



Friends and Family

When John and Meredyth Moore went through the biggest crisis of their lives, their community helped them fulfill a dream.

by PAULA DERROW



John and Meredyth with Jeremy, age 2, in Dayton, OH.

John and Meredyth Moore are the kind of people who drop everything when a friend needs help. That's why, in 2008, John, a firefighter and EMT, didn't give it a moment's thought when a pal called to say that he needed help clearing debris from a fallen tree. "Johnny immediately left to give him a hand," recalls Meredyth, who, like John, was 25 at the time.

Not long after, the phone rang again. It was the same friend, telling Meredyth that her husband of two years had been hurt. Meredyth raced over, only to be prevented by friends of John's—fellow EMTs—from seeing him. Her only comfort: "I knew that his buddies would take good care of him."

They did, but the damage was done. At the hospital, Meredyth learned that John had been hit

by a falling branch. His spine was compressed and he was paralyzed from the waist down. Doctors told the couple that John, an avid cyclist and swimmer, would almost certainly never walk again. "We are very active people—Meredyth's a physical education teacher. All the fun things I loved doing required using my legs," says John. "My first thoughts were, *How will I enjoy our life now? What will we do together?*"

Meredyth, too, was overwhelmed and scared. “Then a nurse in the hospital said that she’d seen a lot of couples in our position break up because the guy would tell his wife, ‘I don’t want you to be a part of this,’” she says. “I said, that’s not what we’re doing to do. That’s not us.”

So the pair went into what they call “survival mode,” says Meredyth. “We prayed a lot,” she says. “The marines say that when you face a hurdle, you have to improvise, adapt and overcome. I’m not a marine, but that’s what we did,” John adds.

COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Their tight-knit circle was a few steps ahead of them. First, John’s fire chief visited him in the hospital to reassure him that he’d always have a job with the department. Then, Meredyth’s friend invited them to live in a one-level home on her property. In the weeks after John’s release from the hospital, friends and neighbors worked to make the new place wheelchair-friendly, donating all the labor and equipment. “It felt wonderful that everyone jumped in to take care of us, so we could focus on Johnny getting better,” she adds. “We got so much, even from people we didn’t know, that sometimes we felt undeserving—like, how can we ever repay all this generosity?”

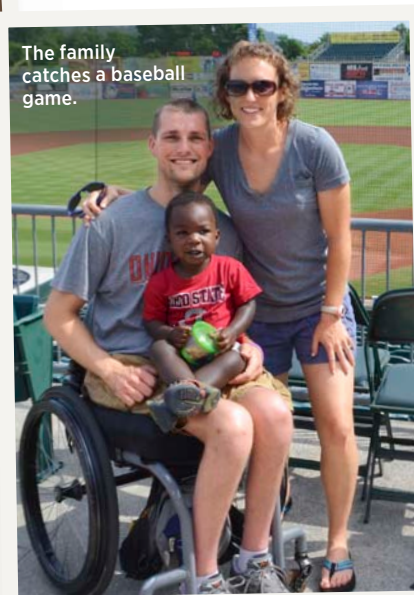
And it didn’t stop there. Members of the Moores’ church joined with colleagues from Meredyth’s school to hold a huge fundraiser, complete with musical acts and food. John’s union set up a fund, and the donations poured in, thanks in part to the local papers. “There was a story headlined ‘Wounded Local Hero’—that’s me,” John says, laughing. The pair ended up with \$25,000, some of which they used to buy a car with hand controls. A nearby school raised another \$2,000, which the Moores used for a hand-powered bicycle. “God



Meredyth and John on their wedding day, July 2006.



“It felt wonderful that everyone jumped in to take care of us, so we could focus on Johnny getting better.”



The family catches a baseball game.

came through with support,” says Meredyth. “He shows His strength through people.”

Slowly the couple got into the rhythm of their new normal. John went to work doing training and public speaking on fire prevention. They even began to talk of having children, which had been their plan before the accident.

THE DREAM OF A FAMILY

Because men with spinal cord injuries tend to stop producing sperm, the odds of the couple conceiving naturally were poor. A year after the accident, a fertility specialist confirmed that Meredyth

had less than a 1% chance of getting pregnant through artificial insemination. “It was devastating for me,” she says. “I’d always wanted to be a mom, to have a baby and feel it inside me. Now, that dream was crushed—on top of what happened with Johnny. I was extremely depressed.” John felt guilty. “I’d already caused Meredyth so much pain, and the infertility just magnified that,” he recalls.

With their trademark resilience, the couple began to focus on another way to have a child. “We knew it was time to think and pray about adoption,” says Meredyth. That, however, can cost upward



The ideal treat for dogs with food sensitivities.

Oven-baked for crunchy goodness, natural BLUE Basics Biscuits feature salmon or turkey as the first ingredient—proteins not commonly used in dog food or treats, which makes them an ideal choice for dogs with food sensitivities.



Friends and FAMILY

of \$20,000. The couple had built up some savings in the two years since John was paralyzed, and combined it with what was left in the community fund. “We felt like, ‘OK, this is what this money is meant to be used for,’” says Meredyth. “People close to us saw how brokenhearted we were when we found out we couldn’t have biological children. They were so ecstatic to be able to help us.”

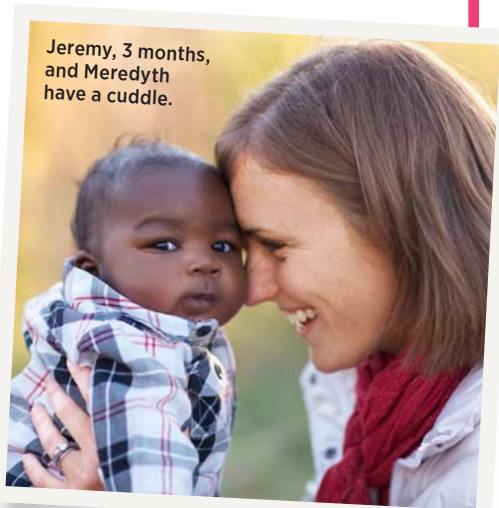
AND BABY MAKES THREE

The Moores found an agency and initiated an open adoption. “Before we started, I called and asked, ‘Tell us the truth—my husband’s in a chair. Do you think we’ll be able to adopt?’” Meredyth recalls. “The woman answered, ‘You can’t see me now, but I’m smiling, because we just placed a baby with a family where one parent is in a wheelchair.’ We were so excited.”

Eight months later, on July 8, 2011, they got the call. “Our agency said, ‘We have a mother here in Dayton who has just delivered a healthy baby boy—can you come get him right now?’” recalls Meredyth. “It was a total surprise! We each left work, and within two hours, we were holding Jeremy.”

The Moores rushed to find a crib that John could access from his chair—“Luckily, he has long arms,” Meredyth says, laughing—and honed their routines with Jeremy. “I practiced different lifts: couch to lap, bed to lap. It went smoother than I expected,” says John.

Jeremy, now 2, is all they hoped for. (The Moores send his birth mother photos and updates.) “He’s a patient little boy,” says John. “He has naturally adapted to being the son of a paraplegic. When I turn, he leans into me. When I go up ramps, he leans back. If I can’t have him in my lap, he’ll get behind me and push on the chair. And when I move



from the chair to the floor to play with him, he knows it takes time.”

The Moores feel deeply indebted to their community for helping them have a family. “We got so much, and we want to give back,” says John. So the pair looks for ways to pay it forward, helping another firefighter adjust to paralysis, and doing what they can financially as well: Instead of trading gifts at Christmas, they give money to local families in need. They’ve also hosted a race to benefit Free Wheelchair Mission, a charity that makes wheelchairs for people who can’t afford them. “It is a great circle of generosity and love,” says John.

ADOPTION UPDATE!

The Moores are in the process of adopting another child. To supplement their savings, they turned to a “crowdfunding” site called AdoptTogether, which was started by a childhood friend of John’s. AdoptTogether allows prospective parents to post a personal profile and solicit donations from friends, family and even strangers to cover the cost of adoption. For more information, visit adopttogether.org.



« Find out more about crowdfunding in the tablet editions of this issue. Go to my.womansday.com to subscribe.