

Article from **RERC on Communication Enhancement eNews**http://www.imakenews.com/aac-rerc/e_article000589950.cfm?x=b11,0,w

May 24, 2006

Meet Mick Joyce*by Mick Joyce*

Doctors can sometimes be wrong. This was especially true before technology became the cornerstone of diagnosis. Mick Joyce proved this to be the case. After his traumatic birth, doctors said that, because of his cerebral palsy, Mick would never read or write much less go to school. His mother and three older sisters had him reading by age five and in grade school in a timely fashion. A series of wonderful teachers, including his mother and one of his sisters, set Mick on the right track until the sixth grade when the powers-to-be sent him to a special school in another town. The special professionals at the so-called Hospital and School kept giving Mick and his parents negative reports about his academics and behavior until the end of high school. Some recognized his ability and gave him more time and support. This, along with an unconventional Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) counselor, saved him from the sweat shops of the times and steered him on the right track to college.



In college, at Southwest Minnesota State University, Mick studied creative writing and political science, and became active in the disability rights movement. He started a newsletter and engaged himself in the study of the law as it related to disability. Mick considered law school, but rejected it because the reasonable accommodations he needed were not yet in place. In his last year of college, he wrote and obtained a private foundation grant to continue his study, subsequently expanded the study to a five state area, and published a legal handbook. Mick also wrote the grant for the first rural independent living center in the United States. Although all these projects were successful, soft money started to dry up at the start of the Reagan Administration and Mick decided to try graduate school.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Mick studied urban and regional planning and public administration and earned two masters' degrees. At the Trace Center, he was introduced to augmentative communications, which he still uses. Through a federal grant, Mick acquired some technology that was considered very experimental. Engineers at Trace decided to fit Mick with one of the first portable high quality speech synthesizers and computer programs for writing and spelling. As time passed, word processing software incorporated features to speed up writing and correct errors. Mick could use mainstream technology for writing, while still carrying a portable speech device.

Using technology, and a positive attitude, Mick stays involved with his Community through his writing. He works at jobs in the Madison area on "soft funds" while he writes poetry and essays and continues to look for permanent employment. Mick likes keeping updated on politics, reading interesting Internet blogs, and going for strolls on the bike paths. On a Saturday afternoon, one can find Mick in the town square, listening to folk music, jamming to jazz or looking at art, in no hurry to buy anything.

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