

# In Memory of RAY LOOMIS

(Editor's Note: The following eulogy was given by Edward Skarnulis at the memorial service for Raymond R. Loomis on September 26, 1979.)

*"If you think you are handicapped,  
you might as well stay indoors;  
if you think you are a person,  
come on out and tell the world."*

Raymond R. Loomis

Ray Loomis was a man who believed in the future, a man of hopes and dreams. He talked enthusiastically about people helping people as the key to a world where human beings with handicaps could lead normal lives. Ray's own world was not a hopeful one while he was growing up. For nearly twenty years he lived in Nebraska's institutions, cut off from the rest of society. He felt keenly and personally "man's inhumanity to man."

But in 1968, he came home to build something solid, to make some of his dreams come true, and for the past eleven years life began to take on a special meaning, not only for Ray, but for all of us who were lucky enough to know him.

He met and married Nancy, went to work at Coco's Restaurant, and the world seemed pretty good. In 1975, he began talking more and more about how everyone needed to help everyone else, and with friends like Tom Miller, he founded Project II. Other dreams began to come true. In March, 1977 his son, Billy, was born. In 1978 he was named Volunteer of the Year by the Greater Omaha Association for Retarded Citizens, and in the same year was elected to GOARC's Board of Directors. Another dream came true in 1978 when the first statewide convention of handicapped citizens was held. Just when it seemed nothing better could happen, Ray was selected by KETV for the Jefferson Award and eventually became one of sixteen finalists for a National Award.

Only a few weeks ago, Ray was with us planning for the second People First Convention; giving all of us his patience and understanding, and sharing his enthusiasm for the future. He was not a wealthy man, but he gave anyone who asked something a lot more valuable than money, a helping hand and his time. He couldn't say "no" when others needed him --- he couldn't turn them down. He was at every Honey Sunday drive, setting up or taking down tables for GOARC's General Membership meetings, moving friends to new homes, making phone calls to get Project II members rides to programs, taking time to explain Project II to people from around the United States and other countries.

Knowing Ray Loomis was like being sure the sun would come up each morning. You could trust Ray when he said he'd do something. He loved to kid around and joke with people, and was a master at gently putting others in their proper place when they got a little too proud or a little too talkative. But behind the warmth of his laugh and the sparkle in his eye was a serious man who felt a sense of urgency about the work of his Association for Retarded Citizens. He knew that someone is sitting on a crowded institution ward somewhere waiting to come home. He knew that someone is staring at a TV set in an apartment, feeling lonely and desperately needing a friend to be with and to talk to. Ray knew that he had "miles to go" before he could sleep, before his dreams could come true. And he had "promises to keep" to the people he left behind.

Ray was a dreamer but he didn't just hope for dreams to come true. Gerry Paes called him "a man who does things." Ray said that when he started Project II he was scared, but that didn't make him back away. He used to say that he was a person just like anybody else, but that we all have to stand up for ourselves. Standing up for ourselves is going to be hard without Ray Loomis to lean on. Nancy and Billy will need all the courage they have, and all the encouragement we can give. Shirley Dean, Bonnie Shoultz, Tom Houlihan, Jack Conrad, Ollie and Lowell Rector, Paul, Deb, Larry, and Craig -- all of the members of Project II and all of us who worked with Ray on GOARC's Board are going to be missing an important part of our lives without him. But we owe Ray our best effort at standing up for ourselves and others and looking ahead to the future. WE need to follow his footsteps, as people helping people.

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## A FRIEND REMEMBERED

*This is the story of a man who started the biggest project in the world and he called it Project II.*

*His name is Ray Loomis. His dream was to close Beatrice State Home in Nebraska. Project II people will keep their project going. To me, the world, and Project II Ray has been a good friend. He also has a good wife and son, Billy. Everyone will miss Ray even Tom Miller, the people at GOARC and the people of the GOARC Board.*

Thomas Houlihan  
Vice President  
Project II