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Outspoken!

Spring 2017

CELEBRATING
Our Community!

Wheelchairs
WITHOUT
BORDERS

Give **PEAS**
a Chance

WORKING
TOGETHER
to Change
the Healthcare
System

GAINING
INDEPENDENCE
and Opening
Doors through
SMART
TECHNOLOGIES

ABILITIES
EXPO
TORONTO
2017



SPINAL CORD
INJURY
ONTARIO

LÉSIONS
MÉDULLAIRES
ONTARIO

SPINAL CORD INJURY ONTARIO CHAMPIONS EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE,
ADVOCACY AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH SPINAL CORD INJURIES



Above/below: People that were helped by Purinapaq

Wheelchairs without Borders

By **Nancy Xia**, Community Resource and Education Assistant

Purinapaq (Walking Together) is a non-profit organization that delivers mobility devices for people in Peru and other parts of the world where very little support and resources are available for people with disabilities.



Since its establishment in 2007, they have successfully helped more than 8,000 people by sending 3,000 motorized wheelchairs and 5,000 power manual wheelchairs to people who need them.

At the core of this small organization is Jose Orozco. Everything can be traced back to 1996, when he struggled with a bad hip and pain from a spinal cord compression, which was the result of a work-place accident. In 2007, he received a knee transplant and finally saw the end of his physical ordeal. During his recovery he was visited by his friend Bob who gave him a manual wheelchair to use.

When he asked about the wheelchair Bob told

him that he was running a charitable organization that sends medical supplies and assistive devices to Cuba. Most Cubans with disabilities have no access to mobility devices and sometimes they have no choice but to lay in bed most of the time. Jose thought about his fellow countrymen in Peru and how they were in the same difficult situation. Perhaps he could do something to help? It dawned on him that prior to his injury he would never have thought about doing this, but years

of physical hardship had softened him and changed his values and beliefs.

With the help of people in Peru, Jose was able to involve local charitable organizations to fund the project. With the advice of his friend, he began to collect used, unwanted and broken wheelchairs from equipment vendors, hospitals, the Canadian Legion and other charitable organizations in Canada. He learned the skills needed to fix wheelchairs on his own and bought any parts that were missing or



Jose at the shop.



Nancy lives in a remote village located on the top of a very steep mountain.

Below: A friend of Nancy Mayon who became an amazing artist.



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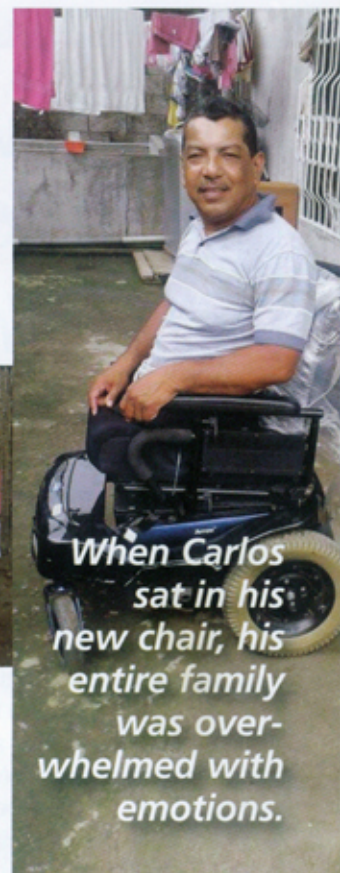




Above/Left: Nancy Mayon and her neighborhood.



Top: Youtube video of Carlos Yoong.
Above: Carlos Yoong's very happy family.
Right: Carlos with his donated power chair.



broken. He found ways to connect with Peruvians and friends in Toronto who would ultimately help him transport the chairs on their trips to Peru. He also trained local volunteers on how to fix and adjust these wheelchairs before they were delivered.

The project quickly grew and between January and August 2007, more than 300 wheelchairs were transported to Peru. When an earthquake hit the country on August 15th, 2007, Purinapag gave much needed relief to the unfortunate individuals who were injured in the earthquake. One of his most memorable encounters was with a lady named Nancy Mayon who had been born with a physical disability. She had spent most of her life lying in bed, but after hearing about Purinapag, she contacted Jose and asked for a wheelchair. After studying a map Jose realized that Nancy lived in a remote village located on the top of a very steep mountain. She would need a wheelchair with a strong motor. Jose had never donated a chair like that and he could not promise Nancy anything. But before long Jose received an Invacare power chair from a family whose elderly parent had just passed away. The donated wheelchair was almost brand new and had a strong motor. It was exactly what Nancy was wishing for. Jose brought the chair to her home and made the necessary adjustments to the joy stick, hand rest and foot rest and Nancy finally had wheelchair for the first time in her life. Nancy zoomed out of the door for a test drive and did not come back for three hours! Her family commented, "My sister used to be stuck at home all day every day, living with depression and hopelessness. But now, it looks like we are going to lose her."

When Jose next saw Nancy three years later, her wheelchair was already a wreck. In her rough and rocky environment it didn't last as long as it was supposed to. Jose went back to Peru and gave her another donated chair. Today Nancy is 35. She works as a pastry baker who also sells toys in the market during Christmas season. More than

continued on page 22

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BOOK REVIEW

You're Not Dead

BY JASON GARDEN

You're Not Dead chronicles its Hero's travels during his ten-month hospitalization, beginning with his viral meningoencephalitis, and ending with his struggle to regain his life and independence.

Acerbic and illuminating, *You're Not Dead* pulls the reader into the Hero's lived experience, while peeling away the layers of politeness we often use when discussing disability.

The Hero is brutally honest as he writes of his journey through the medical system. He speaks of overwhelming pessimism, of pronouncements from "oh nly n-mae whi'tle knowledge of his condition or progress, and of being spoken at, rather than being spoken to.

You're Not Dead is both devastating and inspiring, highlighting the importance of perseverance in the face of profound adversity.

The best place to purchase Jason's book is through his publisher, Friessen Press (<http://www.friessenpress.com/bookstore/title/119734000032851890>).

About the Author

For more than ten years, Jason Garden was a musician in the Canadian independent music scene. He was the drummer for All Cut Up (2004 – 2009) and The Twin (2009 – 2012), has performed on ten albums (including The Twin's *Inner Demons*), and toured Ontario. In 2013, he contracted viral meningoencephalitis. He refuses to give up, though several doctors have told him that he should. ●



**YOU'RE
NOT
DEAD**

the story of a boy
JASON GARDEN

Wheelchairs without Borders *continued from page 21*

that, she is a prominent advocate in her community demanding accessibility and equality for people with disabilities. Through her, Jose has helped more than ten people, who with their new found mobility and confidence, have finally discovered joy and purpose in life.

Another extra special case happened just

last December when Jose received a donated power chair without footrests. The design of the chair was so unusual that it would be hard to find a person who would fit in it comfortably. One afternoon while browsing through YouTube he came across a video of a man named Carlos Yoong singing and playing a guitar in his wheelchair. Jose was impressed by his skills and his style of music, but he couldn't take his eyes off Carlos's rusty and fragile looking manual wheelchair. Evidently Carlos was born without legs and would be a perfect fit for this donated power chair. So Jose found the contact information of the video uploader and connected with Carlos. Jose took the wheelchair with him during the Christmas holiday, and flew to Ecuador where Carlos lives. When Carlos sat in his new chair, his entire family was over-

whelmed with emotions. Jose learned that Carlos was a music teacher at a local college. It was a daily challenge to go to work and push his old chair around. With his new chair he can now travel effortlessly and he plans to drive his wheelchair to work and save some money on transportation. It was the best Christmas present ever.

In 2013, Purinapaq began to help people with visual and hearing disabilities with the assistance of the Catholic Church. They are collecting hearing aids, eye glasses, Braille machines or any adaptive devices that can be recycled. The organization is also looking for more volunteers, donations to expand their storage space and support for transportation. To contact Purinapaq you can call 416-938-9311 or visit their website at www.purinapaq.org. ●

