

able to drive or do needlepoint or see the grandchildren's faces. But under the circumstances I have been exceedingly fortunate. We shall battle that battle when we get there." That battle will find Carroll Manning a formidable foe.

Ken Kunken '72

Against Great Odds

Many Cornellians of a decade ago remember Ken Kunken '72. In 1970 he broke his neck making an openfield tackle in the fourth game of the season for the Cornell 150-pound football team, and was left totally paralyzed from the neck down.

When ten months of hospitalization and therapy restored slight muscle movement in one arm, Kunken returned to school, determined to earn the bachelor of engineering degree on which he was working when injured. To the amazement of his fellow students and teachers, he seemed undeterred by his handicap.

With a splint attached to the one arm, he could type slowly, manipulate eating utensils, and turn pages of a book. An attendant, with him at all times, moved him from bed to wheelchair and back, pushed the chair, and helped with items he needed.

Eleven years and four college degrees later, Kunken is still remarkable in his determination: In May he was graduated from Hofstra University with a degree in law, and is due to start work with the Nassau County District Attorney's Office on Long Island in the fall.

It goes without saying that any sort of progress has been hard-won by Ken Kunken. Although he was not in the least mentally impaired by his accident, the university study to which he has devoted eight of the past twelve years involved much more than brainwork alone. There were classes to attend, books to be found and read, vast quantities of information to be analyzed and remembered, papers to be written, exams to be taken and, at every step, obstacles.

Kunken remembers his first two years back at Cornell as "very difficult." The





Ken Kunken '72, with the awards and degrees he has won since losing use of his legs and arms and, above, taking a call on his specially equipped phone.

terrain was unsuited to wheelchair travel, with few ramps around campus at the time. His attendant had to haul Kunken's wheelchair up and down stairs in between classes. He still recalls, "There were sixteen steps up to Bailey Hall where I regularly went." Lecture notes were carbon copies of his classmates', papers and exams were dictated to a typist or self-written using the splint on his arm that enabled him to type up to ten words per minute.

Not the least of Kunken's troubles was his field of study. He had been encouraged to return to engineering when, in hospital, he met an engineer who designed devices for the handicapped. Not a strong student, before his accident, Kunken raised his grade point average significantly in the first year back at Cornell, but he also realized that engineering was not his discipline. He completed his bachelor's in industrial engineering in 1973, then began study for a master's degree in counselling and student personnel administration in the College of Agriculture's education department.

There, Kunken felt snowed under by the vast amount of writing required, but, no quitter, completed the two-year program. His 100-page thesis dealt with

sleep patterns, a topic of some interest to a man who must be awakened and turned several times every night.

From Cornell, Kunken went to Columbia where he earned a second master's degree, in psychological counselling and rehabilitation, and soon became a certified rehabilitation counselor.

By this time, Kunken was 26 years old, and had completed three university degrees. In the summer following his Columbia graduation, he worked with the Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital as a counsellor intern on both its spinal cord injury and drug abuse wards, and began to look for permanent employment.

"I looked for almost a year," he remembers grimly. "I wanted a job in the counselling services yet even the organizations that are supposed to be encouraging people like me wouldn't try me out. My credentials were as strong as anyone else's, so it had to be because I'm handicapped."

Finally, he was hired at the Human Resources Center in Albertson, New York, as a vocational rehabilitation counsellor. For two years he advised severely disabled students and job seekers, encouraging them by his own example. As it had been designed for use by the handicapped, Kunken found that, physically, the center was convenient to work in, but he felt cramped in his career.

"Counselling is such a long-term process; I felt I wanted to have more of an

immediate impact upon people and things," he says. Law had always fascinated him. An older brother, Stephen, to whom he is particularly close, is an attorney, and Kunken enjoyed watching him in court.

So, in the fall of 1979, Kunken embarked upon a law degree at Hofstra University on Long Island, near where he grew up. Not only is the campus a mere one and a half miles from the Hempstead apartment block in which Kunken lives, it is also well equipped for the disabled. Cornell's campus, with its snow, hills, and interminable stairs, did not tempt him back at all, he admits.

At Hofstra Kunken found a retired high school English teacher who has been his aide for the past three years. Even so, the workload was enormous: Reading hundreds of cases, Kunken had to turn each page with an eraser-tipped pencil attached to the splint on his left arm; his memory was put to tremendous test as note-taking was prohibitively time-consuming.

While a law student, Kunken's first summer job was with the office of the town attorney in Hempstead. Most of his time was spent on legal research and writing. He joined the district attorney's office in Nassau County for a summer internship the following year. "I'd always felt that court work would be best for me. It highlights my verbal abilities rather than my physical disabilities."

Kunken is looking forward to returning fulltime to work with District Attorney Dennis Dillon, whose office he considers to be outstanding.

It is now twelve years since his accident, and Ken Kunken is quietly proud of his tremendous accomplishments since then. He still needs a full-time attendant at home, but with the help of braces, splints, and other adaptive devices, he can answer the phone and, with a pen in his splints, take brief messages. Each action, unthinkingly done by an able-bodied person, is a triumph for Kunken.

"Sure I get depressed. Almost everything is more difficult to do without the use of your arms and legs. One of the worst things is other people's ignorance, and it's so difficult to make them believe I can actually *do* anything.

"Handicapped people shouldn't be feared or shunned. They have to be accepted and worked with, just like everyone else in this society."

If anyone should doubt the validity of such a thesis let him look to the case of Ken Kunken.

—Louise Chunn