

# Student to master gilded oration from computer box

By Gordon Johnson

Answering the phone is no big thing for most people, but it is physically impossible for Bill Rush.

By April 7, Rush who has spastic cerebral palsy with quadraplegia and no speech, hopes to be able to accomplish what for most of us is a simple feat.

With the aid of a voice synthesizer assembled by Mark Dahmke, a computer science major, Rush will be able to accomplish some of the day-to-day things most people take for granted, like asking questions in class or having private conversations, Dahmke said.

The computer, which has a memory, can be programmed to utter a phrase by hitting one key or can be programmed to say a word as it is spelled.

After Rush has entered what he wants to say into the memory circuits, he must only hit a switch to have the whole sen-

tence repeated in voice, Dahmke said.

### Head stick

Rush presently uses a head stick to point to a letter board or types what he wants to say.

"I will be able to use the phone by myself, which will be fantastic because right now I need another person reading what I type or spell," Rush said, which he said excluded private calls.

The voice synthesizer is a small computer which uses phonetic sounds to reproduce words and sentences, Dahmke explained. It produces a loud deep voice which one would not expect from the slightly built Rush.

The voice produced by the synthesizer is sometimes unclear, but can be improved, Dahmke said.

"The electronics of the board are capable of perfect voice reproduction," he said.

The synthesizer is a desk top model,

Dahmke said, but they hope to have it fitted for Rush's wheel chair in time for the fall semester.

### Machine's advantages

An entire dictionary can be stored on a series of electromagnetic disks, Dahmke said. Rush could even store a special vocabulary for a technical class, or a foreign language, Dahmke said.

The machine's advantages are the low cost and superior voice quality compared to some models costing \$11,000. The synthesizer also can be fitted to the individual, much like an artificial limb, he said.

Rush's synthesizer will cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000, Dahmke said.

The United Cerebral Palsy and the State Rehabilitation Services paid for the machine.

Dahmke said he hopes to gain recognition for this work as this is the only machine of its kind in the country. He also hopes to fill more orders when he goes into production this summer.

### Design others

Dahmke said United Cerebral Palsy would like him to design synthesizers for others, and if pressed, he could produce up to three synthesizers a week.

The project was originally proposed to Nebraska's Rehabilitation Services by the

College of Engineering at a cost of \$250,000 for two years, but was turned down, said Lois Schwab, director of independent living rehabilitation.

The idea, Schwab said, originated with a banking machine which talked to the customers.

The synthesizer is in operation, but must be refined before it is ready for use, Dahmke said. Rush has tried the machine and picked up on its operation quickly, Dahmke added.

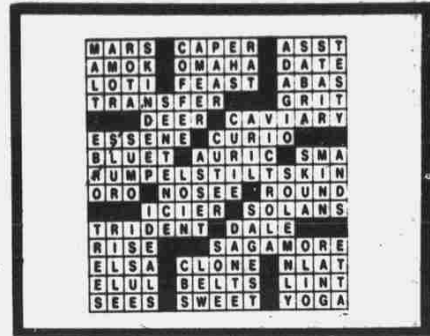
Rush said he is pleased with voice quality of the machine.

"It will help my social life," Rush said. "Ever try to spell things in a dimly lit bar?"

## Ousting 'Joe and Moe' goal of write-ins' ASUN campaign

By Shelley Smith

to Ellicott, with new coaching. SUI's platform includes the proposal



# Voice machine topples student's communication barrier

By Bill Graf

For a quadriplegic with no speech ability the toughest barriers to overcome are social rather than physical, according to a UNL student with cerebral palsy.

Bill Rush, 24, a junior in journalism said, "My goal is to be a normal guy with an apartment, a diploma and maybe a girlfriend."

"Our society doesn't let disabled people just be mediocre. They are either superman or welfare moochers, there is no in between. If someone else flunks a class or gets an A or a C it's no big deal. I don't have that luxury."

"I don't want to sound bitter, I'm just tired."

Rush was born with his disability, therefore he has gone through life unable to communicate by any means

other than by using a stick mounted on his head to spell out words, letter by letter, on a language board.

However, thanks to Mark Dahmke and Lois Schwab at the Nebraska Division of Rehabilitation Services and the United Cerebral Palsy of Nebraska, Rush now can communicate audibly. And as if speech itself isn't enough, his new voice has a Swedish accent.

"IN SEPTEMBER of 1977," Dahmke explained, "I met Lois Schwab almost by accident."

"We went to her department to discuss a grant proposal for academic computing. During our conversation, I told her that back in high school I had once planned to build a simple voice synthesizer for a science fair project. Dr. Schwab suggested that we look into the possibility of a pilot project. Almost simultaneously, we thought of Bill.

"Within hours, Dr. Schwab contacted the University Affirmative Action office and other agencies, and had obtained a commitment of support."

The money to develop the \$3,000 voice synthesizer came from the Nebraska Division of Rehabilitation, United Cerebral Palsy of Nebraska and the University Affirmative Action office.

The voice synthesizer reads phonetic spellings of words. After the word's phonetic spelling has been entered into the computer's dictionary, Rush needs only to spell the word in English and the synthesizer recalls the phonetic spelling and then pronounces the word.

RUSH SAID THE synthesizer has been a great help toward toppling some of the social barriers. He can talk on the telephone for the first time.

Also, the synthesizer presents whole sentences, whereas before Rush pointed out each letter. By the time he finished, many people couldn't put the series of letters into a meaningful sentence.

*Life* magazine has just finished interviewing Rush and Dahmke about the voice synthesizer. The interviews are part of a story *Life* is doing about advanced technology and how it is helping the disabled. Rush said the story will appear after the first of the year.

As a student in the School of Journalism, Rush said his goal is to do freelance writing. He has already had stories published four times in the Omaha World-Herald and three times in *The Exceptional Parent*, a nationally circulated magazine for parents with handicapped children.

Near the end of the interview, Rush said, "There are two final points that are very important.

"FIRST, TECHNOLOGY is great, but it is only a tool to get accepted as a person. Second, I have conquered every facet of life, for example, education, social, etc. Except one, sexuality, and modern technology can't help me there."

Rush went on to say that when he talks about sexuality, he isn't talking about the act of copulation, but instead, simply one person caring for another.

## inside monday

- Bummin' around: Reporter takes an inside look at the life of the streets. . . . . Page 6
- Shake it, don't break it: Reviewer says band goes back to rock's roots . . . . . Page 12
- Looking ahead: NU players thinking of Missouri after seventh straight win Saturday. . . . . Page 14

By William L. Rush

The author, of Omaha, a victim of cerebral palsy who cannot walk or talk, is a journalism major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has written several articles on his life for the magazine.

"Where's the elevator?" I spelled out for the fifth time to two guys who were passing by me.

"What did he say?" one asked the other.

"Don't know, but somebody should be with him to look out for him."

Now my frustration grew. I had a review session for sociology on the seventh floor in 10 minutes. I needed directions to the elevator; my motorized wheelchair would do the rest.

Since birth I haven't been able to walk, talk, or use my hands. But with the help of a stylus attached to my head and a lot of people I was in my freshman year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

I would be late for a very important review test — a test that would count for one-half of my grade — and I couldn't make these guys understand that I was just another dumb freshman asking for directions, not an escapee from a mental hospital.

I tried once again. "Where's the e-l-e-v-a-t-o-r?" I spelled out slowly so they would be able to follow. But, they just looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders and walked away.

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I was experiencing the same frustration two years later when I was trying to get some information from a computer expert on a home computer system. The system was being demonstrated at a computer science conference at the university in mid-September, 1978. But the expert had been side-tracked by another questioner.

Why hadn't God given me speech? Life would be so much simpler if I could just talk.

I spied another expert who wasn't busy, so I decided to ask him. I wanted to know if the model had a shift lock since I couldn't hold a shift key down without a shift lock.

I expected to be ignored, but this person answered me: "I don't know, but if it hasn't, one can be installed very easily for you."

He went on: "I'm glad we've finally met, Bill, I'm Mark Dahmke and I live in the same dorm as you do. I've been talking to several people here at the university, and we want to develop a computerized speech synthesizer for you."

We all have labels to put on people. Mark Dahmke is a computer programmer-analyst, and he looks like it. He has short brown hair that is neatly combed, wire-rimmed glasses, and conservative dress. He is slender.

Mark began, "About six years ago a company in Michigan began selling a speech synthesizer subsystem, for use with computers or OEM — Original Equipment Manufacturers — products. I don't know if you're familiar with the company. Anyway, it was expensive and inflexible.

"When I was a high school sophomore, I became interested in building a voice synthesizer for a science fair project. But the project never got off the ground because it cost too much. It would have been just too expensive and impractical.

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"But building a voice synthesizer has always been my dream. Until now it was impractical. But I think we can help each other, if that's okay with you," the computer analyst offered.

"Yes, it's okay. You need a guinea pig and I can't talk," I spelled out. "But who is going to pay for it?"

"Vocational Rehabilitation, maybe." Mark suggested, "There are a lot of organizations around that can pay for it."

I was skeptical of this idea. I was doing badly in my computer course, so Vocational Rehabilitation wouldn't buy me a computer. They would be justified in refusing. But, a voice synthesizer would be nice. I could talk on the phone for myself. Now I needed somebody to read what I was saying over the phone. This ruled out private conversations. This also meant finding a time when a third party was available.

It sure would be nice if I could dial a push-button speaker phone and be able to say "Hi, this is Bill. I was wondering how you were doing." Or to be able to ask a professor a question directly instead of asking it

## Journey Out of Silence:

# 'I Can Talk! Where Is the Elevator?'



through another person, and having the professor answering the other student.

Or being able to shout "Hi" to a friend who was walking down the street.

All these things would be nice, but I decided not to get my hopes up.

Last October Mark came to my room and gave me a long, impressive paper on a synthesizer system. He said, "We had a meeting out at the home economics building and copies of these were passed out. I thought you would like to see a copy. It explains the synthesizer that I want to build. Goodnight."

I started to read it, not noticing the author. As I read

*When you've been unable to speak all your life, the ability to communicate with sound becomes an exciting prospect. The author "talks" with a stylus attached to his forehead; now he will be able to punch out speech sounds on his computer keyboard. The speech synthesizer is shown in the background. Later, he expects to have a smaller model that fits on his wheelchair.*

Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands, September 23, 1979

## Talk

Continued.

I thought the company had put together a thorough public release. And I wondered what company put this system together.

When I read the byline I was shocked. Mark had written it! He was serious! He really wanted to make me a voice synthesizer. I felt guilty for my negative attitude.

I went to the stairway in our dorm and waited for somebody to come down. When somebody did come down I asked them to ask Mark Dahmke to come down for a minute.

Shortly Mark came down and said, "Yes? Do you have a question about the voice synthesizer? I see you have the paper. Comments?"

I told him it had impressed me. I didn't usually put this much effort into a term paper. It had diagrams and the diagrams looked professional. I couldn't believe how thorough he had been.

He thanked me and said, "We have worked it out so that Vocational Rehabilitation and United Cerebral Palsy will buy the actual synthesizer, and the University of Nebraska will pay for my time in building it. So it looks like we are in business.

"Oh by the way, I plan eventually to put your voice — so to speak — on your wheelchair so you'll have it wherever you go. It wouldn't be practical to just have it desk-top. I will make sure of that. Otherwise it would be self-defeating."

I flipped back to the estimated cost. It would cost \$2,500. He was saying in effect, I would eventually have a computer that cost \$2,500 on my wheelchair tray. I wondered if he knew my arms flew around and knocked things off my tray.

I spelled out: "If you do that, please make it very durable, like bionic construction, because I'm hard on equipment — ask the engineers who fix my chair. Please make it very strong."

Mark smiled and said, "Well, bionics are a little out of my field but I'll try!"

Mark did try. Sometimes I wondered who wanted

### 'Well, Bill, are you going to talk to us?'

more for me to talk — Mark or me. He tried to explain what he was doing, but his explanations just left me with a blank expression.

Then he would say, "Excuse me. I'm being too technical. I have a tendency to forget others aren't programmers. I'm sorry."

"But unlike other synthesizers, this will not have a set vocabulary. You can make it say anything you want it to say. That's the beauty of it.

"By typing in a string of phonemes (the smallest unit of speech, a sound) you can make it say almost anything you want to say. Here, I have something to show you."

He went up to his room and brought down a paperback book from a company known as Computalker Consultants.

"You should have a copy of this material to study. This is how it works: suppose you want to say hello, you type in HHEH3LOW1. It then says hello. By this way you can store any number of phrases."

He had lost me. That wasn't anything. My computer science professor always lost me in his class. So I asked Mark hesitantly, "Are you sure I can operate this thing? My computer science professor can tell you I'm stupid when it comes to computers, but here you are building me a computer that talks. I don't understand it."

Mark replied: "First you are working on a big computer system that was written to be generalized for many tasks. It is a very poor system because it was designed by several people at different times who didn't

know what each was doing.

"If the designers don't communicate the product will have flaws. Since I'm the only designer, this won't happen. Secondly, you're taking a course in computer science which even gives me trouble. Thirdly, if I, as a programmer, do my job right, the system will be so simple that anybody can operate it."

Mark kept me informed on his progress with my voice synthesizer. One day in February he came up to me and said, "Dr. Lois Schwab, the person largely responsible for the funding, is coming to see the synthesizer. It would be neat if you could operate it for her, but I don't think I can bring it down to your room because I'm using my home-built computer to develop it. And you can't come up to my room, can you?"

Mark had never asked me any favors, but he was

asking me one now. He was giving me a voice, so how could I refuse?

"Yes, I can come up in the manual wheelchair. Two friends can haul me up. I don't think they would want to make it a habit, but this is an occasion. They will want to hear the voice. When should I come up?" I asked.

For the demonstration I brought a book of quotations so I could practice with something.

Mark was chatting with Lois Schwab when I arrived at his room. I noticed that his bookshelves were full of books on computer science. I hoped my shelves would be filled with books on journalism some day, and that I would know as much about journalism and commu-

Continued on Page 26. Mark Dahmke explains on Page 21 how the speech synthesizer was developed.



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# Talk

Continued from Page 19.

nication as Mark already knows about computers.

Dr. Schwab is a middle-aged woman with a pleasant smile. She had opened the door for me to come to the university three years ago. She is the head of the independent living center over on east campus. Every project she is involved with becomes a reality. She greeted me.

Mark was sitting at his home-built computer, demonstrating the system to her. It looked easier than expected.

"Well, Bill, are you going to talk to us?" Dr. Schwab asked with a twinkle in her eye.

I nodded yes and laughed nervously. I wished Mark had introduced me to the synthesizer before this. I could have practiced with it before demonstrating my lack of skill to the director of the independent living center. I also wished I had Mark's confidence in me. I kept telling him that computers and I didn't get along, but he didn't seem to listen.

"All right Bill, my keyboard is a little different than the ones where you have been doing your programming assignments," Mark said with a smile. Then he began to explain his keyboard.

The system had three modes:

straight phonetic, where I had to type in the phonemic spelling of words; store, where I could store the words that I had just typed in; and alphabet, where it would say the letters and numbers as they were pressed. It was easier than writing programs myself.

I typed in a word phonetically, but it didn't sound right. I tried again. It sounded perfect! Dr. Schwab was on her feet, smiling with Mark.

"He catches on quickly! Good job, Bill," she enthusiastically said.

Then Dr. Schwab turned to Mark and said, "You'll have the money that you need. Call me in the morning with an estimated price list. I have to run. Good-bye you guys!"

"Well," Mark said to me with a grin, "how does it feel to be verbal?"

My mind went back to the time when I was asking for directions to an elevator in the sociology building. Mark had solved half of the problem. I could now talk, shout, whisper, ask questions, or answer questions faster than ever before. My journey out of silence was seemingly over. Mark had given me a tool which could help me communicate with others.

But still I wondered. Would somebody tell me where the elevator was?

**Sunday** Magazine of the  
**MIDLANDS**

The Omaha World-Herald

I lifted the telephone receiver for Extension 315, and the voice, in low, measured tones, said:

"Hello, Mr. Limprecht. This is Bill Rush. I agree with you, it is unreal."

Then another voice came on the line, Bill Rush's mother, to finish the conversation. He needs some telephone practice.

Bill's message—he referred to a letter I had written him after receiving his latest manuscript—may not rank up there with Samuel F.B. Morse's "What hath God wrought!" in the first telegraph transmission, but to Bill and me it was heady stuff.

You see, Bill Rush cannot talk. He cannot walk, either. Cerebral palsy left him speechless and a quadriplegic at birth, yet such is his grit that he now is a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, majoring in journalism (with a 3.68 average).

Bill has kept readers of the magazine posted on his progress the past five or six years with periodic articles—through J.P. Lord School and on to college.

But none compares with the article in this issue. Bill has acquired a voice, thanks to Mark Dahmke, a senior and computer science major at UNL from David City.

Dahmke designed and built Bill's voice. It's called a speech synthesizer, and in some abracadabra fashion Bill is able to punch a series of computer keys, with the stylus attached to his forehead, and the English language comes out, saying what the user wants it to say. Reply, and it (he/she) answers.

Dahmke is making Bill a second unit, small enough to fit on his wheelchair, and is also making a similar "bionic voice" for a young woman student from Lincoln.

Bill never lets his limitations get in the way of his sense of humor. Recently he began wearing a T-shirt with the words "Selleck Quad." It means Selleck Quadrangle, the dormitory where both he and Dahmke live. Except Bill says it stands for Selleck Quadriplegic. That's him. These two remarkable young men tell their respective parts in the speech synthesizer story on Pages 16 and 21.

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As we noted on August 5, when the seventh-week winners were announced, this year's Amateur Snapshot Contest drew a record number of entries. Promotion Department



From left, judges John Kalina, Catherine Ferguson and Donald Jack.

secretary Carole Safley's final tabulation was 7,145, up 453 from the 1978 figure.

Judges John Kalina, Donald Jack and Catherine Ferguson have made their selections from the 42 weekly winners—on the cover and Pages 24 and 25.

Professional photographers Kalina and Jack are old hands at judging our contest; Ms. Ferguson filled in for Frances Kraft, who was out of the city. Ms. Ferguson, like Mrs. Kraft an artist, has her own studio near the Old Market.

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When the six regional editions of "The Compleat Travelers Companion of Country Inns" reached our office, I checked on the Middlebury Inn in the New England edition. We used to stay there when our daughter was attending Middlebury College, in Vermont. It was listed, along with 28 others. Vermont is inn country.

For fun, I checked the Midwest edition, specifically Nebraska. There are two—Fort Robinson and Belgrade. Belgrade? Certainly. The Bel-Horst Inn.

Magazine staffer Al Pagel immediately headed that way and discovered a charming story. It's on Page 8. A companion article on Page 10 tells of more Pagel discoveries in the good life Midlands.

*Hollis Limprecht*

Editor, Magazine of the Midlands

Photographers

# He Speaks With a Swedish Accent

By Mark Dahmke

This article appeared in the University of Nebraska Computer Network Newsletter. Dahmke, a UNL student majoring in computer science, built the voice synthesizer for Bill Rush.

He has spastic cerebral palsy with quadriplegia and no speech. He moves in a powered wheelchair and uses a headstick with language/word board or electric typewriter and teletype.

But in spite of his handicaps, Bill Rush is a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is majoring in journalism and his goal is to work in the field of communications.

His language board has many disadvantages. First, it requires that someone watch over his shoulder and read or speak for him. Secondly, it's often difficult to attract attention when he wants to communicate.

Another limitation is the telephone. Someone must act as an intermediary or Rush must use a teletype-like-terminal which requires that the person at the other end of the line also have a compatible terminal.

Conversation among friends at UNL about helping Rush communicate turned to specialized computers designed for the specific needs of handicapped individuals. A number of us discussed computer-assisted communication. I've been interested in the subject since high school.

o o o

The Nebraska Division of Rehabilitation Services was consulted on the technicalities of using DRS funds. Ultimately, they bought the Computalker Consultants speech synthesizer board, and United Cerebral Palsy agreed to pay for some of the hardware.

The unit chosen was the Computertalker Consultant CT-1. It has the advantage of software controlled vowel stress, inflection and voice pitch control.

Today, the synthesizer is up and running and speaks quite clearly. Input to the software is in the form of a character string made of combinations of phonemes in the International Phonetic Alphabet, represented by one or two alphabetic characters such as: TH, DH, Z, S, AA, AO and so on.

The program also handles vowel stresses 1-5 (1 is the highest stress, 5 is the lowest) and punctuation. A period produces a drop in pitch, a question mark raise the pitch, and a comma produces a pause.

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To say "Hello, how are you?" the following would be entered:

"HHEH3LOW1, HHAW AA2R YUW?"

The numbers are stresses of the preceding vowel (EH3), (OW1), (AA2). Most people find it easy to understand after just a few phrases.

It has a slightly mechanical intonation and an interesting Swedish accent. This is probably due to the way some vowels are stressed in the phoneme templates.

With the help of David Cochran, associate professor in the industrial and management systems Engineering Department, the next step was a full stand-alone computer system that will mount on Rush's wheelchair.

The design has several goals:

1. Ease of use.
2. Minimum number of keystrokes to perform a given function.
3. Large vocabulary storage.



Mark Dahmke

Rush will be able to enter a word and store it as a symbolic label of his choice. For example, the phonetic "HHEH3LOW1" could be stored with the symbolic label: "Hello".

Later, if he needs the word in a phrase or sentence, it can be incorporated into the new string. The new string can be stored and labelled for future use.

A small disk drive or tape drive attached to the computer will allow extensive vocabularies to be saved and reloaded at will. For example, a special set of words and phrases might be needed for a chemistry class, with another for journalism.

The desired vocabulary can be retrieved from tape or disk with one command.

Some frequently used words and phrases will be available as fixed labelled keys on a specially designed keyboard. Examples are: "Hello," "He," "You," "I."

The total cost is between two thousand and three thousand dollars.

Unlike some prostheses, this unit cannot be outgrown. Upgrading is done by adding more keys to the keyboard and exchanging the cassette or mini-disk with the software on it. This is inexpensive, about one-tenth of the cost of the original system.

While the project has been fascinating and fulfilling, the joy of hearing Bill "speak" for the first time is unparalleled. His first word was "love."



"So you got a nibble. Big deal."

## Filming will begin soon on UNL duo

By Alice Hrnicek

CBS film crews and actors will descend upon UNL next spring to film a movie about the special relationship between the talents of two UNL students.

Bill Rush, a junior journalism major from Omaha, is afflicted with severe cerebral palsy, from pre-brith brain damage which left him unable to speak or use his legs and arms.

Computer science major Mark Dahmke of David City designs computer systems in addition to doing private consulting, working for the university and studying.

Dahmke designed a voice synthesizer for Rush last year which allows him to speak for the first time. Rush communicates by tapping out messages with his headstick on an IBM computer, or on a letter board on the front of his wheelchair or with his new synthesizer.

### Break barriers

"I feel good (about the movie) because a lot of people have a lot of misgivings about the severely handicapped people and I hope this movie will break down some of those barriers," Rush said spelling on his typewriter.

Producer Frank Konigsberg, of Konigsberg Company in Los Angeles, says the movie will be ready for TV by next season. But he was faced with the unique problem of finding a script writer who could sensitively deal with the subject. Konigsberg found Nick Arnold, who also was born with cerebral palsy but suffers to a lesser extent than Rush, to write the script.

"He (Arnold) completely understands the feelings of someone in that position," Konigsberg said. "I think the relationship between Mark Dahmke and Bill Rush is a wonderful one and Bill's story is inspiring."

The two were featured in the January issue of *Life* magazine before the movie offer was made the next month.

Rush and Dahmke met in 1978 after Dahmke expressed an interest in building a voice synthesizer to Lois Schwab, UNL's director of independent living for the disabled.

Both of the students are authors. Dahmke has written for computer publications and Rush has written for magazines, a career he wants to pursue after graduation.

"My fantasy is to be an undercover journalist in a nursing home," Rush said. He says that he could uncover "shabby care" while posing as a patient.

Rush has been writing an autobiography, concentrating on his college career with flashbacks to his childhood.

Dahmke plans to add to the book, and both are aiming for a fall publication date to coincide with the movie's release.

### Dahmke impressive

While Dahmke's biography is not being featured in the book, his emergence into the computer science world has been impressive. Dahmke has turned down at least five job offers in the microcomputer processing field to remain a student and selfemployed, he said.

Although the movie will be a fictionalized version of Rush's life, with events rearranged and accelerated, Dahmke is not too concerned about how the story will be portrayed.



Photo by Tom Gessner

Bill Rush



# Movie to feature UNL students Rush, Dahmke

By Pam George

UNL student Bill Rush, who has overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to earn his education, will join that elite group of people who have had movies made about their lives.

Rush, who lives in Selleck Quadrangle, is quadriplegic, unable to speak, and afflicted with cerebral palsy. Until last July, he could communicate only through use of a headstick and a language board mounted on his wheelchair.

But Mark Dahmke, a former Selleck resident, offered a scientific alternative—a sort of “bionic voice” for Rush.

The computerized system, which has type-

writer-like keys and small viewing screen, allows Rush to type messages with his headstick that will appear on the screen. Then with another push of a key, the message repeats audibly . . . intonation and pauses put where he pleases.

## Complicated system

The computerized system, which has typewriter-like keys and a small viewing screen, allows Rush to type messages with his headstick that will appear on the screen.

Both were featured in the Life article, the instigator of more than \$3,100 in donations from readers.

The donations have allowed Dahmke to “do things I couldn’t have before” with the voice synthesizer, he said.

Improvements in the system are expanded dictionary storage capabilities and advancements in the “word processor.” Dahmke also plans to make the system more compact and portable so it can be fastened to Rush’s wheelchair.

The Life article also generated three television movie offers. Together, Rush and Dahmke decided on an offer from Franklin Konigsberg of Konigsberg Company of Los Angeles, because they “trust the quality” of his work.

Konigsberg is associated with 20th Century Fox and has produced other TV movies including “The Dummy” and

“Pearl.”

Konigsberg is buying the options on the rights to the “life and life story of Bill Rush and Mark Dahmke,” according to a contract which their lawyers are currently studying.

## Big options

Dahmke said the options are being purchased for about \$5,000, which the pair automatically receives whether a movie is actually filmed or not.

The rights will be bought at the time of production, Dahmke said. How much money they will receive is a matter both choose not to disclose.

“Let’s say, five figures,” Rush jibed through his bionic voice.

Both have agreed to split any profits evenly.

Rush said he is excited about the movie offer, but “it is a big responsibility.”

He and Dahmke are “concerned about the quality of the work,” and want accurate representation.

“When any movie is made the public sees it as the way it really is,” Rush said.

“I am worried, because I want to paint an accurate picture of cerebral palsy for people.”

Rush said he doesn’t want the picture to be too glamorous, and yet not too gloomy causing other cerebral palsy victims to be discouraged.

Who would Rush want to play his part? The answer is in one of his favorite typed-in messages, “Aaaaay” which is a fairly good imitation of TV’s Happy Days character, “the Fonz,” done by actor Henry Winkler.

## Patricia O’Neal

When asked how his parents feel about the movie offer, Rush’s only response was “Mom wants Patricia O’Neal to play her.”

Dahmke and Rush also plan to release an autobiography to coincide with the movie’s release.

“Bill already has his autobiography in the works, and we will just see where it leads,” Dahmke said.

The movie will not be based on the book, he added.

“A scriptwriter will be sent out here for several weeks to spend time talking with us,” Dahmke said. They will “work back and forth” so that important elements in the movie and the book will coincide, he said.

There is also the possibility that the movie will be filmed on location at UNL, “which we are hoping for,” Dahmke said.

What the major point of the movie should be is clear to Rush, who is a journalism major, already a published author, and like so many of his neighbors in Selleck, a busy college student.

The major point of the movie? “That I am just like anybody else,” he said.

## **Life magazine story is about 2 UNL students**

The story of two University of Nebraska-Lincoln students — one with athetoid cerebral palsy and the other a senior majoring in computer science — is featured in the January edition of Life magazine.

In the seven-page picture story, Life editor Anne Fadiman writes about Bill Rush, a UNL junior who cannot walk, speak or use his hands. The story is also about UNL senior Mark Dahmke, who built a computerized voice synthesizer to help Rush communicate.

A headstick attached to a band around Rush's head also enables him to communicate. He uses the stick to point to letters and words on a spelling board placed across the arms of his wheelchair.

The Nebraska Division of Rehabilitation Services, United Cerebral Palsy of Nebraska and the university donated \$3,000 to help Dahmke build the computerized voice synthesizer.

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## Story of UNL students wins president's award

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A story of two University of  
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other who helps him communi-  
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The award was presented in  
Kansas City, Mo., recently to  
Anne Fadiman, who wrote  
"The Expanding World of Bill  
Rush" for the January 1980  
issue of Life Magazine. Ms.  
Fadiman is an editor for Life.

The seven-page picture story  
was about Bill Rush, a UNL

junior majoring in journalism  
who cannot walk, speak or use  
his hands. Mark Dahmke, a  
UNL senior and computer  
science major who built a com-  
puterized voice synthesizer to  
help Rush communicate, was  
also featured in the story.

As a result of the Life article  
Rush and Dahmke have sold  
the movie rights to Konizsberg  
Co. of California, and a TV or  
theater movie is expected to be  
produced in 1981, according to  
a press release. Both men still  
have the book rights and plan  
to write a book this summer.

# 'Selleck Quads' not so different from most students

By William L. Rush  
Special Contributor

Rush, who once lived at Selleck Quadrangle, graduated with distinction from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln last spring with a degree in journalism. He, too, has quadriplegia; cerebral palsy prevents him from using his limbs and from speaking.

Every fall, Selleck Quadrangle, a coed dormitory at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, welcomes a wide variety of students. Three such students are Mike O'Kane, a sophomore in mechanical engineering from Omaha; Mitch Miller, an undeclared freshman from Nebraska City; and Dave Temple, a freshman in pre-veterinary medicine from Fremont.

The three live on the same floor and have something else in common. At the first floor meeting they introduced themselves to their dorm mates as the Selleck Quads.

They have experienced quadriplegia: They can't walk or fully use their hands. O'Kane broke his neck in a snow skiing accident, Miller broke his in a diving accident, and Temple broke his in a car accident.

Although they share the same problem, each person is different from the others.

O'Kane is studious, Miller is shy, and Temple is outgoing and independent.

O'Kane takes nine hours per semester and has a 3.4 grade-point average. According to him: "It's going to drop this semester, though."

Miller doesn't know what his GPA is. Temple's GPA is 2.56; he failed a five-hour physics class.

"I really dropped me," Temple said.

Their individual personalities are reflected in how each spends his day and decorates his dorm room.

O'Kane gets up at 6:30 and spends his mornings in class.

Afternoons and evenings are spent studying in an electric wheelchair (with a chin control) at a 40-inch-high desk. The desk is about a foot higher than the standard desk because O'Kane uses a stick that he holds in his mouth to write. Actually he uses two mouthsticks: one for writing and one for turning pages and moving things around. His dorm room also is equipped with an air conditioner, an automatic door opener, a hospital bed and a speaker phone. His room also has a poster of the moon's orbits on the wall and a Sony stereo tape deck on which he listens to his brother's band as well as other bands.

Miller's dorm room, across the hall, has a coffee maker for the mornings that Miller doesn't have time to eat breakfast in Selleck's cafeteria. His room also has a battery charger for his electric wheelchair, a television set, a wall map of the world, an electric hospital bed, two desks, an oversize Smurf doll, a device for his hand that allows him to use eating utensils since he doesn't have any finger movements, textbooks and a painting of a nude woman.

His dorm door has a headline from when Mitch Miller, the famous sing-along conductor, visited Omaha. The headline says: "MITCH MILLER IS STILL HAVING FUN"

Temple's room, next door to Miller's, reflects his independence by having only an electric hospital bed, a shower chair and lowered clothes hangers. It also has pictures of his family, the American flag, a refrigerator and a cassette tape deck.

Each student also has different interests because of his distinct background.

O'Kane wanted to be a mechanical engineer before his accident, and said he still has the same goal.

He is thinking of joining engineering clubs or fraternities, and he reads best sellers and writes poetry when he's not studying. But as he said:

"I have been concentrating on school."

But, school and mechanical engineering aren't all that O'Kane thinks about.

"I don't really have a girlfriend," he said. "I have some girl friends, but nothing real personal right now. I plan on having one someday. I find it hard to picture myself in a relationship with a

girl right now. I don't know. It has been awhile since my accident. I had a hard time adjusting."

His accident changed his lifestyle.

"It's a lot different because I was really active in sports. . . . I was always out shooting baskets or playing football or something," O'Kane said in describing his life before his 1978 snow skiing accident at Crescent, Iowa.

Welfare and Medicaid pay for O'Kane's attendant, David Rupert, and for his special equipment (except for the door opener, the speaker phone and air conditioner, which are supplied by UNL's Affirmative Action Office).

Like O'Kane, Temple said he's going to stay with the field he had chosen before his accident. Before June 1982, when he drove his father's pickup truck off the road and broke his neck, he attended Kansas State University and majored in veterinary medicine. He's at UNL now because the campus is flat and close to his home in Fremont.

Although Temple can't participate in most of his hobbies — swimming, racquetball, rodeoing and water skiing — he still enjoys them. In fact, he said he still water skis by lying on a board while a boat pulls him around. He also loves to listen to music.

Unlike his two dorm mates, Temple said that he doesn't have a paid attendant. He blames bureaucratic red tape in Dodge County's welfare system for this. Until the situation gets cleared up, Rupert, O'Kane's attendant, is helping him free of charge.

Miller, on the other hand, didn't plan to go to college before his diving mishap. He worked on different construction jobs and for the Burlington Northern Railroad during summers. He had joined the Air Force on a delayed entry program six months before his accident.

This semester, he is taking 12 credit hours: an introductory sociology course, a class in human geography, a course in business communication and a course in the arts.

He is proud of his family and of how they have adjusted to his disability.

"All my family have shown super support," he said. "From what

See QUADS on page 3E



PHOTO BY WILLIAM L. RUSH  
Mitch Miller gets into his specially equipped van.



STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY HAMPTON

Dave Temple uses the ramp to his dormitory.



PHOTO BY WILLIAM L. RUSH

Mike O'Kane turns pages using his mouthstick.

## Quads

From page 1D

I have heard, other people with disabilities have gone home and hid out. I think we have done pretty good as far as getting out and trying something I never was much for sitting still."

A typical day for him begins a little after 7 when he showers and gets dressed. He's usually out of Selleck between 8:30 and 9. His classes usually start at 9:30. Before his accident, he got up half an hour before he had to be at work — if he was lucky. He said: "I find that I have to spend a lot more time."

He has two attendants: Tim Colwell and Alex Johnson, who are paid through Medicaid.

But, Miller's pride is out in the parking lot across the street from Selleck. It's a van with a hydraulic lift and hand controls, equipped so that he can drive it. Civic organizations in and around Nebraska City held several fund-raising events to raise money to help him buy it.

His joy is named Lori Alles. Miller said that he and Alles have been going together for about five years and have been engaged for two years.

"She has adjusted very well," he said. "She has been a lot of help. She's understanding. Lori has been a real asset for me to make a lot of adjustments as far as me being sociable with people and outgoing."

He also loves hunting, fishing and the outdoors, but hasn't been able to do much hunting and fishing since his diving accident. He is presently looking for a place to resume his therapy program.

However, the three students do share a trait: optimism about the future.

"I'm hoping that by 1993 they're going to come up with some way to treat spinal cord injuries," O'Kane said, "and hopefully I would be able to use my arms a little more."

O'Kane also said that he wants to be working at a job making \$50,000 a year and that he wants a beautiful wife, a couple of kids and a nice home in Phoenix, Ariz.

He adds with a wry smile: "I'm probably not thinking realistically. I'll probably be still going to school or something."

Miller, in contrast, has no definite plans for after college, but he thinks he would like to get a job where he can help others with disabilities. He said:

"I'd just like to get a job so that I can help people that have been through this similar situation. I'm thinking in my mind that I would like to start my own business working with handicapped students in most all areas and with different handicaps."

But, Miller adds: "It would be too hard to describe what my lifestyle is going to be like in 10 years. Right now, I'm just really interested in getting through college and trying to decide what I would like to major in or what I want to do a year from now."

Miller's indecision about his future could be partly because he was injured just a little more than a year ago, so he and his family had to, as he puts it, "make

a lot of fast adjustments" to his new lifestyle.

Temple, however, has definite plans for his future. He said that he'd like to figure out a way to get into the weight room in the Coliseum because he wants to lift weights so that he can be fully recovered in 10 years.

To achieve his goal he refuses to use an electric wheelchair. Instead he pushes himself around campus in a manual wheelchair.

"I intend to get out of this wheelchair somehow," he said. "If I can get out of my wheelchair, I would like to continue with veterinary medicine and go into practice with large animals. But I don't want to get a degree in veterinary medicine and work in a laboratory. I love to be outside. I don't want to work inside."

If Temple is still in a wheelchair, he said he plans to be a cattle buyer and work for a feed company or for a major feed lot.

The three vary in their opinions on how they are helped and perceived by others.

Although he appreciates the extra help that his professors, classmates and dorm mates give him, O'Kane said:

"When they see me, I don't know what they think — if they feel sorry for me or what. I don't want them to. I'm kinda a hard person to get to know. Once they get to know me they like me pretty well. But people who I just meet on the streets kinda shy away from me a little bit. . . . The people who are really confident with themselves come up and talk to you and have conversations with you. I'm not very open and bold, so I have a hard time becoming real acquainted with the other students in class."

Miller, in contrast, doesn't have any complaints or misgivings about how he has been treated at UNL.

"I've found that all of the professors, classmates and my dorm mates have all been real helpful," Miller said. "They have talked to me to find out — especially my professors — if they were doing everything possible so that I could complete my tests and had enough time. If I needed to have a person to take notes for me, they'd help me find people to take notes. Classmates have been real helpful. They have treated me more than normal."

Miller added that nobody has been rude, nobody has tried to ignore him, and everybody has treated him as a person.

Temple agrees with Miller that other students view him as a person with a disability rather than a disabled person.

"Some are kind of leery at first," Temple said. "But I'm real outgoing, and I don't seem to have any problems. I get rowdy once in a while and that seems to break the ice a little bit."

Perhaps the most telling statement of how all three have been accepted comes from their floor's student assistant, Jack Jensen, when he said:

"Except for Dave playing his music too loud once in a while, I guess there isn't really any problems with the disabled students on my floor."

# PEOPLE

## UNL student journeys far in his book

Bill Rush, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate student with cerebral palsy, has written an autobiography titled "Journey Out of Silence."

The book tells how Rush, who is unable to speak or write, has struggled to communicate using a stylus attached to a headband, pecking words into a computer and into print. It also relates how another UNL student, Mark Dahmke, developed a computer with a voice synthesizer, enabling Rush to say something for the first time in 20 years.

The book is published by Media Productions of Lincoln.

In the book, Rush says that people with impairments have been regarded as "saints, possessed by the devil, as children, as untouchables, as clowns, as tragedies, superhuman, or subhuman."

He pleads to let a person with disabilities be treated as any other human being.

Tired of being called a cerebral palsy "victim," Rush published a media guide that was nationally distributed last year. In it, he chastized writers for using words such as crippled, poor or wheelchair-bound.



Rush has published numerous articles by way of his headstick to computer to printer method and has attained national recognition. He is adamant, however, about not being labeled a hero. "When you write about me," he once asked Life magazine staff writer Anne Fadiman, "please remove my halo."

What he meant, Fadiman explains in her preface to his autobiography, is that "he wanted people to know that he drooled, that he made peculiar noises, that his arms flapped around as if, as he put it, 'I am conducting the flight of the Bumblebee.'"

Fadiman's story of Rush was featured in Life, then excerpted in the Reader's Digest. According to the UNL Information Office, a movie company may do a film about his life.

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## **Bill Rush honored with Victory Award**

**Bill Rush, 335 N. Eighth St., is the 1993 recipient of the Nebraska State Victory Award, presented yearly as part of the nationwide awards sponsored by the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C.**

**Rush was chosen for exemplifying inner strength, tenacity of purpose, integrity of effort and courage in overcoming the challenges of cerebral palsy.**

**He will represent Nebraska at the seventh annual Victory Awards gala**

**salute April 27 in Washington, D.C. He also is nominated for a national Victory Award in 1994.**

**Rush has been an active peer counselor and has written about independence for people with disabilities, including his autobiography, "Journey Out of Silence."**

**This year's national honorees include Sen. Bob Kerrey, D-Neb., actress Patricia Neal and former Detroit Lion Mike Utley.**

# It's time to deliver on promises to Americans with disabilities

BY WILLIAM L. RUSH

I'm a person with a disability. I'm opposed to the changes being proposed by the Republicans and the governors.

These proposals not only throw the baby out with the bath water, but they also throw the house plumbing out, too.

I don't like the present form of Medicaid. It is based on 1930s technology. It fosters dependence. It endorses archaic ways. On the personal level, it is stopping me from marrying my girlfriend of eight years, Chris Robinson.

I agree that Medicaid needs to be reformed, but not necessarily the way the Republicans think. It should be reformed so that it provides a safety net, not a cap on potential. It should reflect the hope and the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of the '90s, rather than the Great Depression of the '30s.

Rather than penalizing people for getting jobs, it should be interfaced with the states' vocational rehabilitation services and other support services, including independent living centers. It should be set up so that all people would be guaranteed personal service assistants and assistive technologies that they need to live fulfilling and productive lives.

One of the reforms that I want to see involves the disincentive to people with disabilities to stay married or to get married. That disincentive should be taken out of the statutes and regulations for Medicaid eligibility. Under the present system, there are two options for people who are married. The first is the spousal



WILLIAM RUSH

impoverishment program. The second is the medically needy program.

Both programs, excuse the technical terminology, "suck."

Whereas the spousal impoverishment program is certainly better than the medically needy program, I am someone for whom the spousal impoverishment program would probably not apply. The cost of my care at home is higher than the average cost of institutional care. Therefore, I would not be Medicaid waiver eligible, and accordingly, I would not be spousal impoverishment eligible. I do not, nor do I plan to, live in an institution. I would self-destruct first.

The medically needy program, on the other hand, would require Chris and I, as a couple, to spend down our monthly income to \$392 before we (or I) would be Medicaid eligible. We could only have resources up to \$6,000. The medically needy program forces peoples to live in poverty.

Living in poverty, subsequently,

“The only options for affordable and adequate medical care for people with a disability are to get divorced or not to get married at all.”

— William Rush

puts stress on any marriage. Couples then divorce. The person with the disability, as anyone, is more prone to sickness when not happy and in a situation without the love of a spouse or significant other. This, in return, costs the state more in the long run, not only in terms of additional costs for sickness, but also in the quality of life of its citizens when family values are compromised. People are being forced to divorce to receive adequate medical care that the family unit cannot afford.

Therefore, what I propose is this: Since there are people wanting to stay married or to get married, but not jeopardize their medical care or finances, couples could pay a reasonable amount based on income, like they would do for a health insurance premium.

For example, if a couple were to pay \$200 per month toward medical care, over the span of 35 years, \$200 per month becomes \$84,000. Not a bad return for a system that could get nothing back if it continues busi-

ness as usual.

Under the present system, Chris would have to spend her resources down to \$6,000 and her income down to almost nothing (which is worse than poverty) and be broke for six months. And then I would be eligible to get the Medicaid services that I need.

However, Chris is not willing to do that. She loves me, but she is not stupid.

The current system is not fair or smart when the only options for affordable and adequate medical care for people who experience a disability are to get divorced or not to get married at all.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ADA are empowering a generation who will be used to living a full life and will want a "life" just like everyone else. And this includes a choice to marry and to have a family. The current system is not prepared for this. Don't you think it's time it got prepared?

*William Rush lives in Lincoln.*

tuesday, august 25, 1981

# Professor's work with handicapped gains recognition

By Carol Harrah

A UNL professor has gained national recognition for her work in coordinating the handicapped services program at UNL.

As a member of the President's Committee for the Plight of the Handicapped for several years, Lois Schwab has promoted community involvement with the handicapped.

Schwab, a professor in the human development and the family department in the home economics college, teaches classes on working with the handicapped.

She also coordinates faculty and student research to provide more tools and services for disabled people.

"I saw that there was a definite need for, and interest in, training and research work with students for the handicapped," Schwab said. "Through the work being done here at UNL, we have been able to generate more state-wide interest in the plight of the handicapped, as well as more tools and services for them."

One of Schwab's most highly recognized accomplishments is her work with UNL students Bill Rush and Mark Dahmke.

Rush, a journalism major who has cerebral palsy, communicates with a head stick on a word board and voice synthesizer that were designed by Dahmke, a computer science major.

Schwab's work with the two students is being made into a two-hour television movie, to be aired on CBS later this year.

"I have been pleased with the progress Bill has made," she said. "He is beginning to write a book about his life, which will be beneficial to all types of people. You don't get to read much about what the disabled person really feels, from their point of view, so the book ought to be interesting," Schwab said.

## Began career at UNL

Schwab began her career at UNL. She taught classes in such subjects as consumer affairs and home management. When she retired from teaching to have children, she worked part time, teaching classes in UNL's adult education program.

Schwab said she began by teaching classes in home management. Later she conducted classes dealing with stroke and heart disease in women, areas that were new in research and growing in public interest.

From this research, Schwab started the handicapped services program. She started providing student training and research work for the handicapped.

Other universities began developing their own programs after seeing what was being done at UNL, she said. Schwab now teaches students in her program about understanding handicapped persons from the pre-school stage and beyond.

The handicapped services program has gained a reputation of quality work for, and with, the handicapped, Schwab said. There are now seven state agencies that provide outlets for UNL's research and training for the handicapped. With their help, UNL now has more time to develop research, to devote to student training and to make more tools and services available to the handicapped, she said.

## National conference

In November, Schwab will attend the national conference for the National Women's Committee for the Plight of the Handicapped. Nancy Reagan serves as the group's honorary chairwoman.

"From the very beginning, I have promised the need for sensitivity to change, techniques and the process of working with people who have disabilities," Schwab said.

She said this is the one aspect of the program that UNL has developed more fully than other universities.

"You can always teach students what services there are for the handicapped, and how to use them, but that isn't enough," she said. "The student must also have a knowledge of the disabled person's attitude and learn how to deal with this.

"In order to help a person to grow and develop, you must know what they are thinking so as to better help them change in their attitudes and coming to an understanding of their disability."

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# arts/entertainment

## Garp creator discusses new book, life as writer

By Bill Rush

*I learned to my astonishment that Garp creator, John Irving, the most successful "serious" writer in America (according to "Time" magazine), wears jeans and a T-shirt.*

*Irving wore his blue jeans at Middlebury College's Breadloaf Writer's conference this summer. He also lectured with his colleagues, Stanley Elkin, John Gardner, and Erica Jong. The Breadloaf Conference was formed by Robert Frost in 1926. The annual two-week conference gives the writers and writing teachers a chance to share their knowledge with writing students in a summer camp atmosphere.*

*Irving, 39, is responsible for a philosophy called Garpomania that swept the country in the late 70s. If early reviews are any indication, his latest book, "The Hotel New Hampshire," will carve another notch in the American culture. The following interview was conducted in Middlebury Vermont this past August.*

Bill Rush: Can you tell me about *Hotel New Hampshire*?

John Irving: Well, it's the fifth book, and I hope it's the best of them. But it's a love story more than any of the others were. It's about a boy whose in love with his older sister. And it's a story about how a family gets over the people in its group within the family, who don't make it.

B.R.: Where did you get the idea for *Hotel New Hampshire*?

J.I.: It's probably the least autobiographical of a number of books, none of which were really autobiographical. But by the time you get to a fourth or fifth book, whatever personal experience you've been writing about is largely used up.

So what mattered to me most in initiating this novel was that it's really the first novel that is completely imagined. That is, it's a fairy tale in a sense of a story for children . . . that you need to know the least about the world outside in order to read or understand it. It's much more the kind of book that is a door you enter and another door you go out.

In a way, stories for children I think are like that. And I wanted the whole of the novel to be like a dream that you begin and then wake up from; a whole thing rather than a series of events. So I think that was both the first and sort of last idea I had with it.

B.R.: What are the "universal truths" in *Hotel New Hampshire*?

J.I.: This is usually a question other people should say of you rather than you should answer of yourself. But . . . it's a novel that has frequent refrains, it makes use of repetitions . . . litanies. I suppose it's in those refrains that get repeated throughout the novel that you hear the closest thing to universals that there are. The old man who is the grandfather of the family says once to his grandson in reference to weightlifting that "you've got to get obsessed and stay obsessed." That becomes the last line of the book, and what it really becomes is a deterrent to suicide, or a deterrent to quitting, a deterrent to giving up.

There's also one suicide in the book. It's another way of saying "you must have something in your life you wish to do intentionally, purposefully and deliberately.



Photo courtesy of E. P. Dutton Publishing  
John Irving

Because without it you're subject to accident or depression, and the book makes use of another old city folk tale of Vienna. It makes use of a phrase, an old Viennese phrase called "keep passing the open windows," which is simply a way of saying "don't kill yourself or don't quit on yourself," and it comes from an old sort of city history of a clown, a man who trains animals.

He's a street performer and he never gets paid enough and he never gets treated well enough, and one day with

The physical handicap that jocks have is that they're never very comfortable with getting older than 19.

—John Irving

a box full of his animals he jumps out a window and all the people then, who paid no attention to him . . . miss him when he's gone. It's from this the phrase comes, "keep passing the open windows," which is a sort of greeting. A form of hello/goodbye, hello/goodbye.

It's a book, I suppose, whose biggest universal is one of self-esteem and self preservation to the main people in these novels, the kind of attacks upon you that . . . assault upon you really, that threaten to take your self away.

The heroine is raped when she's a young girl. The youngest daughter of this family never grows. Her growth

is rusted is some way near birth and this becomes metaphorical . . . her ambition to become a writer, which in her own eyes she never can become quite good enough at. That's as close as I can come to a universal conversation.

B.R.: Why did you become a writer?

J.I.: I wasn't good enough at anything to consider seriously becoming. I think a lot of writers start out distracted because they could be a number of things. I wasn't good in school, I wasn't a very good student. I could never have gotten a very good job, I never actually wanted to have a job. If you grow up knowing you never wanted to have a job . . . Jesus, you've got to find something else, you see.

I wrestled as a schoolboy and I loved wrestling, but I wasn't particularly good at it. So the idea of being a wrestler who lost all the time . . . this is also a wearing process. So my options were very infrequent. I spent a lot of time imagining I suppose, that I might be a person who would like to have a job, or I might be a person who could do something else. But it seemed like the best thing I could do as a child was make things up.

B.R.: In some ways we are similar, in some ways we are opposite. You have characters who are jocks and I have characters who are physically handicapped. . .

J.I.: Let me try to guess that one out. You see, jocks have another kind of handicap. The physical handicap that jocks have is that they're never very comfortable with getting older than 19. So that they remain perpetually more immature than other people and they don't grow old very well. Because if their earliest form, as a kid's form of self-esteem, was because of what they could do physically, it's quickly recognizable to them in their 20s that they're not doing something nearly as well as when they were 17 or 18.

This is depressing news to people who insist on seeing themselves through how well their bodies work. The point about bodies is as they get older, they work less well. Jocks are less capable of accepting this simple news than the rest of the world. I suppose this is a mental handicap as well as a physical handicap.

My uncle always referred to me as a late bloomer. One of my uncles insisted on this view of me, which meant simply that he didn't like me until I did something. Unfortunately most people don't give you credit for being a writer until there's evidence . . . until there's the book, although you could, as many people have, gone through half your life getting the book. Which doesn't seem to me, make you less of a writer. My uncle's feeling was that since I wasn't particularly good at, or didn't particularly accomplish anything until I was in my late 20s . . . ergo "late bloomer."

This is inconsistent with being a jock, because jocks bloom in their teenage years and never outgrow them.

B.R.: What do you think of critics in general?

J.I.: Well . . . I usually don't make comments about critics. My favorite remark about a critic was said by the writer Steven Becker, who sent me a consoling letter after he'd read a very bad review of one of my books in which he said: "Critics are the tick birds of the literary rhinoceros." From this time he sent me this unfortunate letter, I continue to see them in that way. They serve the function of the cow's tail on a sunny day.

'No Guts, No Glory' . . .

# Life in a Tippy Wheelchair

*Bill Rush, of Omaha, is a quadriplegic who will graduate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in May with a bachelor of science degree in journalism. He has written several articles for the magazine about his high school and college experiences. He communicates with a headstick and letter chart; also types with the headstick.*

By Bill Rush

**M**Y PROFESSOR patiently explained: "You must redo this shot. It's not an action shot in the true sense of the word."

"BUT," I argued, spelling out the words with my head stylus and alphabet card, "IT'S A PICTURE OF A WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL GAME THERE'S ACTION SEE THE BALL GOING UP?"

"Right, but there's no horizontal motion with the vertical movement. If I were you, I'd go down to some place like the track and shoot a jogger or the freshman football practice. I'm pretty sure the track's accessible," the instructor said.

I groaned. "Remember, Bill, the slogan is: 'No guts, no glory,'" the photojournalism professor (who was also my adviser) chimed.

I remembered these words as I groped for a ramp onto the track and field section near Memorial Stadium. I went around one fence post and encountered steps. I backed up and tried the other branch of the Y-shaped fork. It looked promising. At least it sloped toward the field. I started down.

The incline was too steep. I lost control of my chair. I headed toward the end of the wide sidewalk. My right front wheel went off the side. Momentum and the sharp drop-off were enough to topple the 300-pound chair on its side. Like a good captain, I went down with my ship. What choice did I have?

"My name is Bill Rush. I'm at UNL's track and field," I thought to myself, checking for amnesia. "And I'll kill my professor. Should his death be slow or fast?"

A passer-by saw me on the ground and said the usual: "Oh, my God."

He knelt beside me and asked: "Are you all right?"

I nodded my head "yes" and laughed. "Just a minute and I'll get help," the stranger said.

**T**HEN HE CALLED out to another passer-by: "Get the campus police fast. He can't breathe!"

I felt great until then.

One of the freshman football players made a beautiful catch.

"Damn, that would have made a nice shot for my assignment," I thought as I waited for the campus police. One wheel up, one wheel down — headstick sideways.

Two uniformed men came running, followed by the second passer-by. All four men pulled my electric wheelchair upright. The first passer-by made sure my torso followed the chair. I wondered how my chair and cam-

Rudy Smith/World-Herald



With patience and coordination, Bill Rush gets his camera shot.

era had fared in the fiasco. My body would heal, but the expensive equipment would have to be repaired or replaced.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked the first officer.

I nodded my head "yes."

"Maybe we should call an ambulance," the second officer suggested.

I shook my head "no."

The policeman didn't understand and started to speak into his walkie-talkie: "We need an ambulance by the track. A quadriplegic tipped his chair off the sidewalk. He is conscious but unable to talk coherently. . . . Over. . . ."

I wanted to laugh and cry at once. I shook

my head violently at the next mention of an ambulance. They got the message and talked to the dispatcher again:

"Um, cancel the ambulance. The victim doesn't desire it."

"How does he talk to us?" the first officer asked the second.

"I think he talks by pointing to that letter-chart beside his camera. Hey, I have to run. Sorry I can't be more help," the first passer-by said.

"Thanks," the first officer shouted to the departing passer-by. "Now, let's try again. Are you sure you don't need an ambulance?"

"NO I AM OK BUT I DONT KNOW ABOUT MY CAMERA AND CHAIR," I

spelled slowly so the two officers could follow. "MAYBE YOU SHOULD CALL AMCO (I meant Amco Transmission Co.) INSTEAD OF AN AMBULANCE."

**T**HE OFFICERS smiled. The first officer checked my camera and said it looked undamaged. The second officer checked the wheelchair and reported that the battery casing and the fuse holder had been broken.

"Who do we call now, sir?" asked the first officer.

"472-0733 OR THE SELLECK DESK 472-1075 MY AIDE SHOULD BE AT THE FIRST NUMBER IF HE ISNT CALL THE SELLECK DESK AND THEY WILL SEND A STUDENT ASSISTANT OUT TO GET ME." Again I spelled it slowly so that the officers could understand.

They did what I suggested over their two-way radios. I could hear the dispatcher five minutes later as she reported:

"We didn't get anybody at the 472-0733 number, but the Selleck officer is sending out somebody to get him. . . . Over. . . ."

Just as the residence director from the Selleck Quadrangle dormitory arrived, so did my photojournalism professor.

"Rush," the prof greeted me lightheartedly, "you're going to have a police record as long as my arm if you don't watch it. Don't tell me your chair battery died again."

"A student who was monitoring the police calls came to my office and told me you were giving the cops a hard time, so I came to see if I could help."

"He didn't run out of juice. He tipped over," said Doug, the residence director.

"Did you at least get some pictures before you tipped over, Bill?" joked the professor.

I shook my head "no," and didn't laugh. I didn't feel like joking. I was cold, tired and scared. I wanted to forget about the stop action shot. An "F" on this assignment suited me just fine.

"Now, Bill, you just took the wrong entrance," the professor soothed. "You'll have more luck if you go all the way around to the northwest entrance. I'm sure it's accessible. I'm also sure that as soon as your chair has recovered you will come back here and get a nice action shot. Notice how I said 'will.'"

**W**HAT A DAY. I had to go back to my room in the dorm. Then a cheery thought popped into my mind. My little friend would stop by to listen to music and have a Coke with me. I would enjoy that, and it would make up for my day at the track, I thought as Doug escorted me home.

When we got back to my dorm room, Paul was waiting with quiet calm and terrific humor.

"Hi, strangers," he said as Doug wheeled me into the room. "A desk worker told me that you were experimenting taking vertical pictures at the track by tipping your chair over on its side. From the look on your face, I bet it didn't work too well. But the desk worker didn't give me much detail. She just told me you tipped over by the track."

The residence director related what happened as best he could. When he told Paul about the chair being broken, Paul immediately suggested:

"Perhaps we should call the shop to see if we can get the chair in tonight. That way, Friend Roger won't have to do it in the morning."

Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands, April 10, 1983

# Editorial

## Overlook the handicap, not the person

This is not an objective column. It is a challenge to the able-bodied not to reject people with disabilities. It is also an explanation of why everyone must look beyond the wheelchair, beyond the white cane, beyond the sign language, beyond the seizures, beyond the retardation to see the *valid* person — who is *invalid* only because society says so.

Through the years, people with impairments have been regarded as being saints, possessed by the devil, children, untouchables, clowns or tragedies. Rarely as humans.

To see the *real* me, one must overlook many things. I have cerebral palsy — one of the most misunderstood disorders on the face of the earth.

Cerebral palsy is a brain disorder, which is caused by a variety of factors, such as lack of oxygen to the brain, the Rh-factor, an illness during infancy or a head injury. Cerebral palsy affects people in countless ways. It can leave a person with only a slight limp, physically able but mentally retarded or mentally competent but physically disabled. It is not inherited, terminal or contagious.

Cerebral palsy has left me without hand use, without vocalization and without walking skills. It has, however, left me with the capacity to think, to remember, to hear, to see and to feel skin sensations as well as emotions. In other words, I can (or have the potential to) understand anything in my social world. But the social world does not

understand me, and what people can't understand they often don't accept.

Having others understand me and others like me was what motivated my suggesting an editorial and series to explore the issues, concerns, problems and aspirations of students with disabilities.

For five years of my college life, I had to live on a freshman floor where I wasn't regarded as an equal. But I *was* an equal, just as those who wear eyeglasses are equal to those with 20/20 vision. The only difference between nearsighted or farsighted people and individuals with more severe disabilities is that society has integrated them.

In January 1980, my junior year at UNL, I had the fortune to be featured in *Life* magazine.

The response to the article was overwhelming and fell into two types: the able-bodied people told me how wonderful they thought I was simply because I had sought to live a reasonably "normal" life, and the people with disabilities thanked me for articulating what they had felt but couldn't say.

I do not pretend to be the spokesperson for the population with disabilities. I don't feel that all people with disabilities should be judged by what I say or do.

But I also think that all people in wheelchairs have cursed steps or ridiculously steep gradients of ramps, that all people without speech have dreaded hearing the phone

ring, and that people without use of their hands have missed touching a special friend or a loving parent. And, I know all these individuals are tired of being treated like *invalid* people in a world that associates validity with physical beauty and prowess.

Nor did I seek to be Mr. Wonderful. The *Life* article had a picture of me in a T-shirt which proclaimed "I am not Superman." That T-shirt was right. I am neither superhuman — nor subhuman. I am merely human — with all the failures and gories of our species.

This editorial is, then, a challenge to all of you readers, especially those of you who have been blessed with perfect bodies and unimpaired minds. Can you look at those of us who have physical or mental limitations and still discover the *valid* human being? Can you stop treating us as *invalids*?

I challenge you to pick up the gauntlet which was first thrown out years ago by my parents when they formulated their unspoken creed for dealing with disabilities:

This is a baby. He needs what all babies need.

This is a child. He needs what all children need.

This is an adolescent. He needs what all adolescents need.

This is an adult. He needs what all adults need.

Oh, by the way, he has a disability.

Bill Rush

## Priority Syrians, Pullout

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Jim Burnett/World-Herald

Honors graduate Rush... Hard work plus caring people equals UNL diploma with distinction.

## Cerebral Palsy Victim Credits Team Effort on His Graduation

By Steve Jordan  
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — It will be a climax of sorts when  
Bill Rush crosses the stage this morning to pick  
up his University of Nebraska-Lincoln diploma.

His efforts toward a college degree began  
years ago at J. P. Lord School in Omaha, or per-  
haps even earlier when his parents realized that  
although the young cerebral palsy victim's body  
hardly worked, his mind did.

"I guess you would say my graduation was a  
team effort," Rush typed with a pointer at-  
tached to a headband. He can't speak.

### Team Effort

Outside his Lincoln apartment (proudly  
marked with a sticker reading, "Member, UNL  
Alumni Association"), Rush, 27, named a few of  
his teammates:

—Deanne Caughey, a high school student who  
tutored him.

—Roger Bacon, an aide who became a friend  
when Rush entered college seven years ago.

—Mark Dahmke, a computer analyst who  
rigged up a voice synthesizer and other elec-  
tronic equipment to make Rush's work easier.

—Members of the UNL faculty, especially  
those at the School of Journalism, which will  
award his degree in magazine writing.

"They were willing to work with me," he  
typed.

For example, he was allowed to satisfy jour-  
nalism degree requirements by taking linguistics  
rather than a foreign language.

Writing is Rush's forte, largely because that's  
the one way he lets people know what he thinks.  
He communicates most rapidly with his head  
pointer, pushing around letters and common  
words on a board to patiently spell out his pro-  
fessional future.

### Knows Limitations

"I have no intention of being the one who  
chases ambulances," Rush said. "The point is, I  
know my limitations. But I could be a weekly  
columnist."

His application to graduate school Carnegie-  
Mellon University in Pittsburgh is pending. His  
UNL degree will be with distinction, the result of  
a 3.65 grade-point average.

His immediate ambitions are a master's de-  
gree and a part-time job as a columnist or fea-  
ture writer with a newspaper.

"Free-lancers starve," he said.

"I hope to be a novelist and win the Pulitzer  
Prize."

He also wants to own his own home some day,  
and stop receiving financial aid from the state,  
which paid for his tuition and expenses.

It's that kind of ambition that has won Rush  
the respect of many at the university, said Jack

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## 6 OMAHA WORLD-HERALD Saturday, May 7, 1983



Jim Burnett/World-Herald

Rush at keyboard... wants to obtain graduate degree and job as columnist.

# Honors Graduate Credits Team Effort

Continued from Page 1

Botts, news-editorial chairman at UNL.

"He earned everything he got," Botts said. "I think he worked harder than most people, because he had to."

Rush listened to audio versions of his textbooks on tape, took notes with a tape recorder and wrote his exams on a typewriter.

He used a camera mounted on his wheelchair for photography classes, but took statistics instead of geometry because he couldn't draw.

One professor tried to turn him away from a class.

"The professor did not want me, but I stayed in, anyway," Rush said, and

earned a B.

He said he doesn't want to make a big deal out of graduating.

"It's not that I'm shy and retiring," he wrote. "I feel that graduation of a person with a severe disability should not be regarded as unusual. I hope more people with disabilities will go to college; not because I did it, but because they think they can."

Graduation does not solve Rush's problems. Under the state welfare system, if he gets a job and earns enough money to support himself, his aid stops. He said his starting pay in a job, however, probably would not be enough for him to afford to pay the people that

feed him, bathe him and care for his him.

"So, it's to my benefit to remain unemployed," he said. "But I want a job. I don't know the answer, except to trust in God. He has taken me this far."

Rush said there are two people he owes special thanks — his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Rush of Omaha.

"I'm grateful to my parents for letting go of me," he said. "It took a lot for them to allow me to try my uncertain wings."

"Most parents of people with disabilities never do let their children mature. I'm proud that my parents were different. They took a big risk by letting me grow up."

# Nebraska Alumnus Coaching Reporters on Disabled People

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — A University of Nebraska-Lincoln alumnus with cerebral palsy who said he is tired of being called a "victim" is coaching news organizations on how to write about people with disabilities.

When Bill Rush graduated from UNL last year, a newspaper headline read, "Cerebral Palsy Victim . . ."

"There I was, graduating with distinction, and still I was a victim," Rush said.

That account of his graduation spurred Rush to write a news media guide for reporting on people with disabilities, called "Write With Dig-

nity." More than 2,000 booklets have been mailed to members of the news media across the country, and hundreds of additional requests have been received.

The guide was co-written with the League of Human Dignity and published by the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Center at UNL. The Hitchcock Center was established to promote graduate education in journalism.

One of Rush's primary goals is to stop the use of the word "disabled" as a noun — rather than as an adjective — to describe people with disabilities. Paralyzed from the neck down, Rush works for Nebraska Advocacy Services.



Bill Batson/World-Herald

Rush at his keyboard . . . "My book takes a different slant. I hope it says, 'I have a disability — so what.'"

## Book Studies Reaction to Disabilities Author Breaks Silence 1 Letter at a Time

By Alison Young  
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — Bill Rush is a quadriplegic and cannot speak. His reaction is "so what."

Rush, 31, is a writer. Strapped into an electric wheelchair, Rush leans over a computer keyboard. A wand, held in place by bands, protrudes from his forehead.

With the headstick, he picks out one letter at a time to make words appear on the screen in front of him.

With each key stroke, the computer's voice synthesizer spells aloud.

In this manner, Rush has written a 217-page book, "Journey Out of Silence," which was released last month. It is a book whose time has come, he said.

"Boy, how do I say this without sounding vain," he wondered on the computer screen. "Most books I have read on people with disabilities have said the authors have 'coped' with their disabilities and have

'overcome' them. I hate 'coped' and 'overcome,'" he spelled, his body shaking so hard with excitement that his chair quaked.

"My book takes a different slant," he said. "I hope it says, 'All right people, I have a disability — so what.'"

Rush has cerebral palsy, a condition caused by damage to a child's developing brain.

In 1983, Rush graduated with hon-

Please turn to Page 9, Col. 1

# Author Finishes 'Journey'

Continued from Page 1

ors from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a journalism degree. Almost four years later, however, it still frustrates him that a newspaper story about his graduation ran a headline that identified him as a "Cerebral Palsy victim."

"Here I'm graduating with honors from a leading university, but still I'm called a victim," Rush said.

That headline motivated Rush to co-author a news media guide for reporting on people with disabilities.

The guide, "Write With Dignity," includes words and phrases that are used and avoided by people with disabilities, suggestions for interviewing people with disabilities and short descriptions of various disabilities.

"Journey Out of Silence" shows society's reactions toward a person with a disability, Rush said. In many of these reactions, Rush finds humor.

"Humor is very important in my life and in the book," he spelled.

His book recounts his thoughts about such childhood experiences as when, without his headstick, he couldn't tell his mother that he had lost a loose tooth in the food he kept spitting out, and she kept feeding him.

Rush is adamant that people think neither better nor worse of him because of his disability.

### Laughter or Anger

"So I'm warning you," he said, "if you paint me either as a superman or as a victim, I'm burning a wheelchair on your lawn." When he shook in his chair, it was difficult to tell if it was with laughter or anger.

"Journey Out of Silence" took 12 years to write, Rush said. Each letter was painstakingly picked out on a word processor by the nodding of Rush's

## Bluffs Crash Victim Shows Improvement

The condition of a 21-year-old man injured when his vehicle rolled several times near Interstate 680 and West Dodge Road was upgraded to fair

head and the stroke of his headstick.

Rush said he hadn't really planned on writing a book.

As a journalism student and after graduation, Rush has worked as a freelance writer. One of his articles, which appeared in The World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands, caught the attention of an Omaha writer, who insisted that Rush write a book.

"My first reaction was, 'You are crazy. I'm in college, I can't do it,'" he said. "But she said to start by writing short magazine-type stories during vacations and worry about tying them together later."

So Rush started writing, one story at a time.

By reading his book, Rush said, he hoped people would learn to look beyond the disability.

"I am a fan of Martin Luther King, who said he had a dream that one day his children would be judged by the content of their hearts, not the color of their skin," Rush said.

### Taking Pride

Before this can happen to people with disabilities, he said, those people must start taking pride in themselves.

Rush is especially bothered by the use of the word "disabled."

"We often say, 'I'm disabled,' and that's a no-no," he said. "We should say, 'I have a disability.'"

"It's like calling women girls. But women got together and said look, enough of this. And people with disabilities must do the same."

The spiral bindings on some of Rush's books are an example of this fight. Rush pointed to a thesaurus on a shelf above his computer.

"Now open it without holding the pages," he commanded. The thesaurus was "perfect bound" — a type of binding used for most books, which imposes a handicap on people who cannot use their hands to read it, Rush said.

"Throughout my life I've had trouble with perfect bindings," he said. "So when I finally sold my book I kind of shocked the publisher because the only demand I had on my contract was that at least some be spiral bound."

When his publisher hedged on the demand, Rush insisted.

"I am a leader in pushing for accessibility and I won't publish an inaccessible book. That's hypocritical," he said.

### Spiral Bound

The publisher had never thought of it like that, Rush said.

Of the first 3,000 books printed, about 500 were spiral bound, Rush said.

The book's title was his mother's idea. Rush said he thinks the title is OK.

"I tried telling (my publisher) we should call it, 'The Purple Passion of Midnight,' — to sell it," Rush said, shaking in his chair as the room filled with the sound of laughter his computer will generate at the push of a button.

Rush lives on his own in a small, one-room Lincoln apartment. He has hired

aides who feed, bathe and dress him.

Controls on the lapboard of his wheelchair allow him to open and close the apartment door electronically. Also on the lapboard is an alphabet chart, which he also uses to communicate.

In addition to its speech synthesizer, his computer is equipped with functions for playing games of chess and controlling the room's lighting. It also has a word processor and a memory address book.

His phone system also uses a voice synthesizer.

"The joys of computers," he said.

After being on the shelves for only a month, Rush said, "Journey Out of Silence" has sold out at some bookstores and his publishers are considering a second printing.

"I want to stress that without my family, friends and God, I couldn't have done this," he said.

His plans include a fiction book about life in a rehabilitation center or editing an anthology of stories written by people with speech problems.

Rush questions applying the word literary to his writing. "You are only literary if nobody understands you," he spelled.

### SPECIAL OF THE WEEK

100 OZ. JM .999 Silver Bars  
\$565.00 each, Lot of 10 \$555.00

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Westroads

## be felt ng aid

student is employed and fill out a W-4 form, the scholarship grants in excess of \$1,000 must be reported as income on the student's taxable return.

Gifts of up to \$1,000 per year are exempt from gift tax. Gifts in excess of that amount are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of tuition and fees are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of property are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of cash are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of real estate are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of personal property are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of stocks and bonds are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of art and collectibles are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of jewelry are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of automobiles are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of boats are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of airplanes are subject to the gift tax. Gifts of other valuable property are subject to the gift tax.

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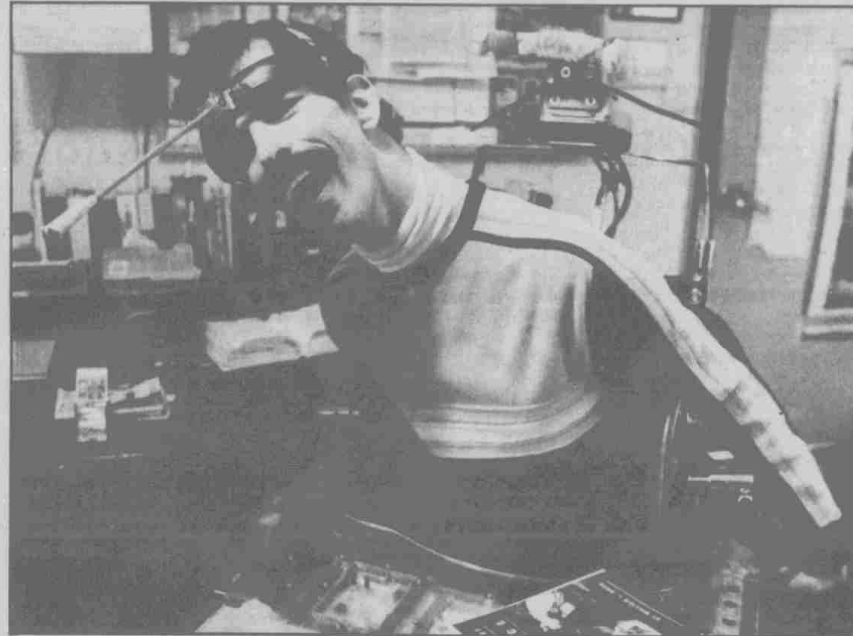
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## icators a' for eotypes

hardt, a Battie School teacher and member of the press, said the media are to blame for a distorted image. He said the media portrays the Soviets as "evil" and the Americans as "good."

and his students exchange



Andrea Hoy/Daily Nebraskan

Rush

## UNL alum writes to free spirit

By Natalie Weinstein  
Staff Reporter

One afternoon when Bill Rush was still a child, he was stung by a bee on the playground.

He screamed in pain, but the teacher didn't understand and told him just to settle down.

One afternoon when Rush was in college he was told by a pair of "fanatic fundamentalists" that he was possessed by the devil and should let God cast out his demons.

On the first day of Rush's first journalism class, his professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln told him to drop the class and change his major.

Rush didn't listen to the professor. In 1983, he graduated from UNL's College of Journalism with honors.

These and other events from Rush's life are included in his first book and autobiography, "Journey Out of Silence."

"Journey Out of Silence," which was published last December, took Rush nine years to write. It describes Rush's life struggle to be accepted by other humans as just another person.

It describes his struggle to be understood.

Rush, 31, has cerebral palsy. He does not have the use of his arms, legs or voice. To write his 217-page book, Rush used a headstick strapped around his skull to punch the words, letter by letter, into his computer.

To "speak" Rush also uses the headstick to punch letters into the computer, which are then spelled aloud by a voice synthesizer.

Rush is scheduled to autograph books tonight from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education.

To sign the books, Rush uses his headstick to stamp on the slogan: "Disability Cool, Let the Spirit Set You Free! William L. Rush."

"Disability Cool," said Rush, is the slogan of the disability movement — a movement to knock down barriers like "curbs, stairs and unacceptance."

Electric doors, ramps and spiral bindings for books, Rush said, are "disability cool because they don't care if you have a disability."

The rest of the slogan, "Let the Spirit Set You Free!," means being free to look past disabilities, Rush said.

Some people have called Rush a "superhero." Others have called him a "victim." Rush dislikes both terms. Everyone, he said, has disabilities.

"My disability is more visible," he said, "but everybody lives with limitations. So I don't see why I should be excluded or granted sainthood because mine shows."

# Disabilities Act gathers praise

■ Federal official told in Lincoln how new law is improving life for those with disabilities.

By Martha Stoddard  
of The Lincoln Star

The Americans With Disabilities Act hasn't been a panacea for people with disabilities, but it has improved the lives of many Nebraskans, a federal representative heard Tuesday in Lincoln.

Rae Unzicker, a member of the National Council on Disability, was in town as part of a 50-state tour by council members to collect success stories about the federal law.

The ADA bars discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, education, public accommodations and government services, and it requires that reasonable accommodations be made so people with disabilities can work, study and participate in community life.

"This is an absolutely critical juncture in the disability rights movement," Unzicker told about 70 people at the Cornhusker Hotel.

**GROWING CRITICISM** of "unfunded federal mandates" along with the turnover in Congress since the ADA was passed could put the law at risk, she said. The council plans to put together a report on the progress under ADA in time for its fifth anniversary this July.

Bradshaw native Ken Mayberry said the law made it possible for him to go into his local post office this Christmas for the first time since using a wheelchair. He was able to enter the post office thanks to a newly installed ramp.

"That was a direct result of ADA," he said.

The ADA also made it easier for

Mayberry to attend his children's school activities, he said. Until two years ago, he could enter most schools only because friends helped. Changes required by the federal law now make it possible for him to wheel himself into those same schools.

**THE SAME** federal law helped Kristy Coleman break down policy barriers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she testified. Coleman fought a legal battle with the university over a policy that didn't allow people needing care from attendants to have roommates.

A ruling issued under the ADA opened the door for her to have a roommate and for all other disabled students who want roommates to have them.

Lincoln free-lance writer and journalist Bill Rush said the requirement that all city buses be accessible by wheelchair opened up the city to him. Now, he can ride StarTran buses to go shopping with his girlfriend or to attend a church meeting at a restaurant.

"In spite of its problems, it's better than what we had before," he said, adding that the law's psychological impact was as important as its access requirements. "When (President) Bush signed the ADA into law, I felt I had become a full citizen."

**THE ADA'S** prohibition on discrimination and requirements for accommodating employees helped Tony Free get a full-time job with benefits, the Lincoln man wrote in a letter read at the hearing.

Free landed a job last fall with the help of an American Sign Language interpreter, provided by his employer during the interview and first few working days, and a vibrating pager.

Other people interested in telling their stories can send them to the National Council on Disability, 1331 F St. N.W., Suite 1050, Washington, D.C., 20004-1107.



# William Rush was 'persistent pioneer' for disabled

By KRISTIN ZAGURSKI  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

William Louis Rush was a pioneer who helped give a voice to the voiceless.

Because of cerebral palsy, Rush himself could not speak until his mid-20s, when longtime friend Mark Dahmke built him a voice synthesizer.

The process was the subject of a January 1980 *Life* magazine article and also was detailed in Rush's 1986 book, "Journey Out of Silence."

Rush was quadriplegic and used a wheelchair. He typed using a stylus attached to a headband.

His book details his life through college, when he became the first student with a dis-

ability to live in the dorms at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said his wife, Chris.

Rush was in the process of writing a sequel to the book when he died Monday at his Lincoln home. The 49-year-old died of complications from a neck injury received in a 1998 car accident, including recurring pneumonia, his wife said.

Rush was born in Omaha and attended J.P. Lord School. He entered UNL in 1976 and earned a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1983.

Rush and his wife were married in October 1999. Six months later, he got sick.

Despite his poor health, Rush continued working on his second book and as a contributing writer for the League of Human

Dignity's newsletter, his wife said.

It was Rush's persistence in the face of "absolutely unimaginable odds" and his ability to make changes for himself and others that his wife will remember most.

Bill's the persistent pioneer," she said.

"Journey Out of Silence" isn't just an autobiography; it's also a guide for people with disabilities on how to live independently, Dahmke said.

"He always said, 'Why didn't God give me a voice?'" Chris Rush said, "but he was truly the voice of the voiceless."

Even so, Bill Rush didn't want to be thought of as a "superman," his wife said.

"His greatest desire was to have a family and live a normal life," she said. "He always said that he wanted to be remembered as a husband and a father, and we got the first thing done."

A celebration of Rush's life will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday at First Baptist Church in Lincoln.

In addition to his wife, Rush is survived by his mother, Lois, of Pawnee City, Neb.; and brothers James of Tecumseh, Neb., Donald of Omaha and Robert of Oklahoma.

**Have Total**

*Walk in peace.*

May you and your family walk in peace for

# William Rush, quadriplegic activist for disabled, dies at 49

Omaha native pushed people's perceptions just by trying to be regular.

BY MATTHEW HANSEN  
Lincoln Journal Star

William Rush once wrote about the overwhelming desire to get out on the dance floor and shake it for all he was worth.

He was always writing.

He contributed articles and wrote op-ed pieces and letters to the editors of the Omaha World-Herald, the Lincoln Journal and the Lincoln Star.

In print, he fought for accessible Lincoln schools, movie theaters, bars, restaurants, hotels, buses and sidewalk curbs.

He sat, strapped in his wheelchair and wearing something resembling a welder's helmet, and

struck one letter at a time with a stick attached to his forehead until he finished an autobiography, "Journey out of Silence," published in 1986.

The first quadriplegic to graduate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the guinea pig for voice synthesis technology allowing him to speak, the subject of a Life magazine cover story and the most well-known Lincoln activist for the disabled was first a writer.

But a dancer?

Bill Rush's cerebral palsy, which could cause him to shake violently, "a muscle spasm throughout my body," as he put it, gave him pause during a 1984 article about sexuality and people with disabilities.

"... I wondered why I was trying," Rush wrote then. "After all, a dance floor was the last place some people would expect to see me ... I had always tried to be careful not to alarm others around me too much; my disability bothers other people more than it bothers me.

"But the band was playing rock 'n' roll and I wanted to dance ...

"Push me out on the dance floor."

Rush died Monday at age 49, falling victim to pneumonia and severe neck injuries originally sustained when he was struck by a car 6 years ago, according to his wife, Christine Robinson.

He didn't live or die a victim of cerebral palsy, she says, despite the inability to walk, move or talk normally from birth.

Instead, he kept typing with the stick attached to his forehead.

"He wanted to use the power of language to show they're not saints and not subhuman," Robinson said Tuesday. "Just human."

The humanity of people with disabilities wasn't well understood in the late 1970s, she said, when Rush's mechanized wheelchair first rolled onto the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

The Omaha native had graduated from J.P. Lord School, done well

on the SAT and then entered a world where no one like him had previously succeeded.

In print, Rush remembered the then-head of affirmative action at UNL telling him he'd be the first and last quadriplegic to attend the university.

He remembered the stares from classmates, frustration at the inability to communicate and the belief that his cerebral palsy would never allow him to find love.

But the university was also where he met Mark Dahmke, a shy computer analyst who approached him in the Selleck Quadrangle and told him he'd like to help design a system so Rush could speak.

Dahmke's computer wizardry and Rush's cooperation eventually resulted in a modified voice synthesizer that allowed Rush to type words phonetically and have them emerge from a speaker for others to hear.



LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

William Rush uses a stick attached to his head to type in this photo from January 1978. Rush, the first quadriplegic to graduate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and an activist for the disabled, died Monday.

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## Rush

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Finally, he had a voice, albeit one that fast friends agreed sounded somewhat Swedish.

In 1983, he graduated from the university's journalism college with honors.

"What he was doing then, it just wasn't done," Dahmke said Tuesday. "People like him didn't go to college or make it through college. He did, of course."

The story drew Life editor Anne Fadiman to campus a year before Rush's graduation. She found a 24-year-old man making classmates' howl with laughter even though they sometimes had to wait minutes for him to type the punch line.

She also found a UNL student who was still convinced no woman could love him.

Then, in 1988, he went to Disneyland.

A conference there about alter-

nate ways to communicate led to a chance meeting with Robinson, a presenter at the conference.

Two years later the Canadian moved to Lincoln, eventually wedding a man who always wanted to be a husband and father.

"We got the first one done," Robinson said Wednesday, taking a break from her late husband's viewing at Roper and Sons Funeral Home.

His funeral is set for 10 a.m. today at Lincoln's First Baptist Church, and his burial is at 3 p.m. in Omaha's Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Rush, of course, will be remembered as more than a family man.

He wrote a manual for the nation's newsrooms, instructing them on how to refer to people with disabilities.

He fought to allow people with disabilities to get married and keep their Medicaid — the resulting Nebraska legislation is one-of-a-kind, his wife says.

He testified before Congress about the Americans with Disabili-

ties Act.

His autobiography served as "sort of a handbook about how to live independently," Dahmke said.

And always, the William L. Rush newspaper pieces with headlines like, "Bus not meeting everyone's needs," "Getting to cabaret not easy," "Failure to pass Americans with Disabilities Act too costly," and "Selleck Quads' not so different from most students."

That last story shows the similarities and differences of three quadriplegic students all living in Selleck the year after Rush's graduation.

The goal is the same as a T-shirt Rush wore for the Life photo shoot. The words "No I'm Not" are stenciled above a picture of Superman.

He wanted readers to realize that people with disabilities were just regular people, his wife says.

He just wanted to be a regular guy, too. Problem is, he wasn't.

"He really was the voice for the voiceless."

Reach Matthew Hansen at 473-7245 or mhansen@journalstar.com.

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## Looking back at sweep of lives in 2004

**T**he annual replacement of calendars prompts a look backward, summoning memories of lives that drew to a close as the past 12 months slipped into history.

After Ronald Reagan's death many recalled his famous words in Berlin, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Charley Thone, the first governor to endorse Reagan for president, called Reagan's words "the sound bite that will live forever."

Other deaths were felt more keenly in their own special local spheres.

Frank Morrison, 99, was a leading Democratic voice in Nebraska for more than a half century. He continued making a mark in his 90s with his successful campaign to construct the Great Platte River Road Archway. "It's been a great ride," Morrison said as he battled cancer this spring. "But sooner or later you come to the end of the road."

Eugene Mahoney, 76, was a silver-tongued persuader when it came to persuading donors to part with their gold in the cause of improving Nebraska's state parks. Under his leadership, the state's sometimes shabby parks were transformed into tourist destinations that rival those found anywhere in the country.

Sue Rosowski, 62, a pre-eminent scholar of Nebraska author Willa Cather, chose her own epitaph from a Cather short story. "It was a nice graveyard ... a big sweep all around it. A man could lie down in the long grass and see the complete sky over him."

Lew Harris, 93, took \$100 and started a company during the Great Depression. Eventually that company, widely known as Harris Labs, opened offices around the world. Despite his business renown, Harris "never lost his connection with and comfort with that small-town and small-farm upbringing," said son Bob.

with and comfort with that small-town and small-farm upbringing," said son Bob.

Bill Rush, 49, rolled his wheelchair onto the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus in the 1970s to succeed where no one like him ever had. Rush refused to be a victim of cerebral palsy. Typing with a stick attached to his forehead, he wrote articles, op-ed pieces, a manual on how to refer to people with disabilities and an autobiography that served as a handbook on how to live independently.

Impossible to ignore during 2004 was the quickening pace of funerals for those with Nebraska ties who died in Iraq in the service of their country.

Sgt. Dennis A. Corral, 33, of Kearney, was killed on Jan. 1 when his vehicle rolled over on the road to Baghdad airport. As the months rolled on other names were added to the death toll. Sgt. Cory R. Mracek, 26, of Hay Springs; Sgt. David McKeever, 25, of Buffalo, N.Y., buried in his wife's hometown of Kearney; Pvt. Noah Lee Boye, 21, of Grand Island; Spc. Dennis Morgan, 22, of Valentine; Cpl. Matthew Henderson, 25, of Bennet; Lance Cpl. Kyle Codner, 19, of Shelton; Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer, 26, of Lincoln; Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess, 33, of Sutton; Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Eric L. Knott, 21, of Grand Island; Army 1st Lt. Edward D. Iwan, 28, of Albion; Lance Cpl. Shane E. Kielion, 23, of La Vista; and U.S. Marine Sgt. Nick Nolte of Falls City.

"We honor all who serve, who, like Nick, made a choice to put themselves in harm's way to defend us, our children, families, nation, our freedom and way of life," the Rev. Robert Roh said at Nolte's funeral.

And, as Roh said, when someone local dies "the war comes home and wears our address."