

Paralyzed after suffering spinal cord injuries, patients get their lives back

# Nothing Short of Remarkable

By Sally Owen

"I'm definitely luckier than a lot of people," Aaron Stacey says. "I'm trying to recover the most I can so that I can go back to work or school."

It was a tragically classic scenario. Kim Bettes was driving from work to her Ellington, Mo., home. It was dark and a cold November rain was falling. Bettes' vehicle hydroplaned, slid across both lanes of the road,

flipped 3 ½ times and came to a stop upside down.

When she opened her eyes, "I thought, at least I'm still here," Bettes says. "I also thought I'd go to the hospital, they would sew me up and I'd go home. Things didn't happen that way."

After being taken to a Poplar Bluff hospital by paramedics, she was transferred to Cape Girardeau and underwent emergency surgery performed by Cape Girardeau neurosurgeon Scott R. Gibbs, M.D., of the Brain and NeuroSpine Clinic of Missouri.

"At first, I couldn't move or feel from the neck down," says Bettes. "Every day, Dr. Gibbs

would stick me with a special kind of pin, working his way up my body. At first, there was no sensation. Then I felt a little sensation in my chest. I would lie in my hospital bed and practice moving my toes. I'd ask my mom, 'Are my toes moving?' She would say no. One day, I asked the same old question again and she said, 'Yes, your toe is moving.' I never thought I'd be so happy to make my toe move."

## The Journey Back Begins

The time had come to begin rehabilitation on Southeast's Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit. Would she walk again? "Kim came to us as 'total assist,'" Southeast physical therapist Allegra Morris-Stroder, P.T.,

explains. "Because Kim's spinal cord injury was not 'complete,' we knew she would have some movement. We just didn't know to what extent that would be when we began therapy."

Morris-Stroder says that although "Kim was in pain, she was very motivated. She worked very hard."

Southeast's therapists were "awesome," Bettes adds. "They made me do things I didn't want to do, but had they not been there telling me I had to, I might not have done it. And they also made me laugh a lot, which helped."

## Starting with the Basics

Bettes ticks off the list of things she could not do when she began rehab. "I couldn't walk; I couldn't write my name; I couldn't brush my teeth; I couldn't hold silverware properly—you name it."

Bettes says she is also appreciative of the therapists' patience. "I got pretty testy sometimes," she admits, "because I was so aggravated at myself because I couldn't do something."

Little by little, much to the delight of Gibbs and the rehab team, Bettes began to show first slight, then significant, improvement. Forty-nine days after she began rehab, she left Southeast, standing straight, using only a walker.

Today, Bettes says she "can do pretty much everything. I can sew, go shopping, go to my son's baseball games, go for walks."

## Aaron's Story

Aaron Stacey of Kennett, Mo., loved riding his bicycle and doing jumps. "I got to one jump I'd done almost every day. But when I pulled the front end of my bike up, the chain slipped and I went down, landing on my forehead. I felt a numbing sensation, and I couldn't move."

Like Bettes, Stacey was transferred to Cape Girardeau, treated by Gibbs and then underwent extensive

therapy in Southeast's Inpatient Rehab.

"When I started rehab, I couldn't do anything at all," Stacey says. "The first thing that returned was being able to arch my back and just sit up. Eventually I was able to raise my legs up and down."

Southeast's therapists, he says, "worked me pretty hard, but with good intentions. The entire rehab team was just great."

After two months in the hospital, Stacey was transferred to Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Mount Vernon, where he spent another two months. When he left to continue his therapy,

"Aaron was able to stand and he was starting to walk," says his physical therapist, Caroline Tennison, P.T.

"Aaron is such a hard worker," she says. "He always wanted to do better. His mind-set made a ton of difference. He literally worked himself as hard as he could."

Stacey, 22, says today he's able to walk around his house and do many things that he initially couldn't. "I'm definitely luckier than a lot of people," he says. "I'm trying to recover the most I can so that I can go back to work or school."

## Exceptional Results

The extent of recovery that Bettes and Stacey achieved was not the norm, Gibbs says. "These kinds of injuries more commonly result in permanent loss."

"In both these situations, there was immobilization during emergency care to prevent further injury, expeditious treatment and excellent spinal cord injury rehabilitation." ■



Kim Bettes, shown here with son Dylan and husband Clifford, marvels at her recovery. She puts it this way: "Am I lucky? You bet!"

**"The pivotal part of a patient's recovery is attitude. Of course, it is essential to realign and reconstruct the spine, but from there on, rehab is vital to achieve optimal results. The old adage 'you can't help others if they don't want to be helped' is true. Southeast's skilled therapy team is there to help patients achieve their greatest potential."**

**— Scott R. Gibbs, M.D.**