

Mike Patrick returning to Edgerton

Former Edgerton resident hopes to encourage students, community through his story

By Mike Drooger

This article was written with the aid of previously written articles by Tom Brakke (40 Years Ago Today), Bob McClintick (Not a Piece of Cake), and Beth Rickers (Still a Believer). Also a big help were past editions of the Edgerton Enterprise, telephone and email interviews with Mike Patrick, and conversations with persons familiar with Mike Patrick's situation. I thank each and every person for his or her willingness to help.

Mike Patrick was involved in two plays of varsity football for the Worthington Trojans in his career. They both came on September 3, 1971, during Mike's junior year.

After teammate Jeff Sellberg sprained his ankle, Coach Milt Osterberg motioned Mike into the game. On first and goal from the six-yard line, Owatonna gained three yards. Mike, a 16-year-old, 155-pound safety, was in on the tackle. On the next play, a 205-pound All-State fullback for the Owatonna Indians (they have since changed their school mascot to the Huskies) took the handoff and headed for the end zone.

Mike dove into the gap in an attempt to make the tackle. When the players got up from the mass of humanity in the end zone, Mike remained on the turf, motionless.

"I knew something was drastically wrong because all I could feel was tingling going from my chest down to my toes. That was the last sensation I felt from below the middle of my chest. I remember the pain as if it were yesterday. The back of my neck just pounded and my head felt like it wanted to blow right off. The throbbing was intense," Mike remembers.

His facemask had gotten caught on the ball carrier's kneepad, which forced Mike's chin into his chest. His fifth cervical vertebrae had been crushed and his sixth was dislocated. He was a quadriplegic and would never walk again.

The Patrick family moved to Edgerton from McLaughlin, South Dakota, in 1963. Mike's dad, Arlin, taught and coached at Edgerton Public School.

"My dad had the most difficult coaching assignment in the state of Minnesota," Mike said. Arlin Patrick replaced Richie Olson, the popular and successful coach who had led the Flying Dutchmen to a pair of state tournament appearances including the 1960 title.

"We lived in a house behind Erv Fey's Texaco Station. He sold many Cushman scooters out of that little store. From our house I could see Curt Vander Stoep's yard where he often shot baskets. I thought it was cool when I could shoot baskets with Curt," Mike reminisced.

Mike attended grades three, four, and five in Edgerton with teachers, Mrs. Fey, Mrs. Kreun, and Mrs. Wright. His mom, Colleen, was, according to Mike, "a domestic engineer raising our growing family and she was our Cub Scout leader with Anabelle Schelhaas."

Mike recalled a bike he got in trade for a horse with Richie Orres. "Richie had a black, Huffy, 5-speed racing bicycle from Huis-ken Hardware and we coveted those bicycles. My dad kept his horses and my two Shetland ponies in a pasture behind the city dump. I imagine Richie had Dad for a teacher and somehow they started talking about my ponies. A deal was struck, I got my bike, and Richie got his pony."

Mike can recall Edgerton businesses up and down Main Street from Kooiman Insurance Agency to Brink Implement to the Spot Café, Leader Café and Dean Gruys' television repair shop. But what he remembers most fondly is Jolink Pharmacy, where he could get a cherry Coke for a dime.

The Patricks left Edgerton in 1966 and, after a two-year stay in Sibley, Iowa, they moved to Worthington where Mike's dad accepted a job at the college as counselor along with track and cross-country coaching duties. They took up residence in a house the Van Essen brothers had moved from Edgerton to Worthington for \$400.

Don Kuiper, who has connections to the Edger-



Speaker and author Mike Patrick was injured in a football game his junior year of high school.

ton area through his wife Julie (Van Dyke) from Chandler, was on the sidelines the night of September 3 as assistant football coach. Kuiper recalls Mike Patrick being a good athlete that he coached in track as well as football.

"I remember that play very well. I could tell something was wrong right away. I was out on the field even before timeout was called. Mike had once read a story in *Letterman* magazine about a boy that had become paralyzed. As we helped Mike off the field he kept saying over and over, 'I don't want to be like that other boy.'" Don took Colleen Patrick to the hospital that evening and was there through the initial stages of Mike's immobilization process. "We (friends and coaches) took turns going to Sioux Falls every night for quite some time to be with the Patricks," Don remembered.

The residents of Edgerton also showed their support for the Patrick family in the weeks following the injury. The EHS cheerleaders put jars in the Edgerton businesses where patrons could throw their change after a purchase. Edgerton Public School hosted a community-wide benefit supper and talent show on Monday, November 22, 1971, with proceeds going to the Mike Patrick Fund. Soup, sandwiches, and pie were offered for 25 cents (30 cents for chili). Ice cream, coffee, and milk were a dime. The talent show was arranged by Harlan Wesselink and emceed by Charlie Walhof. A free will donation was taken at the talent show. The jars, supper, and talent show netted \$726.02.

After an initial stop at Worthington Regional Hospital on the evening of September 3, 1971, Mike was transferred to Sioux Valley Hospital in Sioux Falls where he spent 99 days. Much of that time he spent in a traction unit called a Stryker frame, which is a bed that could be turned to aid in the prevention of bedsores.

"In six weeks I got turned over 500 times," Mike recalled. "I'd look at the ceiling for two hours and then I'd look at the floor for two hours. Every two hours they'd wake me up and turn me over."

His weight plummeted from 155 pounds to 87 before he was transferred back to the Worthington hospital for 14 weeks, and then to Sister Kenny Institute in Minneapolis for four weeks of rehabilitation. When asked if he had any contact with players from the Owatonna team Mike responded: "The two running backs came to visit me in Sioux Valley one Saturday that fall. I have not kept in touch with the guy I tried to tackle, but I met and became friends with his mother. That is a whole other amazing story!"

In April of 1972 he finally returned to his home near Lake Okabena where he spent much of his

time sitting in the front yard watching people walk, run, or bike by. It wasn't easy to watch others do what he had done and loved before the accident. "I had been involved in any sport I could year around and now I was dependent on others to help me do everything, from getting dressed to brushing my teeth," Mike said. He became depressed. In a television interview with KSTP-TV, Mike confessed, "If I could have killed myself, I would have killed myself, but I had no way of doing it."

He eventually enrolled in college in California and it was there his attitude toward life began to change. While with friends, Mike thought he'd impress them by zooming past in his recently modified wheelchair. A friend remarked she had never really noticed the chair; it was him and his enjoyable personality she noticed. With a renewed attitude he moved back to Minnesota and eventually earned a teaching degree from the University of Minnesota. "I'm a tenth-grade dropout with a college degree," he boasts.

Before the injury Mike planned on following his father's footsteps and becoming a teacher and coach. After the injury he refined his gift for public speaking and now spends most of his time going to high schools speaking to students, helping them understand there is worth in every person and, no matter how low you feel, there is always hope. Mike believes we are all very capable people. "We just need to find out what those capabilities are and how we can use them to our advantage. I want my audience to start thinking and to learn that if they think things through, they can find a solution to just about any problem."

Mike has written a book titled *I Still Believe in Tomorrow*, a title that came from a poster on the wall in his room at Sioux Valley Hospital. In the book he discusses the five stages of grieving—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—although he still hasn't given into acceptance. He believes science and medicine will develop a cure for people with spinal injuries and he'll walk again, even 41 years after the injury.

"Hopefully stem cells, a computer chip, or something somebody is working on will be the answer for regenerating nerves. But science has to take its course and move on to find a solution to deal with the problem," Mike stated.

In the days after the injury Mike wondered often why he had been hurt. He suffered from a major case of "Why me?" It took him a while to discover the answer but he now knows, "I got hurt to make a difference in the lives of people who hear me, hear about me, or read my blog or my book."

Despite the injury, and numerous ensuing visits to the hospital to receive care for issues such as bedsores, urinary tract infections, and a broken ankle, not to mention the removal of a kidney and three toes, Mike retains his positive outlook. He is a living reminder of what Mitch Anthony says on his radio broadcast, *Daily Dose*, every day—attitude is everything. It's that attitude that lifted Mike from rock bottom in 1971 to changing lives for many years.

If you have internet access, and would like to keep up with Mike today, he has an informational website at www.patcom.com and his blog at <http://iamnotdoneyet.blogspot.com>.

The community is invited to attend an assembly where Mike Patrick will be speaking, on Thursday, Sept. 13, from 1 to 2:30 in the EHS gym. He will also host a book signing following the assembly.

If you cannot attend the assembly, Mike will be signing books at Turkey Day in Worthington, on Saturday, Sept. 15, from 10:00 a.m. to noon at Center Sports in downtown Worthington.