



Johnathen Picco

Progress has been “remarkable”!
Young worker’s recovery from
serious injury inspirational

Just 18 years of age, Johnathen Picco exhibits a level of independence uncharacteristic of someone his age. The fact that he has had to deal with a serious injury that occurred over a year ago makes his attitude all the more remarkable.

By Michael Theodores

In May of 2005, Johnathen was working on the roof of a building when he fell through a girder, dropping down 16 feet. He suffered a serious injury that left him a paraplegic.

Johnathen’s mother, Kathleen, said her son has displayed an amazing attitude since the accident occurred.

“The accident happened on a Tuesday, he had a 16-hour operation on the Wednesday, and he was sitting up in a wheelchair on Thursday,” she said, in recounting the first days after the accident. “He was in rehab by that Friday, and about a week and a half later, he was participating in Rick Hansen’s Wheels In Motion event. His progress has been unbelievable.”

Following the injury, Johnathen stayed at the Lyndhurst Centre in Toronto for two months as part of his recovery. His mother said he

Johnathen Picco Feature	1
Feature on Stress	3
You Asked...	4
Emergency Preparedness	6
Movie Review: Murderball	7
News Briefs	8
WSIB Contact Information	8

WSIB Workplace Safety & Insurance Board
CSPAAT Commission de la sécurité professionnelle et de l'assurance contre les accidents du travail

became an inspiration to many of the young patients at the centre, making many new friends during his stay.

Currently, he is undergoing therapy twice a week and has progressed to the point where he can walk with the assistance of a pair of leg braces. His progress over the past year has impressed Carol Anne Browning, a Nurse Case Manager at the WSIB, who has been working with Johnathen.

Progress ‘beyond expectations’

“He’s been positive throughout his treatment and he is progressing beyond expectations,” she said. “He’s striving to become as independent as possible.”

Johnathen credits the patience of his parents for his progress in therapy.

“They’re letting me do my own thing,” he said. “They’re very



supportive and I think I'm doing pretty good. I'm getting good enough to use a cane."

Kathleen said the entire Picco family – which includes her husband Robert and daughters Rene, Jacklyn and Tammy – have rallied behind Johnathen since the injury. Additional support has been provided by Rene's husband John and son Leander; Jacklyn's husband Lee; Tammy's husband Scott and son Van; and his Uncle Ken.

"He's received great support from everyone, especially from my daughters, who have been fabulous," she said. "They were constantly at the hospital when he was first injured."

Carol Anne Browning agrees that the family has played a key role in his progress to date.

"All family members, especially his Mom and Dad, have been supportive," she observed. "They continue to encourage this young man to strive towards recovery."

Kathleen said the family has been pleased with the support and services provided by the WSIB,

including staff members such as Carol Anne Browning.

WSIB 'amazing'

"The WSIB has been really amazing," she said. "The modifications to the house have been

perfect and Carol Anne has gone over and above what we've required. We have already sent the WSIB a letter of thanks."

Johnathen said last year's accident remains fresh in his mind.

"I remember it all," he said. "I was laying down roof, walked back, and then fell through a girder and the roof about 16 feet. It happened real quick."

Following the accident, Kathleen and her husband had a conversation with Johnathen about the future.

"We just said, it's happened and we have to deal with it," she recalled. "Even though it was hard, we couldn't change what happened and

had to make the best of it. We had to keep moving forward and that's just what Johnathen has done. His attitude has been remarkable and it's the reason he has come so far."

Johnathen's progress has inspired him to set a few short-term goals, which he feels are within his reach.

"I'd like to get my license and buy my own car," he said. "I may also join some sports, such as sledge hockey."

Kathleen is optimistic that Johnathen will continue to make strides in the future and said his family will always be there to support and encourage him.

"We all want to make him as independent as possible and don't hold him back at all," she said. "If he has a new idea, we encourage him 100%."

It's that support – combined with Johnathen Picco's drive and independence – that should serve him well in the future.



The Picco family (pictured above left) have rallied around Johnathen since last year's injury; Johnathen rafting with his father.

Stress

A Paraplegia News feature

Stress is a physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes tension in your mind or body. Many factors can contribute to it: your family, friends, and co-workers; work responsibilities; lifestyle; and medical condition.

However, these stressors can also bring you great joy. This makes it almost impossible to eliminate all the stress in your life.

People who regularly experience stress usually fall into a weight-management program – largely due to changes in eating behaviours that occur under stress. Thus, stress management is an essential element of successful long-term weight control.

Self-care is the key to reducing stress. For example, healthy eating habits along with a balance of work and recreation can reduce stress and improve your quality of life. Other healthy behaviours include getting plenty of sleep and cutting down on alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco. Even the simple act of hugging someone can be a great stress reliever.

Find a system

How do you feel when you can't find something you need – or when you have to rush to complete a task at the last minute? If your time and priorities are organized,

you can avoid the stress of looking for a lost item and rushing to do things at the last minute.

Organize your home by keeping items in their place. For example, put your keys in the same place each time.

Keep your clothes separated and plan what you're going to wear. Stock up on frequently used items such as toothpaste or paper towels.

You might also list all the things you want to do. Sort your list with the most important items at the top. Break large tasks into more manageable smaller ones.

Start at the top of your list and accomplish the tasks one at a time. When you've done the important things, you're not as likely to be stressed if you don't have time to do those at the bottom of your list.

Too often, people cause themselves stress by worrying about events beyond their control. For example, some individuals may become stressed when they think traffic should be moving faster. Others become stressed when they disagree with others about important issues. People often become stressed trying to solve, or "fix", other people's problems.

Taking time to relax is a simple change in routine that can help reduce stress. Some relaxing activities include reading an interesting book or magazine, going to the park or some place quiet, going out with friends, spending time on a hobby or craft, and getting a massage.

If you're interested in relaxation exercises, such as controlled breathing and imagery, you can find useful guidebooks at your local library.

You can also reduce stress by simply setting limits for yourself. You probably have a lot going on in your life, and you can cause yourself stress by trying to do too much. It's important to keep your activities at a manageable level and not volunteer to take on activities when your schedule is full.

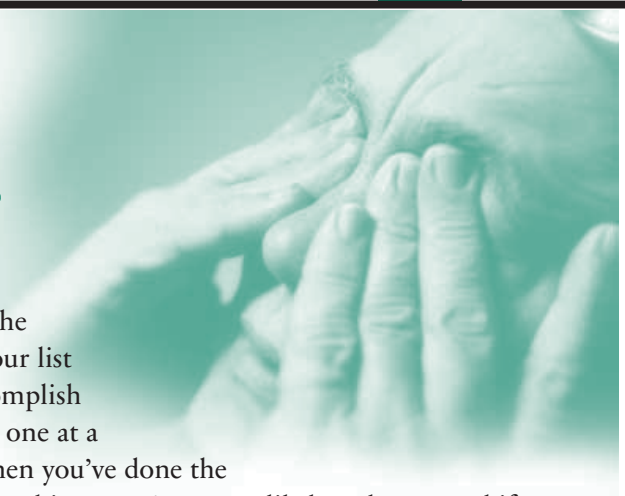
Effective problem-solving skills not only reduce stress but are also useful in preventing secondary medical complications (pressure ulcers and depression) associated with spinal-cord injury. Solutions to problems may not be apparent at first glance, especially if a problem seems too big to solve. It may take careful thought to find a reasonable solution.

You cannot reduce stress without effort. You might start recording the times you feel stress in your journal. Make a list of the stressors in your life and develop a plan to reduce them whenever possible. As you become more skilled at recognizing and managing stress, you may use different combinations to handle situations.

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Steps for Effective Problem-solving:

- Define the problem as clearly as possible
- Brainstorm – make a list of as many possible solutions as you can
- Review your list and pick the solution you think will best solve your problem
- Try out your solution
- Ask yourself, "Does it work?"
- Try another solution if your problem is not solved





YOU

Once again, readers of *Independent Living News* had a wide range of interesting questions for us to answer.

Please read on for questions and answers that should provide you with more details and insight into a few WSIB benefits and service delivery procedures. We've also provided some resources that you can use to learn more about topics that are important to you.

If you have a question that you would like answered, please fill out the feedback form that is included with this newsletter. We'll do our best to provide you with a reply in a future issue of this newsletter.

Thanks again for your great questions. Keep them coming!

Benefit Inquiries

Q If a worker has a medical/drug/dental plan through work and their spouse is covered through this plan – and then this worker can no longer work – why can't their spouse have the same rights/privileges for these benefits through the WSIB?

Also, how come the WSIB doesn't offer family medical benefits – or the opportunity to purchase them – like I had when I was working?

A The purpose of the *Workplace Safety & Insurance Act* (WSIA) is to promote health and safety in workplaces; to facilitate return to work and recovery; to facilitate re-entry into the labour market; and to provide compensation benefits, which include wage loss benefits and health care benefits. **These benefits are provided to the injured worker only.** Any other medical/dental benefits for members of a worker's family would have to be purchased independently.

Q The cost of gasoline has continued to rise steadily recently. Shouldn't the WSIB raise the mileage rate to reflect this increase?

A As part of the WSIB's 2006 Annual Rate Review, the transportation allowance was increased from 34 cents per kilometre to 37 cents per kilometre, effective January 1, 2006, to reflect the higher price of gas in 2005. Every year, the Benefits Policy Branch reviews and sets various rates for different allowances – including transportation – after conducting an external survey of costs for each specific rate. The price of gas will continue to be monitored and, if warranted, a recommendation for a rate change will be made for 2007.

Q I find the Independent Living Allowance isn't based on reality. For example, I don't think it's fair that a single person who lives in a basement (apartment) should receive the same amount of benefits as a father with a wife, three kids and a house.

A Thank you for your question. Over a worker's lifetime, their personal circumstances will change many times. The amount of the Independent Living Allowance (ILA) reflects their average situation. It's not possible to administer and individualize the benefit annually.

The ILA is a benefit administered to help injured workers function as independently as possible where they work, where they live, and in society – and to improve their quality of life.

The ILA is intended to offset the cost of services (regardless of cost) and devices and other items (less than \$250), in order to improve a worker's ability to live independently and the quality of their life. They may use the allowance to pay for independent living services – such as snow removal, housekeeping or gardening – as they see fit and are not required to provide receipts.

Like other benefits, the ILA is indexed every year, with the intention of keeping up with the increases that occur in the cost of living. For 2007, the annual amount is \$3,405.17.

Q If I have a 100% pension, what pension percentage would my spouse be entitled to should I pass away? Please also clarify if I would still get my 100% pension after I turn 65. Will it be reduced, since I don't qualify for a Canada Pension?

A To address your first question, Survivor Benefits for a spouse are only paid when a worker is determined to be 100% permanently disabled as a result of the injuries sustained under one claim. The spouse would receive a lump sum award, depending on the age of the worker at the time of their death, along with a monthly award based on the age of the worker at the time of their death. The exact amount of these payments will vary, depending on a number of factors.

In response to your second question, when a worker reaches the age of 65, the WSIB pension would not be reduced and would continue for the life of the worker. If the worker is in receipt of a Canada Disability Pension once they reach the age of 65, their benefits will be reduced to the level of their Canada Pension Plan benefits, which are dependent on your contributions.

ASKED...

Q+A

Independent Living Newsletter *Client Questions*

For more information on both of these topics, consult the WSIB's website (www.wsib.on.ca) and type in the words "Pensions" and "Survivor Benefits" in the search box at the top of the site. Or feel free to consult the adjudicator assigned to your claim.

Q Why doesn't the WSIB automatically give a Personal Care Allowance to someone in the Serious Injury Program (SIP)?

A The Personal Care Allowance is a benefit for workers in the Serious Injury Program who need assistance with personal care activities at home, such as bathing, dressing and feeding. The WSIB may provide direct payment to agency attendants to assist you with your daily activities, or the allowance may be provided to you to purchase these services yourself.

The benefit is not an automatic benefit, nor is it for income replacement.

Each individual is assessed on their level of functioning to determine the appropriate level of allowance that is required. The timing of your assessment is determined by a variety of factors. These assessments occur in your home with either an Occupational Therapist (OT) from the WSIB or from the community. If you feel you require a Personal Care Allowance assessment – or you have questions or concerns regarding this benefit – please contact your Occupational Therapist/Nurse Case Manager. You can also reach the WSIB at (416) 344-1000 or 1-800-387-0750 for assistance.

Q If routine medication won't eliminate acute pain, can I obtain a simple exercise machine?

A Talk to your Nurse Case Manager about a further assessment regarding pain management. Funds from your annual ILA can be used to purchase a simple exercise machine.

Service Delivery

Q Why do I have to go over a lot of the same things when a new Adjudicator or other WSIB staff member is assigned to my file? Since I have a Pre-1990 claim, isn't there a team or group that I can contact to get information about my disability and claim easily?

A Thanks for your question and for bringing up this issue. When a new Adjudicator or staff member from

the WSIB is assigned to a claim, there is always a transition period involved. They need time to familiarize themselves with your needs and to ensure you receive the necessary services and appropriate benefits. Be patient, as they are trying their best to assist you as quickly as possible. We cannot stress enough the importance of communication and information sharing in order to ensure we have current up to date info.

You are encouraged to contact any member of your Service Delivery Team in the Pre-1990 Claims Unit of the WSIB at any time to discuss specific issues related to your claim. Just have your name and claim number handy.

Q I took part in a survey that the Serious Injury Program conducted last year and indicated that I wanted to communicate with WSIB staff occasionally by e-mail. Can you let me know if this will be possible to do in the future?

A Thanks for your question, and for participating in last year's survey.

In response to your question, some injured workers have expressed an interest in e-mailing WSIB staff – such as their Adjudicator or Nurse Case Manager – about their particular claim. The WSIB cautions all injured workers that e-mails directed to the WSIB may not be secure and could possibly be viewed by an individual other than a WSIB employee. It's best that you contact all WSIB staff by phone. If you're in doubt about who is assigned to your claim, contact our office (Toll free number: 1-800-387-0750) and provide your name and claim number.

Q Does the WSIB still run the hospital in Downsview?

A The WSIB closed the Downsview Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) in 1998. In its place, the WSIB has established affiliations with academic teaching hospitals throughout Ontario to provide expertise in the multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment of injured workers. Consult your Adjudicator or Nurse Case Manager for more information.

Additional Resources

Q I would like information on aids that could help me since I suffer from deafness.

The Canadian Hearing Society's (CHS) website (www.chs.ca) has a wealth of information about assistive devices. A list of phone numbers for various offices

YOU ASKED

Continued...

throughout Ontario is also provided on the site. Within Toronto, the CHS can be reached by calling (416) 928-2500. The TTY number is (416) 964-0023.

Q In 2004, I lost my loving wife to cancer. We had been together for over 48 years. Do you have any advice for widows/widowers?

A Please accept our condolences for your loss. It sounds like you had a very special relationship. Family members, neighbours, or a special friend often act as a great support system during such difficult times. Below are two websites that you may also find helpful in your grieving process.

- Griefjourney.com (www.griefjourney.com)
- Genesis Bereavement Resources (www.genesis-resources.com)

For family members in need of support following a workplace injury, illness or death, one organization that you may want to consult is Threads of Life.

This organization was created by family members and friends who experienced a tragedy at work, or who are supporting a loved one who has experienced a life-altering workplace injury or occupational illness. The toll-free contact number is 1-888-567-9490.

Stay tuned for an article on Threads of Life in the next issue of *Independent Living News*.

Q Do you have any suggestions about where I can find special clothing for burn victims, such as stores/magazines on clothing?

A Below are a couple of good options to consider:

- **The Recovery Garment Centre:** 16 Heintzman, Toronto. Telephone: (416) 762-3327
- **The Ross Tilley Burn Centre:** Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, 2075 Bayview Ave. W., Toronto. Phone: (416) 480-6100

Q Can you recommend any treatment – new or old – for old back and/or leg injuries?

A The best thing that you can do with old back and leg injuries is to stay as active as possible, although your level of activity does depend on your health and functioning.

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association talks about “You and Your Mobility: The SMART Approach” (www.physiotherapy.ca/mobyou.htm). SMART stands for Stretch, Move, Add it up, Reduce strain and Talk.

There are other websites that you may find useful in treating back and leg injuries. They include:

- **Medline Plus** (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003182.htm)
- **Spine-health.com** (www.spine-health.com/topics/cd/tlbp/type01.html)
- **Hurt 911** (www.hurt911.org)

Q Where can I get men’s garters to use on leg bags instead of the rubber strips that are supplied with them and which I find useless?

A You can try one of the WSIB’s four preferred service providers, which were listed in our recent correspondence.

How to plan for an emergency

At any given moment, you may be faced with an emergency that tests your preparation skills. Situations include, but are not limited to, power outages, extreme weather, floods, and fire.

With the help of your family, friends, neighbours, and caregivers, you should prepare now to take care of your own basic needs for at least the first 72 hours following a major disaster. This includes – but is not limited to – ensuring you have enough supplies of:

- Oxygen
- Medications
- Food and water
- Fuel

The *Emergency Management Ontario* office – a branch of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services – suggests consulting the following resources to:

- For information about emergency management in your area, contact the Emergency Coordinator for your community, which is listed in your local telephone book or municipal government directory
- You can also contact the Community Emergency Coordinator or your local fire or police department

There are two excellent publications that can provide you with more information about emergency preparedness:

- A brochure titled, “**Your Emergency Preparedness Guide**”, which was produced by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. Call 1-800-622-6232 (TTY No.: 1-800-926-9105) to order a copy, or go to www.getprepared.gc.ca
- An “**Emergency Survival Kit**” fact sheet, which was produced by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Contact the Ministry by calling 416-314-3723.



Movie review by ILN reader *Scott Golden*



Murderball

IS A SMASHING SUCCESS

In 2005, an independent documentary titled *Murderball* earned critical acclaim. The movie followed the journey of a group of quadriplegic rugby players as they reached and competed in the Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece in 2004.

Since its release on July 8, 2005, the indie film has grossed just under \$2 million at the box office and went on to earn an Academy Award nomination this past March in the category for Best Documentary Feature.



Reviewer Scott Golden and his wife, Kasia

It lost out to *March of the Penguins*, a movie backed by Warner Brothers, which grossed \$122 million (U.S.) world-wide.

The Academy Award nomination was a major coup for everyone involved in the project, including ThinkFilm, the indie Canadian distribution company for the film. In summarizing the appeal of *Murderball*, ThinkFilm noted on its website that the movie "...tells the story of a group of world-class athletes unlike any ever shown on screen. In addition to smashing chairs, it will smash every stereotype you ever had about the disabled."

Through word-of-mouth and positive reviews, the film has earned several more millions through the rental market and DVD sales. Noting the subject matter and critical success of the film, *Independent Living News* thought it would be interesting to have a reader of this

publication review the movie.

Scott Golden, a 26-year-old from Alliston, Ontario, graciously agreed to provide some comments on the movie, which has been on DVD since November 2005.

Scott was injured in an accident in 2004 that left him a quadriplegic. Through hard work and perseverance – similar to the character shown in *Murderball* – he has made great strides in his rehabilitation. He recently regained the ability to drive and also celebrated a major event in his life – marriage to his fiancé Kasia – during the month of June.

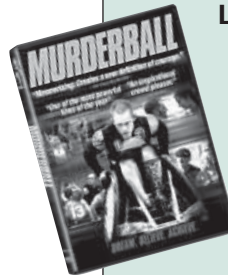
Movie 'inspiring'

"Kasia heard about the movie from someone at work and thought I should check it out," Scott said, in explaining how he became aware of *Murderball*. "We got it at Blockbuster and it was pretty good. I found it somewhat inspiring as it helped show me what a person in the same shoes as I am can be capable of."

When asked if the movie was worth seeing, Scott said, "I would recommend it to just about anyone. It was pretty entertaining and there was also some good comic relief."

If you would like to view *Murderball*, a few details about this movie are attached below, including where you can get a copy of the DVD to rent or own.

Essential details about "Murderball"



Length of movie: 86 minutes

Rating: 'R' for language and some sexual content

Specifications: 5.1 Dolby Digital Surround Sound; 16:9 Anamorphic; and Close Captioned

Availability: Most rental stores (Blockbuster, Rogers Video, etc.) and various retail and online outlets, such as Future Shop, Amazon.ca, etc.



In brief

WSIB BENEFITS

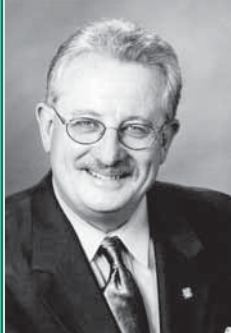
The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) recently announced a Cost of Living Adjustment increase of 2.1% for 2007. This will result in revised allowance amounts for several expenses, including Independent Living, Personal Care (Skilled rate), Personal Care (Personal Rate) and for Guide Dogs.

All increases will be reflected in cheques that are issued after January 1, 2007. For the revised allowance amount for each expense, please consult the list below.

- Independent Living Allowance \$3,405.17 per year
- Personal Care Allowance (Skilled Rate) \$18.36 per hour
- Personal Care Allowance (Personal Rate) \$11.47 per hour
- Guide Dog Allowance: \$922.41per year

The Personal Care Allowance/Basic Supervisory Rate is \$8 per hour (minimum wage).

NEW WSIB CHAIR



The Honourable Steven W. Mahoney, P.C., was appointed to the position of Chair of the WSIB in May of 2006. He succeeded Jill Hutcheon, formerly Interim Chair and President, who continues as the WSIB's President and CEO. Mr. Mahoney has almost three decades of political experience in all levels of government. He is also active in community life, including serving as a board member of the Mississauga Children's Festival and the Hospice of Peel.

Mr. Mahoney and his wife Katie have been married for 35 years and have three sons and four grandchildren.

STAFF UPDATE

The Serious Injury Program (SIP) of the WSIB bids a fond farewell to the following staff:

- **Janet Stonehouse**, a Nurse Case Manager with the program since 2002
- **Deanna Penney**, a Nurse Case Manager with the program since 2004
- **Joe Simonetta**, an Adjudicator and one of the founding members of SIP

We wish all three staff members well in their new endeavours.

The program would like to welcome three new team members:

- **Helen Wills**, Nurse Case Manager
- **Peggy Adams**, Nurse Case Manager
- **Jenny Leandre**, Adjudicator

KEEP IN TOUCH

Serious Injury Program & Pre-1990 Claims Branch

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)
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Toronto ON M5V 3J1

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Main Switchboard:
Toll free: 1-800-387-0750
(416) 344-1000
Telephone for the deaf:
1-800-387-0050
Fax: (416) 344-4684

TO ENSURE THE BEST POSSIBLE SERVICE

- Please let us know if there is a change in your health or your condition.
- If you are moving, please give us your new address.
- Direct Deposit is available for **Pension, Future Economic Loss (FEL) and Personal Care Allowance (PCA) benefits**. If you are interested, please call **1-800-387-0750**.
- Personal Care Allowance cheques are sent out between the 15th and 30th of each month. Our commitment is to ensure you receive your cheque by the last business day of each month.