



Heavy-duty apprentice mechanic Shane Statchuk inspects an engine at the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure's Yorkton Repair Depot

Blind mechanic sees with his hands

Shane Statchuk rolls underneath one of the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure's trucks to inspect the engine during a regular maintenance check. It's too dark for the photographer, so a colleague beams a brilliant portable light in his direction.

"Careful, or I'll go blind," he quips, and the rest of his colleagues at the Yorkton Repair Depot break out into laughter.

That's because the 21-year-old heavy-duty apprentice mechanic has been blind since birth.

"I really don't think too much about it," he says modestly, almost embarrassed by others' fascination with him. He keenly works his fingers over thick oil-stained bolts and tightens one of them with a wrench.

"I've been tinkering with engines on my grandpa's farm since I was a kid," he says. "It's second nature. I just reach up into an area that's hard to get at and try and *feel* what's going on with my fingers. I can also hear faint air leaks that a lot of other mechanics might miss."

Shane was born with a rare inherited eye disorder called Congenital Amaurosis. It's usually characterized by involuntary eye movement and sluggish or no response from the pupils, leading to blindness. He can only see faint shadows and variations of light and dark. Ironically, his older brother Eric (now 24) was also born with the same disorder.

"They found out about my brother when he was two, so when I was born, they quickly discovered that I had it too," he explains. "But thanks to my family, we grew up like regular kids. We used Braille in school, and talking laptop computers, but we don't have seeing-eye dogs or canes. We just get friends or family to lead us around when we're in a new situation for the first time, and then we memorize our layouts pretty quickly."

The brothers are fiercely independent and fiercely competitive. So much so that when Eric showed an aptitude for mechanics in high school and went on to earn a trade, Shane knew he'd do the exact same thing.

"No question – that's what I wanted to do," he says. "After I completed my two-week work experience, the guys at Highways saw what I could do and decided to give me a term position, which eventually turned into a full-time apprenticeship position. I've been accepted into Kelsey campus this March as part of my training towards getting my journeyman status."



Brian Perih,
Shop Supervisor

Shop Supervisor Brian Perih says he couldn't ask for a better employee.

"There's absolutely nothing that holds him back – I mean this is the guy who's up on the roof each winter hanging Christmas lights," he says with amazement. "He's hardly ever sick, he's great to get along with, he has such a good sense of humour, and he's always ready and willing to learn."

While Shane exceeds expectations in almost everything he does, he still needs assistance with electrical wiring.

"Because he can't see colours, we point out the blue and red wires for him and then he bends them a certain way so he knows what he's dealing with," Brian says. "We also keep the aisles pretty clean so he doesn't trip, and when we're working next to him, we point out things like 'Your tool box is to the left' or 'The rad is over to your right.' And we bought him some voice recognition software so he can read emails like everyone else."

Shane has done everything from complete safety inspections to changing engines over to diesel.

"It's pretty amazing to watch him work. He's such an inspiration for the rest of the team," says Brian.

When he's not at work, Shane and his brother Eric (who's a heavy-duty mechanic at Truck Proz in Yorkton) are musicians with a flare for Led Zeppelin-style classic rock.

"We had a group called *2 Blind 2 See*, but when the other two guys left, my brother and I had to disband," he says, pausing for comedic effect. "The full name just didn't fit anymore."

When he's not jamming, he's under the hood of a vehicle.

"I own three '59 Chev trucks and a '58 model. I'm still trying to take the best parts from the four trucks and make them into two trucks."

And while being legally blind means he can't take his prize possessions out on the highway, there's plenty of room on the farm.

"I have people chauffeur me out to the farm and then I drive in the open field along a route I've mapped out from memory," he says proudly. "It's a great sense of freedom to actually find out how these vehicles respond after I've worked so closely on them."



Shane Statchuk

Mechanic. Musician. Comedian. There are plenty of ways to describe this engaging young man. Being blind just happens to be an after thought.