

Meet George Flores: The Only in World History, Disabled Professional Harp Technician

By Ellen Stohl

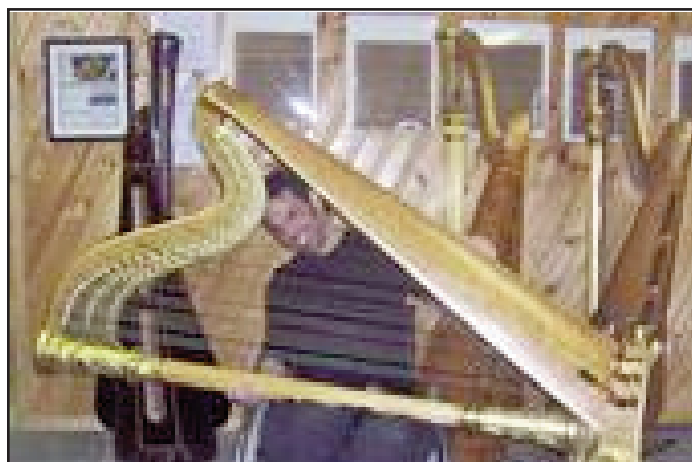
George Flores is a “regulator” of various sorts. First of all, he is a harp regulator: a highly skilled technician who tunes or “regulates” the mechanisms of a harp to produce uniform function and optimal performance. There are only 11 trained harp regulators in the world today and George is considered one of the best. He was trained at two of the largest and best harp manufacturing companies in the world; Lyon & Healy, in Chicago by the Harp Doctor, himself: Mr. Peter Wiley as well as at Venus harps in Chicago. George has been a Harp Technician for symphonies and orchestras in every major country as well as several wonderful teachers and students all over the world.



George became a harp regulator after developing a childhood infatuation for music and musical instruments. Music was the only thing that made him stop crying; lullabies or heavy metal, the rhythm and beat were the only things that would lull him to sleep. This delight in listening to music turned into a passion for playing music when, at the age of 12, his mother bought him a guitar with the little money they had. George believes that guitar was the one thing that helped keep him from getting in trouble in school or joining a gang like other kids his age. But that guitar became more than just a musical instrument that opened the door to a professional career; it also became the symbol of perseverance for George. “I used to have to fix that old guitar all the time,” he says. “It wasn’t a great guitar but it was all I had. I knew if I kept it working it would serve its purpose. And it did. It started me towards the skills I would later need in my life.” Ultimately, those skills would include the repair of his own broken spirit.

On September 11, 2004, George’s motorcycle went off the road. “I tried to call some friends but couldn’t tell them where I was due to shock and my injuries. I laid there for around 12 hours bleeding and basically dying. I was just about to give up. I said good bye to all my family and friends. No, I didn’t see a white light or angels. I did however feel a sense of peace. It was like everything was going to be okay; almost a sense that it was alright to die.” But it wasn’t George’s time. Like that old guitar that still played after so many repairs, George’s life still had some music in it.

Eventually George was found and rushed to the hospital where he learned he had sustained several internal



injuries as well as a T5/T6 spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed from the chest down. With no insurance or big bankroll, George was discharged just two months after his accident. He spent the next three years dealing with one injury-related complication after another and found himself almost completely bedridden and addicted to pain killers for nearly 2 ½ years. Only when his aunt was diagnosed with breast cancer in early 2007 did George finally decide to get himself back in shape. He began to exercise religiously, kicked the pain medication habit and completed the five-mile walk to support breast cancer research the following year.

Now that George was finally on his way to getting his life back in order, he set his sights on getting back to his passion for repairing harps. He was, however, dealt one final blow: his request for the standing wheelchair he needs to reach the top of the harp where most adjustments occur was denied by the insurance company.

George’s spirit was broken. But if that old guitar taught him anything, it was that nothing good stays broken forever: if the healthcare system wouldn’t let George fix harps, well, George figured he’d just have to fix the healthcare system so he could get the chair he needs and get back to work.

So George became a regulator of a different sort ... the sort that ensures compliance with laws, regulations and established rules. He mentors other people with SCI at RIC in Chicago and has become an outspoken advocate for healthcare reform and disability. From George’s perspective, he’s just doing the same thing he’s been doing for years ... this time, however, instead of just song, he hopes for justice and an opportunity to make history as the only harp regulator who happens to use a wheelchair.

Learn more about George on his MySpace page:
http://www.myspace.com/george_flores