

Artie Lange
 By Ryan Patrick Hooper
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Artie Lange & The Friends For Adam Niskar Trust

Knocking On Doors, Busting Down Walls



It all started with a simple letter that no one ever thought would make it into the right hands. Enclosed within this gathering of words was a request for one person in need to connect with someone who has felt, witnessed and lived with the same pain. This is how a mutual respect between stand-up comedian and Howard Stern radio personality Artie Lange and Michigan native Adam Niskar, along with the help of his brother Ross, came to be — a refreshing chapter in a book of randomly reaching out that is constantly exhausted by not being able to make the right connections at the right time.

"About 10 years ago, I dove into a lake and broke my neck," recalls Adam. "The prognosis was ... that I would be living with my folks or under some type of care for the rest of my life." After six months of intensive physical therapy, Adam's mother moved in with him. "She drove me crazy," he laughs. Next, along with astounding and unconditional support from friends, his father would move in. Within a year, Adam's father would move out and the first benefit would be thrown in Ferndale. More than \$100,000 was raised and the proper modifications were made to Adam's house for him to live alone — defying the doctor's predictions like no one ever expected. Throughout this time, Adam's employer, Quicken Loans, went above and beyond the call of duty to support him and, most importantly, make sure that he had a job waiting for him. "I've been working [at Quicken Loans] for about 14 years and I get a ton of support from the company," says Adam. Since his injury, Adam has successfully been promoted from mortgage banker to director of mortgage banking.

With the benefit approaching its 10th year and Adam's financial and physical situation becoming increasingly more stable, it's quite possibly the last benefit, but it is still important. Ross Niskar didn't hesitate on shooting for the stars. "My brother has been a big fan of The Howard Stern Show for years," says Adam. "He had read [Lange's] book ... and realized his father had ... a spinal fluid injury. [He] wrote him a letter half thinking that he would never respond." Lange did respond, calling Ross on a Sunday night.

"The show gets a lot of fan mail," says Lange, who will be performing at the Friends for Adam benefit. "I don't get a chance to see a lot of it, but every once in a while, a letter will get to me and I'll try and answer them. This kid wrote a very articulate, heartfelt letter about his brother who became paralyzed. My father was a quadriplegic for the last four years of his life. We had no money. We had to go on welfare. My mother really could've used someone doing a benefit for her back then. It's something I went through, and I'm trying to help somebody else get through it."

"There are times where, of course, you get down," explains Adam. "When you get home from the hospital ... you don't have all the nurses telling you what a great job you're doing. All those things go away and it gets stagnant. You start wondering if you'll be able to live like this. 'Am I ever going to be desirable to a woman again? Am I ever going to be productive again?' Writing a journal ... really gave me a vision of what possibilities there were for me if I stayed positive and continued to work as hard as I possibly could." | **RDW**

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