

# guest editorial . . .

Someone's going to ring your doorbell this Saturday or Sunday – a teenager, maybe a boy, maybe a girl, long hair, short hair, maybe sloppy, maybe neat. Appearance doesn't matter. The teenager who rings your bell will be carrying a brown envelope marked "Kenny Kunken Medical Fund." He'll be one of 600 marvelous Oceanside junior and senior high school students who volunteered to give up their weekend to collect funds for another Oceanside youngster, just a year out of his teens, whom most of them have never even met.

Kenny Kunken is in the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine. He talks about his "accident" last October matter of factly, with no trace of bitterness. He was a junior at Cornell University, majoring in industrial engineering. He was also a linebacker on the Cornell 150-pound football team. He stopped a kickoff return with a jarring tackle. His neck snapped.

"It was like an electric shock," he says. "I couldn't move, but I thought the wind had been knocked out of me or something. It wasn't until later that I realized how serious it was..."

And now, he says, six months later, he dreams he's all right. "I wake up in the morning and my instinct is to jump out of bed. It takes a few seconds to remember that I can't."

Kenny can move his head, raise a shoulder -- slightly, move the upper part of his left arm -- slightly. Beyond that, nothing. He is paralyzed. A nurse or visitor feeds him, turns him, lifts him, cares for his every need.

"Sure I'm scared," Kenny says. "Sometimes you read about things like this, but you never think they can happen to you."

Scared, bored, frustrated, helpless but not hopeless, Kenny's undergoing therapy which involves, he says, rigging up special devices as well as trying to regain movement in his limbs. "If I could sit better. If I could learn to operate an electric wheelchair..." says this former athlete who was once on Oceanside High School's wrestling and football teams and worked two summers as a lifeguard.

His accident has cost more than \$40,000 -- so far -- more than outstripping his family's insurance. The kind of therapy and attention he needs, and is getting, will amount to about \$100,000 a year.

"I guess I can't be an engineer anymore," Kenny says. "But maybe I could study psychology or law. If I get better..."

He flashes a dazzling smile. His eyes are big and blue. His hair is chestnut brown. He has a beard, neatly clipped, grown in the hospital because it's easier to care for than shaving. Talking to him you notice how good looking he is, how bright, how nice. You almost forget that his body, prone on the hospital bed, hasn't moved -- not a finger, not a toe. He is in exactly the position the nurse placed him.

"I have hope that I'll get better," he says. "I'm trying so hard..."

He knows about the Kenny Kunken Medical Fund, about the Oceanside men and women who organized it, about the 600 teenagers who will be ringing doorbells April 24 and 25.

"People," he says with a deep sigh, "people are wonderful."

Give generously. And if you're not going to be home, the mailing address is Kenny Kunken Medical Fund, 90 Mott Street, Oceanside. With your help, Kenny Kunken is going to make it.

By Lynn Ianniello