

# RUBEN BURNS

James Smith Reserve, Saskatchewan

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**“It’s a constant struggle to avoid the seizures and show him that we love him.”**

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Our son Roger, who is now twenty-five, came down with encephalitis when he was five years old. That’s what you call sleeping sickness and it left him with serious brain damage. At first, he was in a coma for almost a month, and the doctors said there was no way that he would recover.

He was just playing outside and he keeled over. We had to rush him to the University Hospital in Saskatoon because we were living in Prince Albert at the time. So he was paralyzed, completely paralyzed for nearly two months. He didn’t respond at all until the day that his grandfather visited him. He really loves his grandfather and I guess the voice of someone he loves snapped him out of his coma. That was the first time that he even opened his eyes.

The doctors told us that maybe if he went home where he could be with his family, it might help him overcome his paralysis. And they were right, because he became almost fully recovered once his brothers and sisters started talking with him. Since then, only his slight limp reminds us that he was completely paralyzed for two months.

But the big trouble was that he developed epilepsy about three years after this first sickness. He was about eight years old when this happened, and since then much of Roger’s life has been miserable and unhappy. Sometimes he has as many as six or seven seizures in a day, and

this has been going on for seventeen years. He has also developed a very bad temper, which makes him temperamental. He gets stubborn and wants to fight us on everything that we do. Not the other kids, though, but with my wife and me. You know, he’s a very lovable guy, and I am not saying that we don’t love him. But sometimes, it is just so hard to take, what with the seizures and the outbursts. We wonder what’s going on in his mind.

For awhile things got so bad that we had to send him away to the Bosco School for boys in Regina. That’s a Catholic School run by a Father Larry and he was just tremendous. It really wasn’t the right thing for Roger, though, because it was a school for boys who were in trouble with the law. It was the only place where we could find help, even though Roger had never been bad or cruel. He just had this problem with his temper. Anyway, he ran away a number of times. Every time he went back he just got into fights with some of the tough kids in school. It was kind of sad but we didn’t know what else to do.

When Roger ran away he would come all the way back to Prince Albert by himself. I don’t know how he could do it because he had seizures along the way. I know he did because he would show up at home with his face all bruised. When he’s outside and the seizures come he just falls face forward on the concrete. That must have been what

happened to him. We’d always feel so bad because we knew that no one would understand what was happening to him when we weren’t around.



School doesn’t do much for Roger because he can’t take the pressure of being asked questions. It just brings on a seizure. He doesn’t have patience in the classroom, either, so I guess he is kind of unteachable. I mean he hasn’t learned how to read or write. But around the home, he is very good. He has learned how to take care of himself, and he’s very clean and very tidy. Even at home, however, there are pressures that really bother him. It’s hard to talk to him about his problem because he gets defensive and thinks we might put him away. It’s a constant struggle to avoid the seizures and show him that we love him.