

That Smile

That smile. Just didn't seem right. It didn't seem fitting for someone in the condition he was in. But then again, Richie is an unique individual.

I first met Richie when he was 13 years old. An avid bow hunter, Richie and friends spent many hours roaming the woods in Northern Minnesota in search of deer. But what makes Richie so memorable to me wasn't the fact that he was a hunter. It wasn't the fact that he had personal issues to deal with, one of which was he never knew his real parents.



It wasn't even the fact that he bagged his first deer the previous summer in spite of the fact that he had no legs up to his hips, one arm, and only two workable fingers on his other arm. No, these aren't the reasons I think Richie is such an amazing young man. What made Richie so remarkable to me

was the way he handled himself through all the challenges he

faced in his life. According to Richie, you can either sit and waddle in self pity or you can “go hunting.” His rhetoric was always positive and uplifting. It always matched that smile. That smile. Looking up from his wheel chair, eyes barely visible under the brim of his camouflage hunting hat, there would always be that constant, reassuring smile.

When I first met Richie I thought nothing of it. But soon after, it hit me. “Why?,” I asked myself. “Why would this kid be smiling with all the problems he has in his life.” I thought about this for days. Then one day I remembered someone once saying that “handicap people cast a large shadow when it comes to inspiring others.” And then I knew. Then it hit me. His shadow moved in my direction and did hang over me. He did inspire me. I felt uplifted standing under his shadow. I felt hopeful. When I now struggle through life I think of this remarkable young man and realize that if Richie can “smile” through all his challenges and “go hunting,” then I certainly can through mine.

Challenges come into everyone's life. But only a select few use their challenge to inspire those around them. Do handicap people realize the impact they have on other people? The impact to inspire. The impact to make a difference. Do handicap people realize that they have a greater calling in their life then they may have imagined?

Seems like Richie understood this. I know if I were to ask him, he'd agree and then of course he's flash that smile. Maybe, just maybe, he might even ask me to go hunting.