

About the Founder of Polistem

Written by Paul A. Rowland

Will Spence was born with Muscular Dystrophy (MD), a neuromuscular disease. The specific type of MD he has is known as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, (DMD). It is one of nine types of muscular dystrophy, a group of genetic, degenerative diseases primarily affecting voluntary muscles. The cause of DMD is from an absence of dystrophin, a protein that helps keep



muscle cells intact. The onset of the disease is early childhood, from about 2 to 6 years of age. DMD eventually affects all voluntary muscles, and the heart and breathing muscles. Survival is rare beyond the early 30s, and Spence feels blessed to have made it to 30, celebrating his birthday on Valentine's Day of 2007. "No symptoms were apparent until I was about four years old. Then it became obvious that I had trouble walking, climbing stairs and without warning my legs would give out and I would fall down on the floor. After seeing numerous doctors and specialists, I was diagnosed with DMD in the summer of 1984," explains Spence.

Despite having this devastating disease Spence lives his life to the best of his ability. "I wouldn't consider my life to be normal because I don't feel that there is anything normal about life," says Spence. He has the same wants, needs, and desires as any other person it's just that he may have to go a different way to accomplish tasks. It's not possible for him to perform the physical daily living tasks that are easy for so many others, but then again he has the gift of being able to express myself in a way that so many others are not able to.

Everybody has their own obstacles and hurdles to overcome. What's important is how we choose to handle these challenges. "The power of choice is such an important part of how we live our lives. We can either make the best of the situation and progress, or we can be the victim and stay in the same negative cycle," explains Spence. Having said this he also understands and appreciates that many of life's decisions are not easy to make but ultimately we are the only ones who have the power to make change happen.

There is no doubt that Spence has and continues to overcome even more challenges as his disease progresses. However, he is quick to point out that no one is exempt from life's challenges because it's all a part of the learning process. "What's important is being able to learn from our experiences because it's what makes us stronger mentally, emotionally, and spiritually," says Spence. He considers graduating from college to be one of his biggest achievements to date. Graduating made him realize that he can succeed at anything he puts his mind to. It's also college that helped him realize the potential technology can give to people with physical disabilities. It was at the Metropolitan State College of Denver where he was instrumental in developing virtual reality technologies for people with disabilities. He also had the opportunity to work in a computer lab specifically designated for people with disabilities, and learn more about specific technologies that were useful for particular disabilities. After graduating in 1999 with a BS in Computer Information Systems, Spence ran and owned several online forums as well as a disability lifestyle webzine named Duxtra.



His latest project is Polistem™, an online social network for the stem cell community. "I felt there needed to be a greater emphasis and push for stem cell research, development, and policy. Having a disease that has greatly impacted my life, I can understand and appreciate the potential that stem cell research can give to people all over the world who suffer from devastating diseases, disorders, and health-related complications," says Spence. Polistem™ was created so that each and every person who is affected by the positive outcomes of stem cell research can unite as a community to forward its advancement. He is hoping that his creation will become hugely successful while giving hope, information, and strength to the stem cell community.

Spence has many interests that include music, movies, concerts, technology, coffee shops, going to different restaurants, and enjoys warm weather. He's also an avid rock music enthusiast who likes to keep informed about new bands and trends in music.