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BY DESIREE CHEN

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FOR THE BETTER

>> CRAVING INDEPENDENCE



Harvey Walter

MISSION: To have it his way.

MOMENT OF TRUTH: Born with cerebral palsy and seizure disorders, Walter has focused his life on becoming self-sufficient. He recently decided that cooking for himself—real, sit-down fare—should be part of that plan.

BACKSTORY: Walter, 41, lives on his own in Rogers Park with assistance from Chicago's Anixter Center, which helps people with disabilities live and work in the community. Overcoming daily struggles to walk, hold a pen and speak clearly, Walter earned an associate's degree in computers last spring and now walks and takes three buses to get to Northeastern Illinois University, where he's working toward a bachelor's degree. He also volunteers at a soup kitchen. While his life is hectic, he doesn't want to live on fast food and microwaved popcorn. So he approaches meal-making in the same deliberate way he does everything else, planning out his grocery list and thinking through what physical tasks—chopping, stirring, flipping—he'll have to perform, which utensils he'll need, and how to time it so the main dish and sides all get to the table warm.

OUTCOME: His first homemade meal was steak—medium-rare, with rice and vegetables. What he makes "is certainly nothing along the lines of a gourmet chef, but it's rewarding, knowing the effort I put into it." Walter challenges himself by trying a variety of foods, and is awed by the complexity of lasagna, with its long list of ingredients and all the assembly required.

SIDE EFFECTS: "Cooking at least one really substantial meal a day makes me feel like I can rely on myself."

PAYOFF: "It always is better when it's your own."