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Boys fine after separate accidents

Teen who fell down mine shaft in Clayton County still has casts but is healing OK, doctors say

By James Q. Lynch

Gazette Northeast Iowa Bureau

Three weeks after Jesse Schmidt fell 60 feet down a mine shaft, he is doing "pretty good," his mother says.

"It's not much fun having your arms in casts, but it's hard to keep him down," Marian Schmidt of rural Holy Cross said about her son Jesse.

Jesse, 14, suffered two broken wrists May 20 when he fell down the shaft of an abandoned lead mine on his grandmother's farm in southeastern Clayton County.

Schmidt had started to climb into the 80-foot shaft to see a cart at the bottom. While descending into the shaft, which is about a yard square, he changed his mind. His older brother, Nick, and a friend, Matt Gordon, began pulling him to the top. The rope broke and Jesse plunged about 60 feet to the bottom of the shaft, family members said.

Doctors say recent X-rays show that Jesse's wrists are healing properly, but he will have to wear the casts for some time yet, Marian Schmidt said.

His left arm suffered a more extensive injury in the fall so he must wear a fiberglass cast that reaches about 3 inches above his elbow, his mother said.

The cast on his right arm also goes over the elbow, but has been cut out at the elbow to give Jesse more flexibility. "He can get his hand to his mouth," she said.

Doctors don't think surgery will be necessary.



Jesse Schmidt
Fell down
mine shaft

Lawn mower run-in hasn't slowed 3-year-old

By James Q. Lynch

Gazette Northeast Iowa Bureau

A 3-year-old Holy Cross boy is riding his two-wheeler and climbing on kitchen cabinets despite the loss of a foot after a lawn mower accident last month.

"It hasn't slowed him down — not at all," said Austin Schemmel's grandmother, Laura Schemmel. Austin and his mother, Robin Schemmel, live with Robin's parents.

Austin pedals the two-wheeler with one foot "and he keeps it going," Laura Schemmel said.

Austin is scheduled to be fitted with a prosthesis Wednesday at the University of Iowa Hospitals in Iowa City, his grandmother said.

Austin suffered severe injuries to his lower right leg when he fell in front of a riding lawn mower operated by his grandfather, Anthony Schemmel. According to the Dubuque County Sheriff's Department, Austin apparently was running around the yard of his rural Holy Cross home when he fell in front of the lawn mower the evening of May 8.

Austin was taken to Mercy Hospital in Dubuque and then transferred to University

HOLY CROSS

Hospitals in Iowa City, where he spent nearly a week, Laura Schemmel said.

Austin's foot was amputated by doctors just a few inches above the ankle, Schemmel said.

"They told us that in terms of fitting him with a prosthesis, that's the best place to lose a foot if you have to," she said.

Austin may need surgery later, to shorten the bone in his leg as he grows, Schemmel said.

She doesn't expect Austin to have any trouble adapting to the prosthesis. "Judging from the way he took off without it, I don't think he'll have any problem adjusting to it," she said Thursday. "He still does everything — rides his two-wheeler and climbs on the kitchen cabinets. He keeps saying 'I can do it myself.'"

There have been no other complications from the accident or the surgery, she said.

"He's doing great. Everyone is amazed at how well he has done," she said.

However, they continue to monitor Jesse to see whether he suffered any nerve damage.

"There's still a little dullness or loss of sensation in his left thumb," Marian Schmidt said Thursday, "but the other fingers are coming back."

She said doctors don't know whether Jesse will need physical therapy when the casts come off. "It's a wait-and-see thing at this point," she said.

The family has had some discussions about filling in the mine shaft, which is located in a

wooded area beyond a farm field.

"It's my understanding that's the plan — to fill it in," Marian Schmidt said. "It's just that there have been so many other things to do."

Her husband, John, said he was aware of the mine shaft when he was growing up, but never attempted to explore it.

There are many abandoned mine shafts in the area, left over from lead mining operations in the 1850s. Many of them have been filled in or have fallen in.

1997 May 14 year old falls in mine shaft

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TWO BROKEN WRISTS ARE THE WORST OF HIS INJURIES

'Very lucky' teen satisfactory after fall into lead mine shaft

By CHARLES BULLARD

OF THE REGISTER'S IOWA CITY BUREAU

"It's a miracle."

That's the only way a relieved and thankful John Schmidt could explain his 14-year-old son's narrow escape from death after he fell to the bottom of a 100-foot-deep mine shaft near North Buena Vista in Clayton County Tuesday night.

"He's very lucky, and God was with us," Schmidt said Wednesday.

Amazingly, Jesse Schmidt, an eighth-grader who was exploring the abandoned lead mine with his older brother and a friend, suffered only two broken wrists. He was in satisfactory condition Wednesday at Mercy Health Center in Dubuque.

Schmidt said his son was attempting to descend to the bottom of the vertical lead mine, which is on his



grandmother's farm. Jesse's brother, Nick, 15, and a friend, Matt Gordon, 17, were at the surface when the rope broke, sending Jesse plummeting to the bottom.

Schmidt said his son used his hands to break his fall, which was estimated at 60 to 80 feet. Both wrists were broken but he suffered no other serious injuries.

"Everything else checked out just fine," said Schmidt.

It took rescuers two hours to bring the injured boy out of the shaft, one of dozens of old lead mines that dot the countryside near Dubuque.

Two firefighters were lowered into the mine shaft. They stabilized Jesse's wrists and strapped him to a back board in case his spine was injured. Then all three of them were lifted to the surface, where more than 100 rescuers, neighbors and friends were gathered.

Schmidt said he was too relieved to scold his sons.

"They learned enough all by themselves," he said. "I wasn't about to yell at them. I was just happy everybody was OK."

Schmidt said his mother, Marie Schmidt, who owns the property, asked him to fill the mine after the accident.

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