

### ***A Friend for Life!***

May 2022 Caregiver of the Month, Chris Wohlford  
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services



Cory and Chris Wohlford have a bond like no other. They were born identical twins and share a love for all things sports. Side by side, they have achieved many successes. Both were high school state champions and college athletes in football, basketball, baseball and track. In 1985 while attending William Jewell College, Cory was injured in a car accident. He suffered a fractured vertebrae and severed spinal cord. The 22-year-old athlete faced the future as a quadriplegic.

After months of rehabilitation, Cory graduated from college and learned to drive an adaptive vehicle. He spent the next few years working as a substitute teacher at Smithville High School and was offered a volunteer coaching position for the football team. After seven years as a volunteer coach, Cory was offered a paid position as an assistant coach and now, he has celebrated 34 years in this role. Cory states, "I was hesitant at first because I didn't know how the kids would react to someone being in a wheel-chair and I didn't know how I would do."

Similarly, Chris spent a career in secondary education at Smithville High School as both the athletic director and assistant principal before retiring eight years ago. Over the years, Cory and Chris would bob and weave through important life milestones and the general ups-and-downs. Working together became a unique opportunity to be a part of each other's lives.

Cory's parents served as his primary caregivers for many years. Chris stepped in to provide Cory's care when his parents were unavailable and later when they developed their own health problems and during their end of life. Chris consistently navigated the needs of his family to provide the best possible support for everyone – when his dad had cancer and passed away in 2003 and during his mom's health concerns and death in April of 2021.

Over the past few years, Chris has played a significant role in Cory's daily medical care and during a health crisis in which Cory required bed rest, hospitalization, surgery and rehabilitation. As Cory was not able to work or participate in any regular life activities, Chris helped manage 24/7 caregivers as well as fill in when no one was available. As a result, Cory was able to continue living independently in his own

home. Many things would not have been possible without Chris' daily and continuous commitment to his twin brother.

Cory coached a winning football team through a 4A state football championship in 2021. "I hope kids can see me and never give up on anything they do," he said. "I worked with great coaches in the past and even now, but it feels good to know that I am making a difference in kids' lives." Despite the challenges, students, athletes and the Smithville community rallied behind Cory. He said he operates off an "everything happens for a reason" attitude and tries to inspire young students to harness determination.

In addition to caring for Cory, Chris works as a real estate agent and is the parent of two daughters who are active in sports and the community. He believes some of the most important aspects of caregiving include patience and preparation for the future, including making sure that things are in order in case of the unexpected passing of loved ones.

"The last thing I told my mom before she passed was not to worry about Cory. Our family has always been close and supportive. You realize what's important and just do what needs to be done." Chris credits his wife and children for understanding his role as a caregiver. He affirmed, "their understanding and love is where I get my strength." Chris expressed gratitude for all of Cory's supportive relationships including paid caregivers and Cory's girlfriend, Brenda. "They are awesome at what they do!"

If Chris could be granted one wish, it would be for families "to have enough money to not worry about care." Chris states he has learned a lot about himself from being a caregiver and remarked, "My heart goes out to everyone that has been in this position."