

# Back in the saddle

**In May 2002, Jason Roll's life turned upside down – literally. A show horse trainer, Jason broke his back and suffered compound fractures when the mare he was riding reared up, and then flipped over backwards with Jason still in the saddle.**

“The horse had never behaved like that. But something made her rear up and she flipped over. As a rider, you have about 30 seconds to make a decision – should I stick it out or do I bail out before the horse goes over? I made the wrong choice,” Jason, 34, says philosophically.

Six years and several surgeries later, Jason is unable to walk unassisted. Today, one of his biggest problems is healing a wound on his sacrum – the result of continual pressure from being seated in a wheelchair day after day.

“A wound like Jason's is very dangerous as it exposes the inside of his body to infection,” explains Janelle Thoms, Program Director, Mercy Wound Healing Center.

Over the last several years, Jason has had many surgeries to cover the wound with a flap of skin; however, the constant pressure on the flap, as well as complications from osteo-myelitis (a bone infection), hindered his healing.

“I tried to walk the first two years after the accident by using crutches and a walker. That wrecked my shoulders, so I went to the wheelchair. Since then, I've been in and out of the hospital with this pressure sore,” says Jason.

“A part of the problem is I can't feel the pain of the wound,” he continues. “It's like if you were to sit on bleacher at a ball game for a long time, and

you get to where your butt bones are sore or tingly. When my body gets like that, it doesn't send the signal to my brain to say 'move around, the circulation is getting cut off.' A paraplegic just sits right through it, unless he is mentally in tune and adjusts the way he's supposed to, every hour or so.”

Jason was a regular at the Wound Healing Center each week for debridement (the removal of dead or damaged tissue from a wound) until reconstructive surgeon A. John Vander Zee, MD, performed a flap surgery on Dec. 12, 2007.

**“...I immediately identified Jason as a possible candidate. I knew we were about to change his life.”**

*Janelle Thoms, Program Director, Mercy Wound Healing Center*

Vander Zee, who instructed Jason to remain on his stomach for three weeks following the surgery to allow healing time. Since the flap surgery, Jason has gained 20 pounds.

Jason also utilized water therapy at the Mercy Aquatics Center, located in the Physicians' Clinic of Iowa building, 600 Seventh St. SE. Mercy recently renovated the heated therapy and lap pool, and opened the facility for community use in March 2008.

Throughout recovery, Jason's thoughts were pinned on a new stand-up wheelchair which he knew would have a major positive impact on his life. The stand-up chair allows increased mobility, relieves pressure on his sacrum, and adds freedom for arm movements, as well as the opportunity to be at eye-level – or horse-level, in his case.

Jason heard about the stand-up wheelchair through Janelle, who had spotted it at a medical convention. She stopped to talk to the sales representative, a paraplegic who had been wounded for 18 years.



“We pick up as much knowledge as we can at these external conferences. We know our patients. As soon as I saw that standing wheelchair, I immediately identified Jason as a possible candidate. I knew we were about to change his life,” says Janelle. She connected Jason with the sales rep, who brought the stand-up wheelchair to the Wound Center for Jason to test out.

A highlight during this meeting was when Jason gave his wife, Jessica, a hug – the first standing hug she'd had from him in six years. He is teaching several classes at Kirkwood Equestrian Center this summer and is looking forward to training from an upright position. He also gives private riding lessons and evaluates horses as a certified National Snaffle Bit Association judge.

Jason's prognosis is very positive, according to Dr. Vander Zee, who comments, “The No. 1 factor for success is to have a patient who is rehabilitated, and I can't think of a better example than Jason!”



*Dr. John Vander Zee  
Reconstructive surgeon*

Show horse trainer Jason Roll is now able to train horses standing up with his new wheelchair. He also is able to hug his wife, Jessica, standing up – something he hadn't been able to do for the last six years.