

# Reisman: A tough break for the prom queen



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*Marci Mehler has had a good life, but now she must overcome a debilitating injury*



(Photo: TJN File)

My favorite "belle of the ball" Marci Mehler called the other day — and though she was in good spirits, the news was much less than wonderful.

Five weeks ago, she broke her hip in a fall at the group home in Mamaroneck where she lives with five other residents with special needs.

Since undergoing surgery, Marci, 58, has been mending at the United Hebrew Nursing Home in New Rochelle. This is a serious injury, but Marci did not complain when I asked her if it hurt.

"Well, I'm getting better," she told me. "I'm walking with a walker."

In so many ways, Marci has done well in life.

She has plenty of friends, a loving family and a paid, part-time job at United Hebrew where she runs errands.

"Marci is terrific, she really is," said her 81-year-old mother, Bobby. "She's very special. She knows the immediate world and she's not stupid but mentally challenged. There's a difference.

"She's smarter than me on a bus. I don't know how to do a bus. I get lost. She's amazing. She's like her father. Her father had a good sense of direction. Her mother is smart but has none."

I first met Marci many years ago when I was an editor working out of the newspaper's North Avenue office in New Rochelle. She was a regular visitor. Kay Patterson, our editorial assistant, would alert the staff: "Look out, here come's Marci!" — and sure enough Marci would come bounding into the newsroom like a tiny tornado, overloaded with affectionate good wishes. She was always unannounced, but never unwanted and her joyous smile made everybody's day.

Somewhere at home I have an old black and white photograph of Marci, who was caught striking a pose on North Avenue. She was more than ready for her close up — reaching for attitude, she insouciantly stuck out her tongue.

Two years ago, when I last wrote about Marci, she was crowned prom queen at a dance party that was sponsored by the South East Consortium of Special Services and chaperoned by a group of volunteer students from Bronxville High School.

For Marci, this was a Cinderella dream come true and an honor that came to her as a complete surprise. She wept with joy, and, I'm told, wore the crown and sash around town for weeks.



Marci Mehler crowned prom queen in 2104. (Photo: Photo by Phil Reisman)

But now this challenge: overcoming a frustrating injury that can take months to heal.

Marci's mother told me that Marci fell when she and another woman at the group home rushed to answer the front doorbell. It was termed an accident, but there seems to be some residual hard feelings.

Asked if she could forgive the other woman, Marci said, "I don't know, I'll have to think about it."

The group home is one of 10 residences in Westchester County run by Westchester Jewish Community Services. When asked about the incident, a statement was provided by WJCS through its spokeswoman, Colleen Brathwaite.

"I can assure you that all of our procedures for handling accidents were followed — including reporting the accident, and seeking the necessary medical care to follow up," Brathwaite said Wednesday. "Our practices also go beyond that, to provide additional support to the person and her family. We have cared for Marci for more than 20 years, and look forward to her return."

Marci's mother said it's imperative for Marci to get back to walking without assistance, and she worries about the cost of therapy. But without rehabilitation, Marci can't return to her job or go back to the Mamaroneck residence.

"I want her some day — I don't now when that is — to go back to the life she said," Bobby Mehler said. "Marci has to go home on her own two feet."

Marci told me she was eager to return. In the meantime, she has been well treated at the nursing home where she has long been a familiar face.

"The food is good," she said.

Her mother said she has been showered with candy and other gifts.

"But that's not the point," she said. "I don't want her to end her life in a nursing home."

So consider this column as a substitute for a Hallmark card.

Get well Marci. People are depending on you.

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