

## Teen 'starting all over'

By Michael Stone

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Before late August, David Anderson III didn't know anything about spinal cords, bedsores, electric wheelchairs or all the gizmos modern science has contributed to the rehabilitation of paralysis.

But since then, he's become somewhat of an expert.

The 16-year-old sophomore at Signal Mountain Middle-High School dislocated two of his vertebrae Aug. 22 in a trampoline accident. He spent his first days at Erlanger hospital, then went to Shepherd Center, a brain and spinal cord rehabilitation facility in Atlanta, before returning home Nov. 24, the day before Thanksgiving.

"It's like a different life now," he described Thursday. "When you wake up, it takes a good hour and a half, two hours to eat breakfast, get dressed and in your [wheel] chair."

"It's like being an infant and starting all over," his mom, Rhonda, added. "But he's come a long way."

Sitting in his electric wheelchair in his Signal Mountain home, David describes the events of the August day that left him partially paralyzed.

He was diving with friends from a trampoline into a pool, just as he had done a week before.

But after one dive, he didn't resurface -- he had hit the bottom of the pool head-on.

"I started panicking because I knew [my friends] would think I was joking around," David said, referring to how he could do little more than scream from the bottle of the pool.

His friends reacted, though, rescuing David and rushing to call 911. He quickly was taken to Erlanger hospital, and a metal plate was implanted in his back.

Since then, life has changed drastically for David. Without the use of his legs and right arm, simple tasks -- eating, brushing his teeth, climbing into bed -- are a challenge.

David's gone from only being able to shrug his shoulders to moving his head, wrists and left arm.

Friends came to visit him on the weekends at Shepherd, and they've been trickling in and out of his house since his return to Signal Mountain. Without that support, along with that from his family, he wouldn't have as much hope, he said.

"I wouldn't be able to do it without my friends and family," he emphasized. "If you're here by yourself and no one comes to see you, then it's depressing."

His grandmother, Barbara Anderson, said she has been impressed with David's high spirits. Along with friends and family, God has been a big source of inspiration for David, she said.

"[David] hasn't doubted for a minute that he wouldn't be healed," she said.

And David does plan to walk again, though he recognizes that it will be a long rehabilitation process. He also hopes to go back to school in the spring -- though that, too, will be a challenge, he said.

And though he won't be at the game, he'll be rooting on the Signal Mountain football players as they compete in the state championship game in Cookeville, Tenn., Saturday. David played football last season but opted out this season to concentrate on baseball.

"They've gone a long way since I've been [in Atlanta]," he said. "I knew they'd make it far in the playoffs, but I didn't think they'd make it to the state championship."

The little things, like cheering for his school's football team, mean so much more now since his accident, David said.

"I can sit on a couch on my own, and I can enjoy that a ton, where everyone else just sits down and says, 'Whatever,'" he said. "When I first became able to feed myself, that meant a lot."