



ERIC CRUNICK AT HOME AUG. 30, 2011

'TRIPIL helps me maintain my independence so I can continue advocating for other people with disabilities.'

—Eric Crunick, Washington

By Cindy Bailey, GreeneSpeak Editor/Publisher

Although Eric Crunick spent a large part of his adult life living on his own in Atlanta, Ga., he says he's glad that he returned to his roots several years ago.

Those roots run deep in an 1870s Victorian house in the heart of Washington, where he grew up with two siblings and where he now lives with his mom, Helen. His dad, Mike, passed away in 2002.

In fact, his dad's illness was one reason he returned. He now covets the memories of those last days with his father.

But, Eric, who was then in his 40s and who has muscular dystrophy, also knew he would be needing more services in order to remain independent. That's where TRIPIL came in.

"When I was making my plans to return home, I got in touch with TRIPIL and they put my attendant care in place," he said. "The paper work was extensive, but TRIPIL made it smooth. They helped me assess what programs I was eligible for."

After his needs assessment was completed, Eric chose the Agency Model in which TRIPIL served as the employer of his Personal Care Attendants.

Recently, however, he switched to the Consumer Model, where he has become the employer because he finds it more flexible.

In Eric's case, his attendants come and go throughout the day as needed, allowing him the level of independence he is comfortable with.

"Our staff at TRIPIL works directly with folks like Eric to determine the individual level of attendant care they need to stay independent in their own home," said Stefan Manz, Executive Director of TRIPIL.

"Without my attendant care, I'd be in a nursing home," Eric says matter-of-factly.

But Eric has a lot of living to do. "I'm busy from the time I get up until the time I go to bed," he says.

He and his mom clearly have a unique rapport. They enjoy being together, but each has their own life. The atmosphere in their home is as warm as the yellow clapboards on the historic house, where a 22-year-old cat named "Pumpkin" holds court.

Three stories high and trimmed in white gingerbread, the house has been the pride and joy of the family.

Inside, the lovingly decorated first floor has been a blessing, Helen said, because it has always been accessible for Eric.

Additionally, back in the 50s, Helen and Mike convert-

ed the upper floors into five rental units, which Eric now helps his mother manage.

And he really is happy to be back, noting, "The big city is exciting, but there is more of a sense of community here."

He enjoys tooling around the neighborhood visiting friends, but he also relies on his attendants who make it possible for him to attend music concerts, like the Blues Fest in Wheeling, and sporting events like professional hockey and football games.

"I like to go to the casino, too," he says. His eyes twinkle a little when he adds, "I let the gamblers support my music habit."

At home, he also enjoys collecting cats and Coca-Cola memorabilia, both of which line all the shelves in his office.

But it's not just about fun and games for Eric.

His "proudest achievement" was serving as co-chair of the Committee for Disabled Access to the Atlanta Olympic Games back in the 90s. One of this pioneering watchdog group's most important accomplishments was improving standards for comparable sight lines in the wheelchair sections of stadiums.

"That is, in the wheelchair section, if someone stands in front of you, you should still be able to see over their head," Eric explains.

The court eventually ruled in their favor, ordering that Atlanta's Olympic Stadium be updated in time for the 1996 Olympics. These days, Eric gets a lump in his throat when he sits in stadiums here at home and sees the harvest of those efforts.

Nowadays he continues to advocate for people with disabilities as a member of the TRIPIL parent board. He relishes the opportunity to provide input, noting, "You have to be inquisitive. I take pride in asking pertinent questions to help us make sound decisions."

He sums up his life as a "team effort" with his supportive family and the folks at TRIPIL cheering him on. Each day is full and rewarding, he says, and he works hard to maintain the balance between work and play.

"I still want to go out and enjoy things with my friends and family, but if it had not been for TRIPIL and the attendant care, I would not have nearly the life I now enjoy," he says, adding, "It would be a miserable existence."

For more information regarding Personal Care Attendants, or any other matter relating to persons with disabilities, call TRIPIL at: 724-223-5115.



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