

# John Hoogland



According to his mom, Lili, by the time he was eight months old, John Hoogland had already taken his first steps and could say two words, “up” and “down,” to let his parents know he wanted to get out of his crib. John was, by all accounts, developmentally advanced.

And then, out of nowhere, John had a bout of seizures that landed him in the hospital for a week. Back home he continued to develop normally until, at 14-months-old, he got sick again. After the second bout of seizures, John stopped walking and talking entirely. He didn’t speak again until he was five, when he put three words together to tell one of his caregivers that his dad had brought the family a new pet. He said, “My dad cat.”

If you were introduced to John today, you’d meet a good-looking, 34-year-old man who is quick to shake your hand and start a conversation. John’s disabilities don’t become apparent until you’ve spent

some time with him. His friendly nature often leads him to stand too close, and in conversation you might think that John is speaking English as a second language; for although he has a strong vocabulary, he has trouble getting his thoughts out.

The seizures John had as an infant caused considerable brain damage. He has been diagnosed as mild-to-moderately mentally challenged, and suffers from Autism Spectrum Disorder and Tourette’s Syndrome – a combination that makes it impossible for John to ever live entirely on his own.

When John was 29, Lili, his mother and full-time caregiver (now a single mom) was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“Of course I’d thought about what would happen to John when I died, but in my mind that wasn’t for years yet. I’d never thought about what would happen to him if I died before then. The cancer was a real wake-up call,” Lili recalled.

Although John only has the maturity of an eight-year-old, he has a very clear understanding that he is a man. And he wants the privileges that come with his age.

“When my second son moved out, John began to think of himself as the man of the house. He’d try to boss me around and, at times, got physically pushy with me. We weren’t living together well anymore, but I’m the kind of mother who wants to care for my own children. I didn’t want strangers taking care of John.” You can hear the relief in Lili’s voice when she adds, “Giving in Action was a godsend for us.”

With the support of Giving in Action, Lili was able to renovate her unfinished basement into a suite for John, giving him his own home to be master of and providing Lili with the calm she needed to continue her cancer recovery.

“John won’t let me into his home unless he needs something, but he comes upstairs to my home every day. I cook dinner for him and we eat together almost every night. The renovation that Giving in Action allowed us to do has given John and I the perfect balance of support and freedom that we both need.” 

