

SPOTLIGHT ON JOHN PAUL MAYS

October is the annual celebration of Disability Employment Awareness Month to heighten awareness and recognize the contributions of Americans with disabilities to both our workforce and our society.



John Paul Mays

This month we celebrate John Paul Mays, computer clerk/technical webmaster for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Where were you born? I was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1961. I was raised by my mother until I was 7 years old. I was then placed in foster care until I was 22 years old. I guess you could say I grew up in foster homes.

Tell us about your rare medical condition. I have a neuromuscular disease called **Spinal Muscular Atrophy** (a form of **Muscular Dystrophy**). It basically affects every muscle in my body. I've been confined to a wheelchair since the age of 4 years. I've never really been able to walk, however, I was able to do pretty much everything for myself (dressing, bathing, feeding, etc.) until high school, when I started to lose the use of my arms and hands.

My biggest setback was being placed on a ventilator at the end of my junior year in high school. During Easter break, I had a bad reaction to the swine flu shot and ended up in the hospital with double pneumonia. For four nights I was afraid to go to sleep for fear of not waking up again. My physicians were concerned about this because I needed to rest in order to recuperate and allow my lungs to heal, so I was placed on a ventilator which was supposed to be only a short-term solution. We tried and tried over the course of three months to wean me from the ventilator, but the damage was too far gone.

I had made up my mind that I was not going to finish my high school senior year. However, my foster mother at the time - God bless her - had other ideas! So on the first day of school, she made sure my butt (along with my ventilator) was on the bus. Over the course of my life, it was the best thing she ever did for me! That ventilator was much, much bigger than the one I now have. I had to pull it on a little trailer attached to my wheelchair. It was kind of like driving a big rig semi truck!

How have you overcome obstacles in your life? I think attitude plays a big part in overcoming obstacles, not just me but pretty much everybody. If you have a bad outlook on life, it doesn't matter whether you're disabled or healthy, you're just going to have a hard time of it.

I have to thank my last foster mother for how I have turned out. She constantly drilled into me that I need to stick up for myself and don't let anybody run over me simply because of my disability. Always speak your mind and always be honest with your daily dealings with people. And last but not least, always keep a positive attitude! This was probably the best advice a mother could give her son.

Where did you go to school? I went to Bassett High School, at La Puente in California, and graduated in the top 20 out of 400 students in my class. I guess I'm amazed I graduated in the top 5% of my class.

I attended Mt. San Antonio Community College for about two semesters. It wasn't until I moved to Douglas, Wyoming that I decided to go back to school, where I pursued an **Information Technology** degree at Eastern Wyoming College.

How did you get a job with the Forest Service? I was in school and working for **Moore Computer Services** as their Senior Web Developer and Webmaster in Douglas, Wyoming. I had a friend who worked at the Forest Service at the time the Internet was being implemented in the Forest Service. There was a position available at the Douglas Ranger District, so I applied for it with some assistance from my friend, Bill Steenson, who is now retired.

I held the job for one year as a Temporary Assignment in 1997. A year later, I was offered a permanent part-time position as the computer clerk/technical webmaster for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland.

What does your job involve? My job entails helping manage the internal and external web site for the MBR & TBNG, and each of the individual District pages. I'm responsible for making sure the data/info is all current, troubleshooting and fixing any broken links. Also, from time to time, I'm called upon to create new pages for special projects, such as the "**Plant a Tree Program**".

What special tools do you use to accomplish your job? I don't really use any special tools, other than my speech recognition software, which allows me to command and control every aspect of the laptop I do my work on. I use a software package called **Dragon NaturallySpeaking Pro** which allows me to write/create custom commands that allow me to do everything you can do with a mouse and a keyboard.

Tell us about your daily routine. I guess my daily routine isn't much different from anybody else's. I just start a little later than the most of you. I usually wake up around 10 a.m., have breakfast between 10:30 and 11, watch a little TV until it's time for me to logon to my laptop for work.

First thing I do is check my Lotus Notes inbox to catch up on messages, and my assignments for the day. Since I receive most of my assignments via e-mail, I'm constantly checking every hour on the hour. On days that aren't so busy, I do online training, such as learning the new Microsoft Office 2007 suite of applications, or any mandatory training.

What do you enjoy doing outside of your job? By far my most enjoyable non-work activity is playing Texas Holdem online. I play every night in the same tournament, so I guess you could say I am a semi professional poker player. I won four tournaments since January of this year and I've also placed 3rd and 4th twice.

I also enjoy reading, especially now that Amazon has come out with Kindle software for the PC. It's opened a vast new world of literature for me and I don't have to rely upon another person to read to me or turn pages.

I also enjoy watching sports, specifically the NFL (Oakland Raiders) and NASCAR (Tony Stewart), along with catching an occasional thorough bred horse race, such as the Triple Crown Series and Breeders Cup Series.