

## A FAMILY'S JOURNEY:

# Reconciling the new Jon with the old Jon

STORY AND PHOTO  
By

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The first thing you notice about Jon Thomann is the wide, engaging grin as he stops to say hello to old friends at his former high school in Eugene.

When Jon was in high school he was intensely focused on things he was interested in: rugby, basketball, girls, school and his plans for the future.

Things changed, devastatingly so, June 21, 2008, when a fall into an open concrete stairwell, resulted in a traumatic brain injury which threatened Jon's life and changed the lives of Jon and his family.

### BACKGROUND

Jon is the son of Vickey and Joe Thomann. He has one younger brother Zach.

He was graduated in May of 2007 from Eugene Cole R-V High School.

In the fall of 2007, Jon started his freshman year at Westminster College in Fulton pursuing a business degree. "He was headed in the right direction," says Joe.

He had finished his freshman year and pledged a fraternity when the injury happened.

### THE INJURY

At first after the fall, Jon seemed to be all right, but a few hours later, his friends realized Jon was in trouble and he rapidly became non-responsive.

"He had a blood clot in his brain which caused swelling," says Joe, "and with swelling in the brain, there is no place for it to expand."

Jon was flown to Barnes Hospital in St. Louis and underwent surgery to remove the blood clot. Joe says they didn't know if Jon would make it through the night or the next several months. Jon was in coma for several months.

During that time Joe says Zach, who was a senior in high school at the time, basically was at home by himself, while they stayed with Jon.

"Zach dealt with it like a champ," says Joe. "He had to grow up a lot quicker than he should have. He's a good brother.



Hoping for a new way to help his son—Joe Thomann (right) and his wife Vickey have become the fund-raising chairman to help bring the Center For Head Injury Services to Central Missouri. Joe's son Jon (left) suffered a traumatic head injury in 2007.

We couldn't have asked for a better brother for Jon."

Before he could come home, he had to learn how to breathe, eat and talk again.

Jon was finally able to come home in a wheelchair in February 2009. Joe, who used to work for American Family Insurance and became a displaced worker in 2009, became Jon's full-time care-giver.

### HOME

Jon says being home is much better than being in St. Louis,

then tells a joke and gives a belly laugh.

He is much stronger physically. In fact, physically, he can move very quickly. He does have some cognitive problems.

While his long-term memory is good, (he can remember faces and names of old friends) short-term memory is a problem. He has trouble focusing.

"It's a slow process," says Joe.

Jon says it feels like he constantly has a thousand thoughts running through his head all at once which makes it almost im-

possible to concentrate on one thing.

"From where he started, he surprised all of his doctors and caregivers. He didn't surprise me. I kept pushing him. You push for your children," says Joe.

"Jon is hopeful and faithful," says Joe. "He wants to be able to go back to college, though he is nowhere near that. Independence is the goal we have now. We want him to be able to have a productive life."

Jon says the hardest part in the difference between the old Jon

and the new Jon (as he refers to himself) is that he is lonely a lot of the time.

Joe says before the accident Jon was very social.

"Right after the accident all of Jon's friends were very helpful, but their lives have moved on, and they are ready to graduate from college and get a job in the real world," says Joe. "And Jon's personality is different now."

Before taking a job with the Missouri Department of Economic Development Vickey worked at Westminster College

in a building right across from the fraternity Jon had pledged. "It was hard for her to watch his friends moving on with their lives," says Joe.

Joe says Jon almost never becomes frustrated unless he is responding to Joe's frustration. "Sometimes it seems like he just freezes and is unable to do anything and he can't help it."

### CENTER FOR HEAD INJURY SERVICES

Joe and Vickey have become the fund-raising chairmen to bring a Center for Head Injury Services to Central Missouri.

The center would give Jon a structured environment to go to during the day.

The center would provide thinking skills enrichment activities, help with social skills and assistance and training with daily living activities, pre-vocational activities and recreational activities.

Joe says a center can provide economic and emotional support. Joe is looking to return to work and a center would help him to be able to do that.

To be able to bring the Center For Head Injury Services to Jefferson City, a minimum of \$60,000 in startup funds is needed.

Joe says there will be a Bowling For A Cause fund-raiser Sunday, April 10, at Westgate Lanes in Jefferson City with the first session from noon-2:30 p.m. and the second session from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Joe is also looking for other fund-raising ideas. "Please help us get this facility open. There is a need for this center for so many people. Please, please, help us," says Joe. "At this point I'm willing to beg and pray."

As a final thought Jon says, "I want the center so I can get out of the house. And so my dad can get a job. My dad is the best in the world."

"This can help me be better," finishes Jon whose eyes twinkle as he shows a dumb blonde joke on his phone.

For more information on the Center For Head Injury Center contact Joe at (573) 680-7348.