

Gene's Story

That's me with my doggy Cheyenne. I'm the one on the right. Though I live in Austin, TX now, I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio.

I broke my neck at age 17 when I fell from a cliff. No, not this cliff in Socorro, NM that I climbed years later, but Wipp's Ledges in Ohio. The good news is, **since** then, I have had many adventures in 40 countries on 6 continents, earned several college degrees, a fellowship, enjoyed numerous adventure sports, and made an expedition to Mt. Everest Base Camp. You can see pictures from some of my adventures here and at www.GenosPlace.org

Growing up in a family that valued hard work and no excuses had the most influence. Learning the habits of industry at an early age set the tone for my rehabilitation. My parents both worked hard and never complained. I credit my mother for being a "stay at home" mom, and my father for always having several "irons in the fire" at any one time.

Goal setting was instrumental in much of my growth, particularly in education and traveling. By setting goals of getting my MBA by age 30 or going to X amount of countries or continents, it was easier to make plans. A goal without a plan is just a dream. As James Dean said, "Plan as if you'll live forever; live as though you'll die tomorrow."

My incredible friends helped me build an incredible life. They were mostly over achievers, high achievers, or simply people I admired, who all new more than me. Since I only learn from people who are smarter or more talented than me, those are the people with whom I choose to associate.

I learned life is a summation of mini-events, which can be either successes or failures. The key is to have more successes than failures, and to learn something from every experience as well as have many varied experiences. Success is never forever and failure is rarely final.

ADAPT is a disability rights group that taught me the importance of asserting our civil rights. They taught me about individual responsibility in group processes. Participation in ADAPT actions really liberated my thinking.

Mentors in every realm of human endeavor are available to put the odds in your favor. The trick is finding them. Luckily, they often found me and saved me countless hours, dollars, and disappointment. I think if you show you're highly motivated, and a relentless worker, mentors will find you.

Looking back on my life, I have concluded that my station in life is due to my upbringing, friends and family, hard work, and both good and bad luck. I've learned "Life is the sum of all your choices." "People believe they make choices, but it may be more accurate to say that their choices make them." In the words of J. K. Rowling, "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

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