



“People are afraid of me in the sense that they don’t realize that I’m a person, that I have a conscience, and that I can speak eloquently. The only thing to be afraid of really is that I can run you over with my wheelchair. But don’t worry, I’m not gonna do that.”

# Jeremy

I’m Jeremy. I’m 22 years old. I go to Chaffey College. My life is normal. I’m just doing the normal college thing. I do have Cerebral Palsy, which is a lack of oxygen to the part of the brain that controls movement. Cerebral Palsy makes me a very animated person. I jump around when I speak, and it’s a total workout so I sweat through my clothes.

My voice is also different. I wish I was like that guy who plays Zorro. He has a nice accent, but I have a disabled accent. People sometimes treat me according to the way I sound, and they don’t take the time to understand what I’m saying, or to talk to me.

It takes most people a while to get around to thinking that I’m just like anyone else. Some people talk down to me, like in this baby tone, “Hiiiiii, Jeremy,” and pat me on the head. Don’t pat anyone on the head! And there are other trigger words, like “buddy.” Don’t call me buddy.

Other people, when I roll up they say like, “You are such an inspiration!” When I graduated from high school they even gave me an award for

“most inspirational.” I had to go in front of the whole school at a pep rally. It was really awkward! I was like, “Who is this saying that I’m inspirational?” None of those kids ever took the time to talk to me

If I’m your inspiration, just for being in a wheelchair, you need to find a new inspiration. I mean, I understand that by looking at my life it can make you feel like your life isn’t so bad. But, this is just me, living my life.

It’s hard being a kid with a disability because kids are always trying to fit in, and if you’re disabled you just don’t fit in. Up to eighth grade I was also in special education classes. I loved special ed, because it teaches you life lessons and very practical information mixed in with the academics. But at the same time, my identity system was thrown off because I didn’t think I should be there.

I’m a pretty smart person. I’ve had a high GPA, and people are always telling me that they are surprised to find out I’m so smart – smarter than them, even. I like to think I’m kind of a Christian Steven Hawking. I’m a very philosophical thinker. Growing up, I didn’t have the most social life. So, I would spend a lot of time just staring off into space, trying to figure out life’s big questions. They say when you lack one ability, you heighten another. So since my body isn’t able, I figure my mind is.

My parents treat me just like they treat my two brothers. The one thing different is that they don’t make me do chores, because it takes me so long to do

stuff. So, hey, maybe there's a purpose to me being disabled. Like God knew, "My son is gonna be lazy."

But, my dad did worry that I didn't have many friends, so he made me join a church youth group. I didn't want to go, but he was like, "You have no choice. You're in a wheelchair. So I'm gonna drop you off and you're gonna be stuck there." My dad is a jokester too, so it's in my DNA.

I use a lot of jokes to ease people up. My dad told me that if you can make someone laugh then you show them you're just like everyone else. You're gonna find this hard to believe, but once in my life I was even more of a jokester than I am today. I would put my disability on the floor for people to laugh at. The danger with that is when you joke around all the time people can start to think that your whole life is a joke.

The church group is where I started to turn that around, to become a more positive person. Some



"My identity is not being disabled. It is just something that I am."

**"If I'm your  
inspiration, just  
for being in a  
wheelchair, you  
need to find a new  
inspiration."**

people would say, "Oh, you found God, because you have emotional issues and you are disabled." But that's not it. I know why my faith is my faith. My faith and my disability are two separate things.

I was always a creative kid. When I went to high school I got into graphic design and t-shirt printing. I had this idea for a t-shirt company - I-M-A-G-N. It stands for Imagination Makes a Greater Nation. I do want to inspire people, but through my t-shirts and through my faith, by helping them to look on a higher level and at what life is truly about.