



PHOTO BY A. CHANNELL

**Rebounding:** Waylon Pitcher shoots basketball during P.E. class. Pitcher has been confined to a wheelchair all his life due to spinal bifida.

## Homeless

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cigarettes. He and his sisters repeatedly asked their father to quit, but he did not give in.

"He said (Alcoholics Anonymous) was a place for quitters," Pitcher said.

That addiction, however, would cost Pitcher another parent. His father contracted liver cancer when Pitcher was 20 years old.

"He took all his beer that he just bought and threw it outside and said, 'I do not need this anymore, what has this done for me?'" said Pitcher.

It soon became clear that Pitcher would lose another parent before the age of 21. His sisters left Greenville to live with guardians back in Florida. Pitcher stayed behind to stay with his father for his final days.

### 'He would have never wanted me to give up'

As his father ailed, he gave Pitcher a silver half dollar. His father told him not to lose the coin because it is a special heirloom that he could pass down to his children.

"I still have it and I am not going to use it for anything other than handing it down to my son or daughter," said Pitcher.

Pitcher's father was hospitalized this fall. In his final days, Pitcher's father asked his son to promise to finish high school. Pitcher had remained in high school later than most students due to lost credits during his move from Florida.

On that fateful day in October of last year, Pitcher decided to make good on his promise. With the news that his father had passed away, Pitcher left the hospital and returned to the only family he had left in

Greenville—J.L. Mann High School.

"That is his motivation to not quit," said Pitcher's guidance counselor, Tammy Pace.

For two weeks Pitcher did not inform anyone of his father's death. In keeping his promise, he rides the bus everyday to school and has not miss one day for his father's death.

"My father was a strong man. He would have never wanted me to give up," said Pitcher.

### 'My sanity intact'

After his father died, Pitcher would wheel himself to nearby stores to buy microwave dinners with what little money he had left. Drug deals around the motel were common, Pitcher said. He did not feel unsafe, Pitcher said, but he remained prepared for anything.

"I kept my dad's knife on me all the time when I go outside," Pitcher said. "I do not know what kind of crazy people are in that motel so I do not want to take any chances."

Pitcher expresses regret when he talks about his two sisters who are in Florida.

"I'm not able to take care of them and there is all this guilt that I feel because of that," Pitcher said. "They just keep telling me, 'It's not your fault you can't take care of us,' but really there is always that thought in the back of my mind that it should be me taking care of them because I am the head of the household."

### 'Everyone here is my family'

Since his father's death, the J.L. Mann family has reached out to Pitcher, even from people he doesn't know.

"I have people who call me every day just to make sure I have my sanity intact," Pitcher said. Teachers at Mann give Pitcher

frozen meals or preservatives that he can take home and cook. Pitcher went to Max Clymer's house for Thanksgiving to celebrate the holiday. Social Services has also been helping Pitcher with living costs.

"I always thought that only your own was going to help you, only your family was going to help you," Pitcher said. "Apparently everyone here is my family."

Pitcher is on pace to graduate in June and has plans to go to college. He would like to attend Greenville Tech and then transfer to University of Florida. Once he completes college, he would like a family of his own.

"I plan on being a father someday," Pitcher said. "I think it is the best thing you can do as a man to prove that you are going to be a good husband."

All in all, Pitcher just wanted a normal life outside of the motel. On Jan. 28, the J.L. Mann family made his dream come true.

Throughout all his turmoil, Waylon received a house from one of Pace's friends through Section 8 housing.

"All if it just happened to fall into place," Pace said. "He plans to make Greenville his home."

"I'm very excited to be getting out of where I am now," Pitcher said.

However, Pitcher still needs many provisions for his new home, according to Pace. He needs donations of food, furniture, and other items for a home, and Pace says she hopes the Mann family will follow through even more for him.

Despite the last few years of hardship for Pitcher, the promise he made his father and the support of the J.L. Mann family keeps him focused on even better days ahead.

"Well, really, you just got to think you're going to get out of there someday," Pitcher said, "just to survive it all."

*Want to help Waylon Pitcher?  
Bring food or small donations to  
Tammy Pace in the guidance office.  
For larger donations, see Pace for arrangements.*

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## Florida

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the day is when we pull into the parking lot and I say 'See you in school tomorrow', but other than that I have to say Epcot because I like the World Showcase," said Cook.

"I rode a big roller coaster, the big one," said freshman Sydney Farthing.

The next day, the students and adults chose between Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure. Goodbar went to Universal and decided to go on the Jaws ride, a decision that would plague her later.

"I went on this boat ride, and thought it was just a regular boat ride, but it turns out I was being attacked by sharks, said Goodbar. "It was a feeling of pure terror."

Everything seems all fun and games, that is, until someone gets hurt. Coach Mickey Crocker was plagued by bad luck on this trip, along with two freshmen. He had some gall bladder issues that surfaced during the trip.

"Coach Crocker got sick on the way there, and Sartain had to take him to the St. Augustine Hospital," said Goodbar.

It appeared that the worst was over, but one student had an asthma attack in the early morning of Epcot according to Cook. Then, because they were at the park from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. a girl who had a condition called colitis reached the extent of her medicine. Though all of these were dangerous accidents, the conditions were all treatable and the fun went on.

"It was a great experience because I got to explore the world of excitement and adventure in Florida," said Farthing.

"By and large, the trip went very well," stated Cook. "I'm a sucker for showing [the students] things they need to see. I'll have memory failure next year about August and I'll start putting it all together again."

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