



Dan tries to keep himself healthy and active. Sometimes he goes for long evening walks to recharge himself and break the monotony of video games.

# DAN THE GREAT

*“LIFE HANDS YOU CARDS. IT’S LIKE PLAYING POKER. SOMETIMES YOU GET A LOUSY HAND. YOU JUST GOT TO BLUFF YOUR WAY THROUGH, AND HOPEFULLY YOU’LL WIN.”*

Photos and story by Thomas Surian



It is easy for Dan to get lost in thoughts. With a memory span of a minute or two, he often struggles to remember things.



At the dollar store, shopping with Jen, his personal service worker. She calculates what Dan can spend that day on his groceries.



Dan in his living room, sitting on the new couch his mother just got him, reflecting on his day.

Born in Coburg in 1971, Dan Adams is a victim of birth asphyxiation.

“I wasn’t really born with a disability. Instead of the doctor doing the C-section on my mother, I was wrapped up in her umbilical cord. When he reeved on me, it cut off the circulation into my brain, causing my disability.”

Birth asphyxiation, more specifically intrauterine hypoxia can cause many complications, including ADHD, epilepsy, eating disorders, and cerebral palsy. According to the World Health Organization, in 2008, 900,000 infants died of birth asphyxiation, making it the leading cause of death for newborns. Dan made it out the other side, he now lives with the effects of the trauma he incurred at birth.

Having trouble recalling his younger years, he relies on his parents to remind him of what happened in his early childhood. “I don’t have the best memory, that’s the problem. You tell me one thing, one second, two seconds later, I forget.”

He spent much of his childhood moving around southern Ontario. His dad worked for Ontario Hydro and had to follow the work.

“I just accept it. Life is life. You move on, you carry on. I didn’t make many friends, but I was happy for the friends I did have.”

“My high school education never really prepared me for the outside world. I’m not afraid of admitting this. As a reader my grade level is 6, and as a writer my spelling is a grade 3 level.” But not one to surrender easily, this October Dan began flute lessons after his sister gave him her old flute.

“For me, playing the flute is like being a 10 year-old at



Trying to get it right. Dan takes weekly flute lessons and believes it has truly been a game changer for him.

Christmas time. I guess there’s no other way of explaining it.” He hopes to play the flute professionally in five years.

“Flute playing . . . I can see myself going places with it. I have some plans with the flute, going to the hospital, playing for those who have to stay in the hospital, for seniors in the hospitals.”

Dan has been working since he was 14 years old, spending much of his working life in the restaurant industry. As a person with a disability he has faced some discrimination from employers and co-workers. On a few occasions even being addressed as a “mental retard.”

“When you have a different ability or disability . . . you tend to have to go with the flow. It’s normal for people to be afraid of people with my disability . . . it’s normal not to get hired. That’s why I don’t have a job. It’s hard to maintain a job when you’re on disability.”

Dan receives around \$1,000 a month, three quarters of which covers his rising rent. The remainder goes toward paying bills and buying groceries for the month. Oftentimes he is scraping by buying food at the dollar store.

“It feels like I can’t eat properly. I can’t eat healthy, because some of the vegetables are too bloody expensive to afford. So I try to go for the cheaper quality and there’s not much protein in cheaper foods. I like good quality, but again, you just don’t have the money.”

While on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) you are allowed to make \$120 from your job. What ever you make over that will be deducted from your next month’s payment.

“I had to quit my jobs because I can’t make rent. It’s a no-



On his way to downtown Belleville for one of his flute lessons. Dan wants to play the flute for patients in long-term care.