



Newsday Photo by Jim O'Rourke

Kunken: 'I'd like to . . . help others for a change'

He Must Take, And Hopes to Give

Oceanside—Ken Kunken's world is limited as only a paralytic's can be. Limited by his dependence on others to feed him, to clothe him, to care for all his needs. Limited by his reliance on the good will of relatives and strangers. Limited in these ways as it will be always.

But Kunken, whose active, athlete's life ended two and a half years ago with a jarring football tackle at a university lightweight football league game, has graduated at 23 from Cornell University and hopes to enlarge that world.

"I'd like to see if I can help others for a change, instead of always being on the receiving end," he said yesterday in a shady corner of the sunlit backyard of his aunt's home here. Sitting strapped into one of the two wheelchairs he uses—the other, an electric one, he can manipulate himself—Kunken discussed what he will do now that he has graduated with a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering.

He expects to return to Cornell this fall to study counseling in the school's education department—another two years for a master's degree. His physical disability—he is paralyzed from the neck down—makes an engineering career difficult.

Counseling was a career suggested for him by a psychology professor, Dr. James Maas. "I certainly never associated myself with that," Kunken said, "until he put it to me. But it made a lot of sense. I owe him a lot."

"I'm not going into it because I'm disabled and it's the *only* thing I can do," he explained, "but because it's exciting in the first place and also

happens to be something I can do.

" . . . I think I've got a lot more insight since the accident. Before, there were so many things I took for granted. Physical things, but emotional too. There's been a lot of time to think—though sometimes that's not so good—but, I think that I could put that to work in counseling, particularly for paraplegics."

His physical condition is never really out of his thoughts for long, but there is a lively atmosphere at the shingle and brick house at 2639 Cornwell Pl., provided by five young cousins and his brother Stephen, 25, and sister, Meryl, 13, who visit.

Kunken is limited in movement to a slight up-and-down flexibility in his left arm that—with special braces—permits him to turn the pages of a book, punch the keys of an electric typewriter and push the buttons on his electric wheelchair control board. Does he ever think about the chance of physical improvement? "All the time," he said with a brilliant smile. "But though I hope some day there will be a cure, I realize that nothing more medically can be done for me now."

What he needs most right now is an attendant to take care of him while he is home this summer and at Cornell when school starts. He looks forward to going back. But, he stresses, he's not really dedicated to study; he loves to watch football on television, settling for other sports when the season is over. "People think that just because you're in a wheelchair it's easier to study," he said. "But it's not. I find it harder. I'm always looking for distractions."

—Judith Bender