

LOVELL, Jocelyn

## Former cycling champion

# Fourteen years after accident Lovell is waiting to walk again

By DECLAN FINUCANE  
Staff

Former Canadian champion cyclist Jocelyn Lovell believes the powers that be are spinning their wheels in the wrong direction when it comes to finding a cure for spinal cord injuries.

Still, the Port Credit resident — paralyzed from the neck down after being run over by a dump truck on a summer evening 14 years ago as he rode his bike — remains every bit determined that he will walk again.

"The idea of walking along the beach some day is too profound for me to not think I'll walk again," says Lovell, 47, owner of numerous Canadian cycling records and a member of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame.

### Will ride again

Riding a bike again isn't even out of the question, he claims. "If I'll walk again, then I'll ride again."

Nothing would make him happier. If ever a man was born to ride a bike, Lovell will have you believe it's him. His love for cycling is as clear as the smile that engulfs his face when he speaks of past accomplishments on the bike track, which include several appearances at the Olympics and four Commonwealth Games Gold medals.

The man who dominated the Canadian cycling scene throughout the 1970s and into the 80s — and collected a 1975 Canadian Male Athlete of the Year Award in the process — feels cheated there isn't yet a cure, an answer that will vault him back onto a bicycle seat. He feels especially cheated because he's a firm believer a cure for spinal cord injuries should have been found years ago.

It's such outspoken sentiments that have painted Lovell a bitter man, in many people's eyes. But, he contends he's not at all bitter.

He simply doesn't mince words, choosing instead to tell it as he sees it, all in the name of helping to find a cure for spinal cord injuries, he says.

Lovell was in the midst of one of the hottest winning streaks of his career — "I couldn't

lose a race that year, I was going so good," he beams — when near-tragedy struck on August 4, 1983, at 6:55 p.m. He was riding his bike along Britannia Rd., near Trafalgar Rd., when a pair of trucks came rumbling along.

"There were two dump trucks coming up behind me. The first truck brushed me, and the second one hit me," recalls Lovell. Though still pained by the accident that stole his cycling career and nearly took his life, Lovell continues the story, laughing softly.

"I went under the truck, my bike was mangled, and I came out better looking and wiser. I still can't believe I did that without dying. I have no right to be here now, I shouldn't have survived it."

Lovell became involved with the Spinal Cord Society (SCS) a couple of years after suffering his injury, and has served as Canadian co-ordinator for the Minnesota-based organization for the past seven years.

That has now become his passion, replacing at least for the moment his true love, and he spends hours upon hours of what he calls cure-oriented work, in attempts to give the 30,000 or so paralyzed Canadians hope. When Lovell isn't devoting his time to the SCS from his home — where he lives with his six-month-old dog Beanie — he says all his time goes to simply staying healthy.

He says of the nearly \$1.75 million raised annually by the SCS, a large chunk goes directly to scientific research, work that is targeted directly at a cure.

On the other hand, Lovell claims the medical profession's approach to spinal cord injuries is misdirected, and that the process of finding a cure has been held up due to a lack of "goal-oriented research."

In the days and months following his accident, Lovell took particular exception to those in the medical field who tried to tell him the best thing to do was to learn to accept his injury, and live with it.

"They told me I'd never walk again, and they wonder why there's no cure yet. Where's the demand for a cure if you have all these people

in wheel chairs out there who are accepting their injuries? They'll give you a wheel chair and tell you to put a smile on your face and show the world you can be happy. I hate being crippled, and I'll use that word. If I could trade spinal cords with you, I would in a second. Ninety per cent of the knowledge is there. It's just a matter of wanting to find the cure badly enough, but if there's no demand for a cure, none will come," says Lovell.

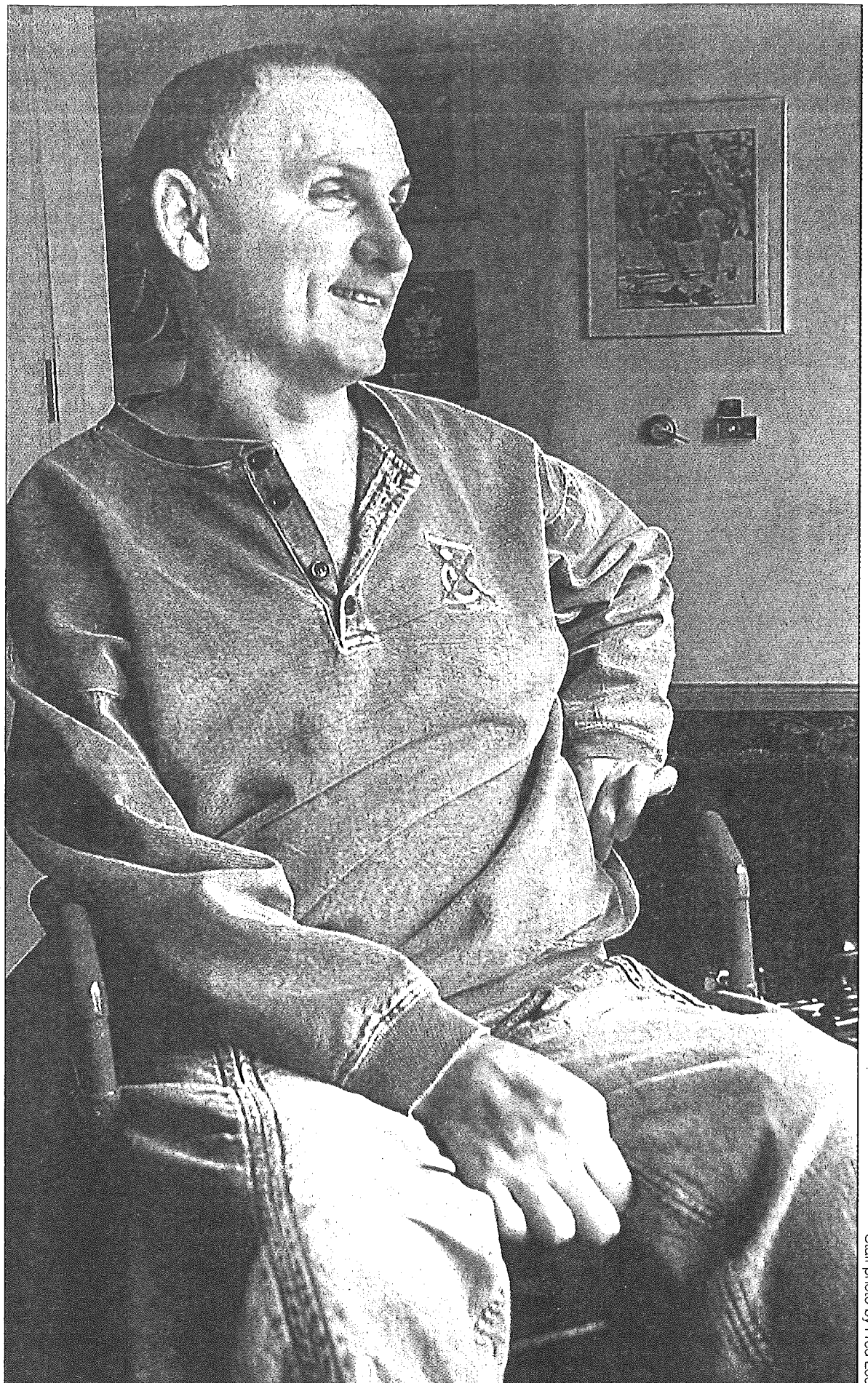
### Address real issue

"Millions of dollars are piddled away in the name of coping, and that does nothing to address the real issue, which is the absence of a cure that should be there. I'm not going to accept it, I never have. People who suffer such injuries should be told that while there's not a cure at the moment, everything possible is being done to bring one about, and you should keep yourself fit for that day. I have no real education or vocation to speak of, but I have what's between my ears, and I know it is right and it is correct to aim for a cure, rather than resign myself to being in a wheel chair. It's tough to be in a wheel chair, it's a constant battle. I'll never give up trying to get out of this chair. If you like being in a wheel chair, then you're also mentally handicapped."

Lovell contends that with enough funding, a cure is around the corner, given several "huge discoveries" in recent years, and that honing in on such a cure for spinal cord injuries "is like a puzzle, one piece at a time".

But, a big part of the battle, he says, is getting those with spinal cord injuries to change their way of thinking.

"It's no wonder people who are paralyzed are indifferent a little to a cure," Lovell explains. "It's been rammed down our throats that there is no cure. But there is, and I believe we're more than halfway there."



Staff photo by Fred Loek

## Looking ahead with hope

Peel Bio-  
Sept. 17/97  
MN

Port Credit's Jocelyn Lovell, a former Canadian champion cyclist, says not enough is being done to find a cure for spinal cord injuries. Lovell was paralyzed when he was hit by a dump truck while riding his bike in August, 1983. See story page 14.