a bale of hay that fell off of a hay stack. I was instantly paralyzed from the neck down from a broken neck. After many months of rehabilitation, I was able to sit in a wheelchair and gain some form of independence. After being told I would probably only have seven years to live based on the results from past research, I realized that those seven years were going to be very difficult. I had returned home without much of a realistic outlook on how life would be with a significant disability. In short, I went into a deep depression.

The Social Security Administration sent a vocational rehabilitation counselor out to the farm to meet with me, and this began my process of rehabilitation and earning a college degree. This gave me something meaningful to do every day and gave me some self-worth back that I felt I had lost. All through college I never really thought I would ever get a job with my disability, but, oh, how wrong I was.

After graduating from USU in 1994 with a BS degree in Agricultural Business I worked for 2 years as an AmeriCorps volunteer at OPTIONS for Independence, the Independent Living Center in Logan. This opportunity gave me an introduction to the disability community and the world of advocacy and how advocacy enhances the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and their families. After two years of experience, I then applied for the Consumer Liaison position at the CPD that was advertised in the Herald Journal. I was very fortunate to be hired and entered an environment I really enjoy and I have been here ever since. I now feel useful, productive and have a totally new outlook on life. The opportunities I have been given allow me to be a part of enhancing the quality of life for myself and other individuals with disabilities.

The CPD is a friendly, positive place to work. It has helped me to replace my roller coaster ride of depression with productivity and hope. In my position here at the Center, I have learned how to become a strong advocate for myself and for others with disabilities. I have had opportunities to travel to conferences and meetings in some great places and to meet amazing people. I have changed as an individual thanks to these opportunities here at the Center. I am able to better communicate with individuals with and without disabilities and I feel that my demeanor and personality have greatly improved over the last several years. This has allowed me to represent the Center in everything I do and communicate with the many different types of organizations I am working with or have worked with locally, statewide and nationally. I am presently serving on the AUCD board of directors on a national level which has allowed me to connect with colleagues across the nation from multiple segments of the disability community.

Today I am not so arrogant, have given up most of my red-neck characteristics and I am still a Republican, but I will vote for the individual that I support regardless of party. But now I am also happy and fulfilled. Life has been grand over the past 13 years.