



0. GERRY BERTIER - Story Preface

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Despite massive injuries, Gerry Bertier refused to accept that life in a wheelchair means a life with limitations. He worked hard to help others with physical challenges and stressed that barriers—which cause hardships for people in wheelchairs—should be banned. Photo of Gerry Bertier, courtesy Bertier family and online via AwesomeStories.

Gerry Bertier, born on August 20, 1953, had spent a happy childhood in Alexandria. While still a boy, he dreamed of winning an Olympic gold medal. As a teenager, he attended Hammond High—until desegregation of three Alexandria schools made him a student at T.C. Williams.

Playing on the Titans' 1971 football team, Gerry made huge plays and contributed to a no-loss season. Reporting on the teams' success, the December 1971 "Richmond News Leader" stated:

Gerry threw opposing backs for 432 yards in losses - 52 yards more than were gained net against the state champions [- and -] Bertier was credited with 142 individual tackles, including dumping opposing quarterbacks 42 times.

Bertier had more than local notoriety. He was selected by *Coach and Athlete Magazine* as one of the top 100 high-school football players in the United States.

At the celebratory banquet, following the Titan's perfect 1971 football season, Gerry received the "Defensive Award in Football." He was at the top of his world, with many college-scholarship offers in hand. Within hours, however, everything changed.

After the dinner, while driving a new 1971 Camaro, Bertier was involved in a terrible car accident. Sustaining paralyzing injuries, Gerry would spend the rest of his life "in a wheelchair."

Investigating officers later determined that a mechanical failure, in the Camaro's engine motor-mount, had caused the crash.

Despite his life-altering injuries, Gerry remained a participating athlete. At least one of his boyhood dreams came true when he won a gold medal—for "shot put"—in the "Wheelchair Olympics." He also worked hard to help remove barriers for others with physical challenges.

A decade after the Titans' football triumph, at the age of 29, Gerry Bertier died (on March 20, 1981). He'd been in another car accident—this one caused by a drunk driver.

Both of his coaches—Herman Boone and Bill Yoast—attended his funeral. His life is still celebrated by friends, family and a new foundation for spinal-cord research: The Gerry Bertier #42 Foundation.

The Nixon Administration, working in Washington D.C. (just across the Potomac River from T. C. Williams High School), could have learned a few good lessons from the Titans. As the football team flourished under great leadership, the country's chief executive floundered under the weight of burgeoning political scandals.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/GERRY-BERTIER-Remember-The-Titans)

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Gerry Bertier Photo

Image, courtesy Bertier family.

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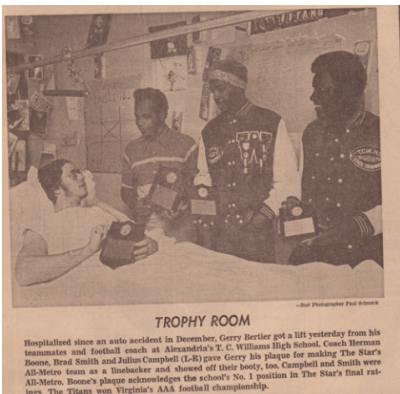


Gerry Bertier - After his Accident

Image, courtesy the Bertier family.

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Gerry Bertier - Paralyzing Car Accident

News article, courtesy Bertier family.

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Gerry Bertier - No Barriers

Photo of Gerry Bertier, courtesy Bertier family.

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