

The following was written by Trudy Williams, a friend to Gladys Herland in Bend, Oregon. Trudy spotted Doug Herland's name on a shell on the Spokane River at a Fall Race in October, 2000 against Gonzaga University, where her sons Mark and Paul rowed and coxed for four years. Matthew Price told Trudy he would appreciate any information about Doug Herland's life and the following is the result of his request:
"Unbreakable"

Douglas John Herland didn't come home from St. Charles Hospital in Bend, Oregon until seven weeks after he was born, one hand clenched in a fist because his caretakers were afraid they might break a bone in his hand if they tried to release that tension. This attitude of protection was of course well-intentioned but his mother made an especial effort from then on to allow Doug to live as normal a life as possible.

Born on August 19, 1951, Doug Herland was the first patient of St. Charles Hospital with osteogenesis imperfecta. He was born with one collarbone, his left hip and several ribs broken. He was put in traction at the hospital for his first seven weeks of life.

It was not uncommon for patients born with osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bone disease) to simply be put in a wheelchair - confined not only physically but also emotionally. Doug's father Harry, mother Gladys and sister Lyla gave him the gift of normalcy - the freedom to do and be whatever he wanted. That freedom propelled Doug Herland to accomplish much in his not quite 40 years of living.

To those of us who have interlaced our fingers with the tiny feet of our infant children to raise their little bottom up far enough to slip a diaper under, we perhaps can appreciate the gentle lifting and maneuvering Gladys Herland managed for the first few years of her son's life. And too, Mrs. Herland was deeply disappointed in not being able to nurse her son because of his long weeks in traction and fragile body.

At the age of four, Doug and his family were given their first television set by the local television dealer, Elmer Hudson, the Sons of Norway Lodge and many Lutheran friends. A picture in the Bend Bulletin on November 19, 1955 shows Doug in a reclining wheelchair, a cast on his left leg for the eighth time, enjoying his family's new television set.

Friends at the family's church, First Lutheran in Bend, remember Doug being carried into church by his Mother in a special child's seat, each with an ever present smile.

Doug was home-schooled for the first three grades since he could not walk very well. Edna Shepard was his first and second grade teacher and Mary Carroll his third grade teacher. Mrs. Herland brought Doug to Kingston Elementary School on Fridays during those first three years so he could experience being with other students. She recalled the school having her sign a release for insurance purposes because they were afraid Doug would be injured while at school and thought his parents might sue them. Gladys Herland assured them their fears were unfounded, that she understood no one would be responsible for any injuries Doug incurred while at school.

In the fourth grade, at Kenwood Elementary School, Doug used a rectangular walker with a seat at one end. Fortunately his school was only one block north of his home. In the sixth grade, Doug wanted to learn to swim, and his teacher Mr. Ensworth gave him lessons at the city pool at the same time his sister Lyla was having Red Cross swimming lessons. Later, after Doug had gone to Boy Scout camp for three years, he could swim a mile!

Doug was in casts for broken bones 15 times before he was nine years old. As he recuperated, he enjoyed listening to his record player, which is still in his bedroom at the family home. His favorite song then was "McNamara's Band." He was able to walk unassisted by the time he was in Junior High. He had a slight limp due to the fact that his left leg and hip had been broken so many times, and that side of his body was shorter.

(It wasn't until college that his legs were the same length. Evelyn Sather, a lifelong friend from Doug's Church in Bend recalls him coming home from college and telling her how after an evening of drinking with friends in a bar, he had fallen down. Evelyn said, "You know better than that Doug." He answered, "I know Evelyn, but for the first time in my life, my legs are the same length." Doug always found the good that came from misfortune.)

Simple things like running into the coffee table could break a bone. One evening, Doug scrunched up by the family's front door next to the piano, still located there today. He was hiding to surprise his Dad as he waited for him to come home from work. His leg was already in a cast below the hip and a bone broke above the hip while he was hiding.

Doug was not afraid to play outside. He spent countless hours out in the front yard, always surrounded by friends. His older sister Lyla often wheeled him to a nearby park in a wagon. When Doug was an infant she had carefully sat on the bed next to him, talking with him instead of holding him as most siblings might.

In 1966, Doug was confirmed at First Lutheran Church. A picture of the confirmants brings a smile to Gladys Herland's face. She tells how he was placed at the highest step in front of the altar so he wouldn't appear so much shorter than his peers. His Mom remembers a saying on Doug's bedroom bulletin board that spoke to his spirituality. It read, "I know God will never give me more in a day than I can handle."

Among Doug's favorite childhood pastimes of fishing and camping was woodcarving. He learned the craft from a counselor, who was from Honduras, at one of his Boy Scout camps. His mother proudly displays all the pieces he made, including a stubborn burro being coaxed by a man wearing a plastic cowboy hat. Doug told his Mom he didn't think he could carve a hat so he borrowed one from a figurine of Roy Rogers.

Doug made at least 40 neckerchief slides for his Boy Scout friends. As a member of Troop 81 in Bend, Doug earned his Eagle Scout Award and proudly did all the requirements despite his handicap. Offered a burro to ride on by Mr. Moody, his

Scoutmaster on the required 50-mile hike, Doug said, "If I want to be an Eagle Scout, I want to do it the way every other Scout has to do it." (The difference was, Doug Herland made Eagle Scout in three and a half years.) His friend Leonard Parker woke up early each morning and started walking with Doug. Doug attended several Boy Scout World Jamborees, including one held in Idaho in 1967.

The largest carving in Gladys Herland's collection depicts a Viking toolmaker. Doug's grandfather was the "Village Blacksmith" in Tioga, North Dakota and Doug was very proud of his Norwegian descent. Another carving, depicting Doug's mom and dad, was given to them when they became grandparents. One can't help but smile when it is quite obvious there is a can of chew in Doug's dad's bib overalls. This thread of humor wove its way through all of Doug's life.

Though he couldn't participate in sports, his interest prompted him to take a correspondence course in becoming a team manager and trainer. Doug held that position during Football, Basketball and Baseball seasons in Junior High and High School.

At halftime during football games at Bend High School, two players, usually at least six feet tall, would grab Doug under his arms and carry him between them as they ran into the locker room. Doug was 4' 8" at the time, so it must have been quite a sight. (Doug claimed that he was 4' 9" if he stretched.)

During his Junior year in high school, Doug was base coach for the Bend Lava Bears Baseball Team, who that year took Second in the State. On one trip with the baseball team Doug and his friends were swimming in the motel's pool. Someone inadvertently jumped into the pool at the same time Doug came down a slide. He spent the following summer on his family's front yard in a lawn chair with yet another broken bone.

Doug graduated from Bend High School in 1969. His humor and endless positive attitude brought him to graduation the same year others born in 1951 graduated. That's an awkward way of saying he did everything in the same time those without such a handicap did.

It was during his college years at Pacific Lutheran University that he became interested in Crew. He rowed for PLU from 1969 to 1973. Following his graduation in 1973, Doug worked in Salem, Oregon at the Oregon State Rehabilitation Center. He coached Crew in Klamath Falls, at the University of Michigan and at PLU for three years.

As a coxswain for a pair of rowers, Doug won the Bronze Medal in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles at Lake Cacitas. His mother generously allows visitors in her home not only to see this medal but also hold it. The box that holds the medal has a sticker on the side that reads, "Rowing-Pair-Oars-With-Coxswain-Men." Its intricately sculpted pictures, several symbols of the Olympics and Greek figures, and sheer weight attest to its underlying meaning - artistry and devotion.

Doug Herland possessed that devotion. His perseverance finally paid off after several years in the Midwest and on the East Coast trying to find his way into an Olympic shell. He and his pair practiced only a month together. Since Doug did not meet the minimum weight requirement for a coxswain, he carried with him a four-pound bag of birdshot. The birdshot is displayed at Pacific Lutheran University, where he found a sport he not only loved but could excel in. He didn't "weigh enough" but in living his life, Doug never gave up, and in Crew vernacular never said, "Weigh enough."

In a 1985 interview he said, "There is not a better fitness activity (than rowing) for anybody. Anybody, if they have bad knees or bad legs or bad ankles, can have problems running, but they can row. I have my problems, but I can row 10 miles a lot better than I can run a half-mile."

While in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Doug began a program for disabled persons called "Freedom on the River." He started his student rowers in the Olympic-sized pool on the University of Michigan's campus. Their next sessions were on a small pond and then, the river. Imagine the freedom Doug gifted these individuals!

Doug had friends who crafted special aluminum gloves for a young man with Multiple Sclerosis who could not use his hands but had strength in his arms. Backrests were ingeniously installed in the shells, as Crew boats only contain a sliding seat for support. A male who had been in an automobile accident was strapped into this homemade seat.

This innovative program for both able and physically challenged people was introduced by Doug Herland in six key cities in the United States and Regina, Canada. By the time of Doug's death in 1991, there were 37 cities that had begun successful programs.

In Doug's hometown of Bend, Oregon he tried to establish the "Rowing in the Mainstream" program. Sadly, the Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District was unable to find good instructors for rowing, since in that area there were no rowing programs.

Other pursuits during Doug's professional life were in working with and being a member of the U.S. Rowing Association and selling Alden Rowing Shells. Alden Shells designed a boat for the disabled. After leaving his coaching position at PLU, he was Safety Coordinator on campus. He died there as a result of a massive brain hemorrhage.

At that time he had been confined to a wheelchair. He had hoped to regain his ability to walk, but when he couldn't, his comment was like his attitude through all his life, "I'll just have to remind myself that I did stay out of a wheelchair for 38 years."

Untimely though Doug's death was, ironically the Crew program at Pacific Lutheran University, his Alma Mater, had just purchased a new shell. They named it "Herland's Legacy" in his honor. Another quite impressive looking shell now on the water at PLU holds the name "Doug 'Herley' Herland." His legacy lives on in a program of incredibly dedicated athletes. Each year when new recruits are brought into the program of rowing, they hear or read the story of a young man, destined perhaps to spend less time than most

living, but dedicated to living his life to the fullest. He once said, "There's more to life than rowing, but not much."

In 1991 Doug Herland was posthumously awarded the 1991 Distinguished Alumnus in Sports Award at PLU, acknowledgement for all the work he had done especially for the sport of rowing. His vision of encouraging the disabled to participate in the sport of rowing enabled countless of athletes out of the mainstream to experience personal success.

Doug Herland is indeed a legacy. Bones are breakable, especially those of this particular young man because of a rare disease. His positive spirit however, shown endlessly in the pursuit of everything he did, was absolutely and undeniably unbreakable.

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