

JR News

Summer 2018

WORK, HOME AND PLAY

Change, Fun, and Patience are the themes for this Edition

Home/Health:

Change is one constant in everyone's life. During these past 6 months I have had a little more change than I would have liked. 5 of my 7 Personal Assistants have graduated or moved on to the next stage of their lives. 2 are off to Medical School, one is a practicing OT, and the other 2 are heading to graduate school. The hardest part of this team change is my long term Personal Care Assistant, friend, and much more, Eric (of 20 years) has moved on to greener pastures. He had been my go to man for many adventure (the White House, Australia, cruising, marriage, and so much more). Eric knows me better than I knew myself. While he is still in Tallahassee and we bowl from time to time, I miss him. But, I am glad to report that he has volunteered to be the "Mr. Miyagi" of sorts for future recruits. Not to worry, I still have a few veterans on the team, but it has been a significant transformation over the last 60 days.



As reported earlier, I continue to struggle with a 1 cm by 1 cm pressure sore. The second opinion up at the world-renowned Shepherd Center in Atlanta, made it clear that the only long-term fix to an issue I had been avoiding for the better part of 3 years, was surgery. The surgery date was June 8th and we know how much I love going under anesthesia. I really tried to advocate for a local and being awake during the surgery, but the doctors simply would not go for it. The anesthesia has a very debilitating effect on my body, the loss of weight, muscle tone, and so forth are almost impossible to get back. Long-term recovery requires patience and strict adherence to the protocol. I will probably be in bed for 30-40 days. My first time out of bed was about 2-weeks post-surgery, and then it was only for 15 minutes. It takes a long time for the tissue to settle, build elasticity, and the strength necessary to sit for 10-12 hours/day. It is my goal to be game ready better by fall semester...

While we have not encountered any new hurricanes, we have had some significant storms, snow, ice, and over 2 cords of firewood were burned this year. We also lost another tree! It seems that the Leyland Cypress trees that create a natural barrier in my backyard have reached old age and are no longer as sturdy as they once were. We will probably need to replace all of them in the coming years (not all at once I hope!). In addition to the hard freezes, Tallahassee experienced its first snow in nearly 20 years! Not much...



The Legacy Fountain was frozen in time when temperatures dropped on January 3, 2018.

but something to talk about.

I am sure we are all familiar with the classic movie “Singin’ in the Rain” with Gene Kelly. How about cooking in the rain? One of the many skills Erika possesses is Barbeque Master. During a visit from one of her girlfriends, she would not let bad weather interfere with good food. What dedication and enthusiasm!



Work:

I cannot begin to tell you how much fun I have in my role as a member of the FSU Faculty. Keeping up with the students is a 24/7 job and boy do they like instant feedback! I couldn’t be happier. This is the right place at the right time for me. I would highly encourage anyone looking to reinvent their careers or looking for something new to do to teach at a post-secondary institution. It is time well spent. Some of the achievements for this semester include receiving an award from the student members of Phi Beta Kappa, I am honored to have been chosen as the teacher of the year for 2018. Even more exciting having my students evaluate my course and give me a 4.7 out of 5 rating which surpassed the department, college, and university benchmarks! Another was having my presentation accepted for the celebration of the 20^{-year} anniversary of the Family Café I would say all-in-all it has been a very good year thus far.

In January, I was quoted numerous times in an [850 Business Magazine](#) article wherein I discussed the employment and persons with disabilities. Once again while working with FSUPD and the University of Choice students, we were able to raise [Rish Park Scholarship](#) dollars for low-income families for the sixth year in a row. This modest scholarship is a game changer for families with

disabilities as we are all aware, having a disability requires the help and support of an entire family in for the individual to thrive and live their best life. Moreover, the scholarship gives a family of 4 three nights/four days at Rish Park and includes \$250.00 for food, gas, and miscellaneous items. Over the years it has been a relaxing escape for folks who could not otherwise afford a weekend in Miami, Clearwater, or Destin.

I was also very excited to help students within the College of Business to plan and execute their second annual Diversity in the Workforce Conference. Many thanks to Delta Airlines, JP Morgan Chase, Coca Cola, and Amazon for their active participation and support of these emerging leaders.

On a different issue, [Delta Airlines](#), with the support of the Disability Advisory Board (of which I am a member), took the first proactive step in mitigating the use of fake service animals flying the friendly skies. To be honest, it was very difficult to balance the needs of the community and the safety of other fliers, but in spite of everything, and because of our initiative the USDOT is opening the rulebook regarding service animals. For all of you interested in this issue, please, go to their website to share your thoughts. Our collective voices make a huge difference, and it will be a work in progress as we collaborate with the feds and other members of the community to develop more permanent rules.



For the past year I have been an advisor to 10 engineering students for their final capstone project. With a cross discipline approach, they came up with a “Dri-go”-which is an automated, mounted, and hands-free umbrella for wheelchair users. What an overdue, and necessary invention! Not only did they receive A’s on the project, but they won first place in the University Wide Innovation Competition and the \$10,000 prize that came with it.

My work with the Christopher Reeves foundation as a grant reviewer keeps me tuned into ideas across the world. I am also a grant reviewer for the Toyota challenge-advancing mobility innovation for persons with disabilities. So perhaps this means I will get lucky and get to go to Tokyo in 2020 for the big award ceremony, wouldn’t that be something!

Play:

The trip of a lifetime for us! While I grew up in Germany; the Greek Isles and Athens were not included. After very careful planning and the use of a disability planning travel agency; SAGE; we pieced together an eleven-day adventure that began in Rome and ended in Athens. We stayed with Princess Cruise lines because they have always met our thirst for magnificent adventures. SAGE provided an excellent added in their guarantee of accessibility value for shore excursions



Erika and I enjoyed an amazing time relaxing with friends touring the city at night and a host of other exciting things. Our tour excursion had a wonderful night guide and the accommodations were first rate. There would have been many things unaccomplished because of the old-world cobblestone designs of Europe, but in our case Outreach Accessible Travel really brought the experience to life. We were also able to see the natural ruins and reach new heights as we enjoyed the views of Mount Olympus.



Erika and I are wishing you all a safe a wonderful summer remember to keep us in your thoughts and prayers as I recover. Fell free to reach out via email, text, phone-call, or smoke signal, and I can keep you all posted on my progress, and abreast of any updates and success stories concerning us and our community.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Downing'.