

Phillips family

From housebound to homefree

Getting Jackie down four stairs used to take three people. “He’s heavy, and his wheelchair is really heavy,” says Linda Phillips, Jackie’s bright-eyed younger sister. “Getting him down the front stairs of the house was a three person job. And it took at least two to get him in the car.” So Jackie was mostly stuck at home—and so was Linda, who’s been his caregiver since their mom died a few years ago.

Jackie is 62 years old, but has the mind of an eight month-old, as a result of a neck injury when he was an infant. He can’t walk, talk, or feed himself. Even so, Linda’s never seen taking care of her brother as a burden. “He’s just always been a part of my life,” the vibrant, auburn-haired woman says. But getting a wider front door, a ramp, a wheelchair accessible van, and a few other accommodations funded through the Giving in Action program has made a world of difference for Linda and Jackie. “It’s made things so much better. Now we can just fly out the door, down the ramp, and get in the van without needing anybody else’s help ... We can zip off to the neighbour’s, we can go to town ... I never dreamed how much easier life could be,” says Linda, who lives with her husband and Jackie on a horse ranch 40 kilometres outside Dawson Creek, BC., where the couple trains horses. “A while ago, we even took Jackie on a trip, to Calgary, through Creston and Banff.

He hadn’t been on a trip for 20 years, because if you folded up the wheelchair and put it in the truck there was no room for luggage. It was just grand.” Even his own backyard used to be largely inaccessible for Jackie, but now it’s become a favourite hangout for him. “Jackie loves to be outside; he loves to watch things, the horses, and the dogs. And now I can get him out in the backyard easily, he’s out there all the time, he’s so pleased, he just sits there and smiles and hums,” Linda continues. “I just wish my mom could have had this kind of help,” says Linda, her voice breaking and eyes filling with tears. After a moment, recomposed, she continues. “But most of all, I’m so grateful. It’s been such a blessing.