

ABILITY

Jack Eyers

EXTREME DECISION

OUR LUPUS

IDENTICAL TWIN SISTERS

Open Dialogue

*Drs. Ericha Scott
and Diane Wiener*

China's Scholar

Professor Ye Tingfang

IT'S NEW!



**HEAR ABILITY
IN PRINT**

**SCAN VIA THE
VOICEYE APP**

**LONI
ANDERSON** COPD

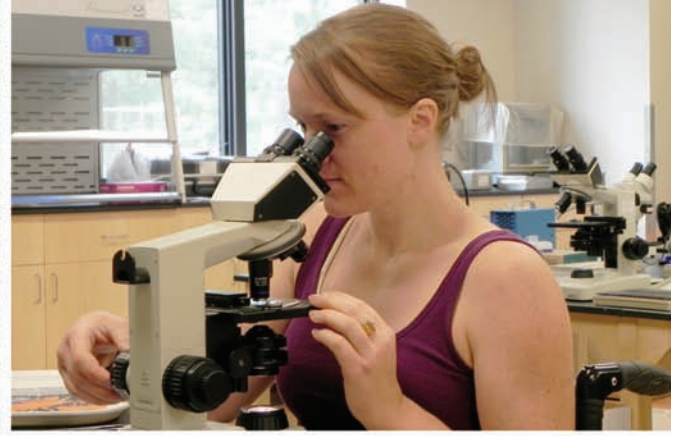


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Loni Anderson
David LaTour
The Voice of Open: Our Business

A person wearing a red helmet, safety glasses, and a harness is climbing a large tree trunk. They are holding onto a yellow rope. The background is filled with green leaves and branches. The text "in my nature" is overlaid on the image in white, bold, lowercase letters.

**in my
nature**



Growing up on the rugged coast of Maine, with mountains, fields, forests and wildlife around every turn, I developed a deep love of the natural world at a very young age, and a strong desire to preserve it as I grew to understand the innumerable and increasingly devastating threats it faces. Despite having earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, nature remained my first true love. I became eager to gain the education and experience necessary to pursue a rewarding career in conservation. Given my physical limitations, however, I was plagued by self-doubt.

Paralyzed from the waist down after incurring a spinal cord injury nearly six years ago, I never dreamed that pursuing my passions and continuing the activities I loved were still options for me. I created a fortress of self-imposed restrictions, erecting blockades where they needn't exist and justifying them without reason. I assumed that I would have to tailor my educational and career goals to fit the confines of my wheelchair, eschewing those courses in field biology that truly peaked my interest, and focusing instead on how I could make a difference solely from behind a desk. A recent summer REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) at Baker University in Kansas changed all that.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the internship opened up a whole new world to me, allowing me to not only learn the ropes, quite literally, of biological field research, but also by shattering those preconceived ideas, held by myself and cemented by society, regarding my apparent lack of ability. Doctors William Miller, Meg Lowman and Elzie McCord, the scientists who spearheaded this project, had the foresight to recognize that a wheelchair does not have to be a limitation to good field biology, and wanting to encourage students from all walks of life to pursue their interest in science,

made the decision to actively recruit participants with ambulatory disabilities.

Guided by Tree Climbers International and Tree Climbing Kansas City, I, along with seven other undergraduates from around the country, learned to climb trees, ascending into the canopy using ropes and a harness. Under the direction of our mentors, we collected moss, lichen, leaf and bark samples at varying heights along several tree species across eastern Kansas, climbing at the edge of tall grass prairie and into deciduous forests. We learned to process our samples in the lab, using microscopes to find and identify over 4,000 tardigrades, or water bears, the little known, little studied phylum of microscopic invertebrates around which our research was based. Two months and four potentially new species later, we presented our work at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, where Dr. Lowman is the director of the Nature Research Center.

While the spinal cord injury I sustained may have left my body broken, my spirit and my resolve are as strong as ever, and this program proved to be an exciting and empowering way to begin this new chapter in my life. During the course of the summer I got a taste for what it means to be a field biologist, and despite needing occasional assistance navigating the rough terrain, I was able to fully participate in every aspect of the research. I learned to ask questions, lots of questions, and to think like a scientist, keeping my mind open to new ideas and endless possibilities. Most importantly, I learned that a wheelchair does not define who I am, and can only limit my ambitions and capabilities to the extent that I allow. Now, instead of feeling weighed down by seemingly insurmountable challenges and limitations, I am free to develop, nurture, explore and surpass my own expectations. ■ ABILITY

by Rebecca Tripp

