In Memoriam

Lucy Gwin: The Brain with a Mouth
Disabled Vets: Where are Jobs?

By John M. Williams

Each month I receive more than a dozen emails from people with disabilities. These emails come from veterans and non-veterans. The senders are job hunting. The majority have been unemployed for more than a year. They think I can help them find a job. It pains me to tell them that I can’t help them. Many of them tell me they are let down.

Each email is accompanied by a resume, all of which show that these individuals are well qualified for jobs. They bring skills in many areas to the job market. For veterans, these skills include leadership, discipline, critical thinking, education, a sense of accomplishment and the drive to succeed. They have strong language and technology backgrounds that they want to use. They know how to build and repair roads and bridges. They know how to fight and do the nearly impossible.

From what I have seen of my email, the overwhelming majority of the veterans lack college degrees. The highest-ranked enlisted man I spoke to was a command sergeant major who was seeking information and training on speech recognition for a job he was trying to land. It was his 19th interview in 25 months, and he hoped his last.

“I gave 24 years of service to my country,” he said. “I want my country to give me another 25.”

Former Corporal William Andrews is a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq who spent four years in the U.S. Army. On his last tour in Iraq, an IED (improvised explosive device) shattered his left arm and leg. He needs help in the morning getting dressed and in the evening undressing. For nearly two years, he has been job hunting. He speaks Farsi, French and English. He is studying business administration. He said he has had more than a dozen interviews in 15 months with companies doing business in the Middle East.

“I know I can be an asset to them,” Andrews said. “When the interviewers see my wounds, they close their minds, and the net return is zero for me.”

Andrews said the Veterans Administration has been excellent in helping him get interviews, but the VA lacks clout in getting him and tens of thousands of other disabled veterans hired.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the unemployment rate among veterans is 9 percent. With the national unemployment rate at 5.9%, the unemployment rate for disabled veterans is 1.5 times the national rate.

Suicide

Don’t Let a Suicide Victimize Love

By Peter S. Kahrmann

The last thing suicide deserves is the power to stop love. The fact that someone I love committed suicide will never stop me from loving and respecting that person.

My mother, brother and birth father committed suicide. A childhood friend ended his life when we were both boys. Another friend I danced with in the Joffrey Ballet School committed suicide.

When I learned that Robin Williams had committed suicide, I cried. It felt as if something inside of me broke. Like many -- millions -- I loved his work, and I loved everything I knew about him. His struggle with addiction did not diminish my love and respect for him, not in the least. First of all, I’m an alcoholic; becoming sober and staying sober is a tough slog at times. Second of all, addiction is a disease, not a definition.

Suicide has a unique place in the trauma lexicon, for a fairly obvious reason, I would think. Someone has made the choice to end his or her life, to leave this world. Suicide is not easy to digest.

It is, tragically, the kind of experience that invites judgment. Judgment is the last thing someone who commits suicide deserves. The self-inflicted, harsh lashes of blame and guilt common with those close to the person who has committed suicide are also not deserved -- neither is finger-pointing.

The viciousness of some online comments aimed at Williams simply confirms we’re not running short of cruel human beings and, to be blunt, cowards. The fact that some of these comments wounded his family, particularly his children, truly sickens me.

Entirely avoiding the presence of judgment is, I think, nearly impossible. The challenge, and one I believe can be met, is to rob judgment of decision-making power, in large part by recognizing its inaccuracy.

Suicide is never the fault of the loved ones. I know it often feels that way. Believe me, when my mother ended her life on August 12, 1992, not only did I rake myself over the coals for some time because I could not find a way to stop her, I walked right into the embrace of alcoholism. I knew I’d walked into that embrace because I too was trying to die.

into the light

By Peter S. Kahrmann

Don’t Let a Suicide Victimize Love

The last thing suicide deserves is the power to stop love. The fact that someone I love committed suicide will never stop me from loving and respecting that person.

My mother, brother and birth father committed suicide. A childhood friend ended his life when we were both boys. Another friend I danced with in the Joffrey Ballet School committed suicide.

When I learned that Robin Williams had committed suicide, I cried. It felt as if something inside of me broke. Like many -- millions -- I loved his work, and I loved everything I knew about him. His struggle with addiction did not diminish my love and respect for him, not in the least. First of all, I’m an alcoholic; becoming sober and staying sober is a tough slog at times. Second of all, addiction is a disease, not a definition.

Suicide has a unique place in the trauma lexicon, for a fairly obvious reason, I would think. Someone has made the choice to end his or her life, to leave this world. Suicide is not easy to digest.

It is, tragically, the kind of experience that invites judgment. Judgment is the last thing someone who commits suicide deserves. The self-inflicted, harsh lashes of blame and guilt common with those close to the person who has committed suicide are also not deserved -- neither is finger-pointing.

The viciousness of some online comments aimed at Williams simply confirms we’re not running short of cruel human beings and, to be blunt, cowards. The fact that some of these comments wounded his family, particularly his children, truly sickens me.

Entirely avoiding the presence of judgment is, I think, nearly impossible. The challenge, and one I believe can be met, is to rob judgment of decision-making power, in large part by recognizing its inaccuracy.

Suicide is never the fault of the loved ones. I know it often feels that way. Believe me, when my mother ended her life on August 12, 1992, not only did I rake myself over the coals for some time because I could not find a way to stop her, I walked right into the embrace of alcoholism. I knew I’d walked into that embrace because I too was trying to die.
In Memoriam

Lucy Gwin: The Brain with a Mouth

By Janine Bertram Kemp

Lucy Gwin left the planet on Oct. 30, 2014, after a long respiratory illness. She was 71 and living in Washington, Pa.

From 1990-2010, Lucy published and edited Mouth magazine, whose slogan was “Voice of the Disability Nation.” She was an irreplaceable person in the disability movement. She dedicated every breath and computer keystroke to building a grassroots disability rights movement, and her voice was always uncompromising and geared toward full societal inclusion for all. She quit publishing Mouth when she became too ill to keep up with it, although she diligently tried, in vain, to find someone to continue the magazine.

Lucy came out of Madison Avenue’s ad industry with an eye for graphics and exceptional writing and editing abilities. She was researching an article about a woman who, while working on an oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico, was tossed overboard by a group of men, her co-workers. That incident spurred Lucy to write “Going Overboard: The Onliest Little Woman in the Offshore Oilfields.”

Fred Pelka, a disability rights historian, wrote, “Why that book -- so beautifully written, and such a compelling story -- didn’t end up number one on The New York Times bestseller list is one of the sad mysteries of life.”

In the late 1980s, Lucy begin publishing “This Brain Has A Mouth,” which evolved into Mouth magazine. Lucy never minced words and would not “waste precious time” compromising Mouth’s voice to keep advertising dollars.

“Lucy was an extreme black-and-white thinker, with very little room for gray,” said Josie Byzek, managing editor of New Mobility magazine and longtime writer and editor at Mouth. “For her, right was right, and wrong was unacceptable. Period.

“I remember being in her apartment up in Rochester (N.Y.) listening to her talk and realizing that she was able to see the finished product of what we were corporately toiling to create. In her mind, it was all finished and done and all so easy, and why couldn’t we just follow her up that mountain already? Obstacles, to her, were just excuses.”

There are many people in the disability rights movement who work at other than grassroots levels. Federal, state and local government appointees and bureaucrats with disabilities may work for policies that provide services and supports. Allies and lobbyists have done crucial work passing rights-based legislation. Many of them moderate their voices in order to protect their paychecks. Not Lucy Gwin. One hundred percent of her efforts went toward building a grassroots movement.

What made her different?

Gwin’s office, where she published the magazine and where she lived, was known as “Mouth House.” Tom Olin, a disability rights chronicler, shared Mouth House with Lucy in Rochester and then in Topeka, Kansas.

In 1990, Lucy sustained a brain injury in a car accident and was rushed to a hospital, where she lay, unconscious, for three weeks. When she awoke from the coma, she was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital. The facility, Olin said, would not release her until her health insurance coverage funds ran out. She called a friend, who assisted her out of the facility against medical advice.

“Those months of being under the control of an institution gave Lucy her passion for the disability movement,” Olin
Book Review
‘Life, Animated’ a Journey of Discovery
By John M. Williams

I have always been awed by the power and truth behind the phrase “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” Forest Long of the advertising agency Young & Rubicam, in partnership with the Ad Council, created the slogan.

The powerful phrase rings true. Its message can be applied to people with intellectual disabilities, and Ron Suskind does so in a brilliantly written family biography about Owen, his youngest son, and the latter’s struggles with autism.

“Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism” depicts nearly two decades of ups and downs by the Suskinds: Ron, Walt (Owen’s older brother) and Cornelia Kennedy (Owen’s mother). Suskind, a Pulitzer Prize winner, uses his best journalistic talents as he describes the daily struggles of Owen and the challenges he presents to himself, his brother and his parents.

Author Ron Suskind/Google Images

This is a story of love, patience and perseverance by Ron and Cornelia as they combat ignorance by professionals who work in the autism field. It’s a story of encouragement to Owen as he grows up and starts honing his artistic and communication skills.

It is also a tale of discovery. It is discovering that, at age 3, your son has lost his ability to speak, which leaves you wondering why. It is hearing the foreign word “autism” and discovering its meaning.

It’s discovering prejudice toward people who are different.

It’s discovering the differences between learning disabili-

Web Series Creator’s Novel Concept: Putting Disabled Actors in PWD Roles
By Mike Ervin

The web television series “Interrogation” takes place in a world in which people with disabilities abound. That’s because the setting is Los Angeles in the year 2098, and series creator Britain Valenti thinks by then it will be common to see disabled people involved in every aspect of life.

But Valenti has no disability, and the show she created isn’t about living with a disability. It’s about an underground band of former soldiers working together to overthrow the totalitarian regime in charge. Their greatest weapon is knowledge gained from their unorthodox interrogations.

Among the rebels is Mikey, the group’s tech wizard, who is almost always staring at a computer screen. He’s played by wheelchair user Scott Rosendall, who said, “Mikey is the type of guy who would rather be vacationing on an island paradise than holed up in some makeshift bunker trying to hack into the government system, but he knows without his tech skills the team and the fate of humanity doesn’t stand a chance.”

Another rebel is Lana, the group’s ballistics expert who walks with crutches and rarely speaks. One of the crutches is a gun that looks somewhat like a bazooka. Lana is played by Mallory Kay Nelson, a single-leg amputee.

Valenti said of Lana: “She’s our loose cannon. Nobody really knows where she stands, but she’s on our side for the moment. On a scale of one to 10, she’s a badass — crutch gun included.”

Another disabled actor, Ann Colby Stocking, made a guest appearance as a villain. Behind the scenes, there’s art director Patrick Wells, who is on the autism spectrum. Nelson also designs costumes.

Valenti is happy to hire an abundance of people with disabilities for political as well as artistic reasons. According to the description of the series on its YouTube channel, it is “socially responsible … dedicated to diversity behind and in front of the camera and consistently casts disabled actors as disabled characters …”

Valenti was born and raised in New Orleans, but she moved to Los Angeles in 2013, right after graduating from Carnegie Mellon University with a master of fine arts degree in dramatic writing. The second person she met in Los Angeles was Nelson. “Through her, I found the network of disabled actors and performers. And once I knew I could find people, I knew I had to write something for them.”

Valenti heard the deep frustration that actors with disabilities
A Toast to Polio Survivors

By Kathi Wolfe

Last fall, I went to Google something as I listened to the news. Health care workers in the United States who’d treated people with Ebola in Africa were being shunned by their neighbors and communities, the newscaster said. People were afraid, the news report said, of “catching” Ebola if they rode the subway or ate pizza at the same place where someone with the serious, often deadly, illness had been.

As I surfed the Internet, I noticed the “Google doodle” – the illustration that you see on the search engine on special occasions. This particular “doodle” showed happy children, along with a couple of smiling adults, holding balloons and riding bikes beneath a sign that read “THANK YOU, DR. SALK!”

I wondered, “What’s with the doodle?” Then it hit me: It was October 28, 2014 — the 100th birthday of Jonas Salk, the researcher and virologist who, after years of work and an unprecedented field trial, developed a vaccine against polio. (Salk died in 1995.)

As I thought about it, I flashed on what’s been running through my mind since I first heard about the current Ebola crisis: The fear surrounding that virus seems eerily similar to the panic felt around polio.

If you were born after the mid-1950s, you probably haven’t thought much about polio unless you either know someone who has it or read about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the most famous person to have had the disease. But if your birthday falls before then, you’re likely to have some vivid polio-related images somewhere in the recesses of your mind.

I was only 2 years old on April 12, 1955, when it was announced that the vaccine developed by Salk was safe, effective and potent. Yet throughout my childhood, I had nightmares about polio. Like many Americans, I was most afraid of the Iron Curtain, the atom bomb and polio.

Grown-ups were warning us kids to be careful in the summer — especially in crowded places or swimming — so we wouldn’t get polio. And scary TV public service ads warning what would happen if you didn’t get your polio shot still linger in my memory. Every summer before the Salk vaccine was created was “polio season.” You never knew when a polio epidemic might strike your town.

There isn’t any “wild polio” virus in the United States, Dr. Peter L. Salk, a son of Jonas Salk and president of the Jonas Salk Legacy Foundation, told me over the phone recently.

“Polio has been eliminated around the world except for three countries: Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan,” he said. “In 1952, there were nearly 58,000 polio cases in the U.S.”

People had reason to fear that polio would be contagious, William G. Stothers, president of the board of directors of Post-Polio Health International and the former San Diego Union-Tribune public editor, told me in a phone conversation.

“People didn’t understand how long it could be contagious or how it was transmitted,” said Stothers, who contracted polio at age 10. “Not everyone, but a good number of people would avoid being around people with polio. It wasn’t contagious after your fever broke. But some people wouldn’t go into my family’s store.”

Stothers’ wife, Cyndi Jones, contracted polio when she was 2 and a half years old and living in St. Louis.

“I had two older sisters, my dad was a construction worker, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom,” Jones said to me over the phone. “My mom couldn’t go to the grocery store. If people saw her, they’d move to the other side of the street.”

Still, some people would put themselves at risk, Jones said. “The priest from church brought food over, and his wife babysat my sisters,” she said. “When the AIDS crisis (occurred), and there was so much fear, I thought, ‘That’s what happened with polio.’”

The incubation period for polio is from six to 20 days “with a range of 3-35 days,” according to an Immunization Action Coalition fact sheet. People who are infected with polio can “pass the virus on 7-19 days before the onset of disease,” according to the fact sheet, which has been reviewed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “In addition, they can continue to shed the virus in their stool for 3-6 weeks.”

In an email, Daniel J. Wilson, author of the books “Living with Polio: The Epidemic and its Survivors” and “Polio: Biography of a Disease,” wrote that the viral illness was viewed as a “threat to the American Dream” and the “most feared childhood disease of the ... twentieth century.”

The treatment and rehabilitation provided to people with polio as well as the research that led to the polio vaccine weren’t funded by the government, Salk said. This huge effort was privately funded by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, known as the March of Dimes (its fundraising campaign). People of all ages and from all walks of life contributed their dimes to the cause.

“It was a heroic effort by the people of this country!” Salk said.

From 1938 to 1958, the March of Dimes helped more than 335,000 families pay medical, hospital and rehabilitation ex-
In Honest Praise of the Written Word

By Peter S. Kahrmann

For nearly as far back as my memory goes, books and writing have been my two loyal companions. I do not know what I would do, or if I would want to do anything, without them. Of the two, reading is easier to explain.

My love of reading books was allowed to flourish thanks to my father. Both my parents were readers. One day, I suppose when I was 7 or 8, I announced to my father that I was not a reader like "you and Mommy."

“What makes you say that?” he asked.

“Because every time I try to read a book, I can’t finish it,” I said.

“What makes you think you have to finish it? You’re thinking school assignment. This is reading. Don’t you think the author has some responsibility to keep you interested?”

And I was off, pulling books from the shelves and reading them until they captured me or until I set them aside to move onto the next one. Books, then and now, have always been my refuge. I’m well into reading my 50th book of the year as I write this.

My relationship with writing is as important to my ability to be me in the world as reading -- perhaps more so. Writing, after all, not only requires that you to be alone with self while you write, it demands that you are paying attention to self.

Most people, it seems to me, have a hard time being alone with and focused on self. I am no exception. Society at large, particularly with the advent of handheld devices that lead an increasing number of us to find our worth and meaning in anything but self (and make us vulnerable to the way big business and government want us to experience life, by the way) are no help at all. Personally, I think they are destructive to the sanctity of individuality. It’s only a matter of time before someone somewhere will loudly proclaim that we are descendants of lemmings, not apes. No doubt people will get this announcement over their handheld devices.

Anyway, back to writing. I sometimes write because I want to. I always write because I have to. I could no more survive without writing than I could without air. I rarely like anything I write or think it is any good at all. But I keep going, setting down word after word.

There is something I’ve learned as a writer, and I am not the first writer to notice this. Far more than me is at work, in play, when I am writing. I recently finished a short story without writing than I could without air. I rarely like anything

repeatedly expressed about their inability to get cast in meaningful roles because of the narrow-mindedness of those who write, produce and cast movies and television programs.

Rosendall moved to Los Angeles in 2006 from his native Grand Rapids, Mich. “I had a strong desire to be a working actor,” he said. “I’ve experienced everything from star treatment to being downright insulted. While it’s likely true there are more characters with disabilities portrayed on television and film today than ever before, the disparity between the percentage of disabled individuals in society and on screen is still glaring.”

Research conducted by I AM PWD, an organization advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the arts and media, concluded that although 20 percent of Americans between the ages of 5 and 64 are living with a disability, they are represented by less than 2 percent of characters on television. It also concluded that only one-half of 1 percent of words spoken on television are done so by a person with a disability.

“It seems in some cases, Hollywood would rather attach a name and hire a coach to teach an actor how to realistically portray disability,” Rosendall said. “Adding insult to injury, we’re then supposed to be content with the leftover scraps, playing bit parts and background roles while the bigger names play the leading and supporting disabled roles. I’ve witnessed a number of actors with disabilities simply get fed up over it after years of accepting next to nothing, until they can’t take it anymore and leave L.A. for greener pastures.”

Rosendall said this tide can most thoroughly be reversed by more people with disabilities becoming involved in all aspects of film and television production. “Interrogation” provides a model for that.

Valenti plays Breyson, the brazen leader of the rebel band. But Valenti’s ambition is to create and write a successful television series. These days, she said, the means to that end is to produce a web series that can attract a following.

She loves science fiction. “I was raised on classic ‘Doctor Who.’ My favorite TV show growing up was always some incarnation of ‘Star Trek.’”

She used her own money to produce the seven episodes that compose season one of “Interrogation.”

“I figured I can start paying on the student loans, or I can defer for a bit and make a web series. I wanted to make something full-out, something that just looked and felt and was 100 percent my version of a sci-fi show.”
penses for their loved ones with polio, David W. Rose, archivist of the March of Dimes, said in a telephone interview. At a time when there was no Medicaid and few had health insurance, the March of Dimes “saved countless families from bankruptcy,” Rose said.

In 1954, the largest field trial ever run in this country, in which 1.8 million children took part, tested the polio vaccine. “When it was announced on April 12, 1955, that the vaccine was safe, potent and effective, the vaccine was licensed that same day,” Salk said. “That would never happen today. It was a different world back then.”

It would be impossible for those of us not alive or too young to remember then to imagine the electrifying effect that the announcement of the polio vaccine had on this country -- and the world. As word spread of the announcement, church bells rang, children were let out of schools, factories closed, strangers embraced, and tears were shed, according to news accounts of the day and historians of the event.

“It gives you an indication of how intense the fear of polio was,” Rose said. “Courtroom trials that were in session that day were stopped so people could hear this major announcement.”

Peter Salk was only a boy at the time.

“To an 11-year-old hearing the results (of the field trials), it was quite boring,” Salk said. “But it was striking. We had to take our phone off the hook.”

Not long after the announcement, Salk and his family went to the White House, where President Dwight Eisenhower gave his father, Jonas Salk, a presidential citation.

“Police on motorcycles escorted us to the airport so we wouldn’t miss our plane,” Peter Salk recalled. “That’s what was most memorable to myself and my two younger brothers aged 8 and 4.”

The March of Dimes was involved in promoting the polio vaccine, Rose said. “It’s hard to vaccinate a population of millions. We promoted the vaccine through free clinics and the media,” he said. “Elvis Presley was photographed getting a polio shot so teenagers would get vaccinated.”

Though the introduction of the vaccine was cause for jubilation nationwide, people with polio faced challenges ranging from the nearly universal lack of “handicapped accessibility” to the discomfort, ignorance and even scorn of many able-bodied people toward their disability.

called “Frozen,” and when I was done thought, Good. This time I stayed out of the way. It was as if I had to keep out of the way so the story could come out.

Years ago, soon after my first marriage ended, I was working on a play called “Dans Les Murs,” French for “In the Walls.” The two main characters, Goin and Eau (the latter being French for water), were male. At any rate, some friends of mine in Greenwich Village conducted a reading of the play. I was there, a complete and utter emotional mess given the end of my marriage. It was a wonder I could complete a sentence.

One of my friends, a director, came over and told me the actor who was to read the part of Eau couldn’t make it and would I mind very much if an actress, who just happened to be there, read the part? I said I didn’t mind at all, I just wanted to hear the words. The reading was no more than 30 seconds old when I realized I’d been writing about me and my wife, that Eau was indeed a woman, and, had my mind allowed me to recognize this while I was writing the play, I never would have written it.

It was as if I had to keep out of the way so the story could come out.

There are, I know, a couple of underpinnings that must -- and I mean must -- be present for any piece of writing to have any real value: honesty and a kind of fearlessness. It is a fearlessness such that, when you are about to set down some words that might make others not like you or be appalled at what you’ve said or embarrass you, you write them anyway, as long as you are being honest.

I read a wonderful book a few years ago called “The Courage to Write” by Ralph Keyes. In it, he talks with writers about handling the challenge of writing words they may find embarrassing, or words they know or fear will cause a backlash. One of the authors -- I can’t remember who -- said, “Write as if you’re dying.” Another author, whose name escapes me, went one step further. “Write as if you’re dead,” he urged. The latter works quite well for me. More than one sentence I’ve written successfully reached the page because of the latter guidance.

I have one final thought to share: My father was and is the greatest gift life has ever given me. Although he died at age 55 when I was 15, he has been a presence every day of my life. He always will be. He taught English at Columbia University and, in his last years, at Columbia and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Writing and reading keep him close to me. Being close to my father was always a wonderful, loving and safe place to be.

Peter S. Kahrmann is a writer and an advocate for people with disabilities.
Steve Brown, author and activist, wrote: “Within a few years, Mouth magazine caught the attention of disability rights advocates all over the country. I recall someone once saying Mouth should be in every physician’s office.”

After leaving the rehab hospital, Gwin worked with Ken Collins and other brain injury survivors to fight “helping” professionals in the Brain Injury Association of America in hopes of building a more consumer-directed agency. Eventually New Medico, the owner of the institution that tried to hold Lucy against her will, was closed down. (For more on Gwin and New Medico, see “The Brain Injury Scam” at http://copyrights.freedommag.org/page06.htm).

This Brain Has A Mouth was started as a magazine for brain injury activists and survivors. Eventually, Lucy decided she needed to reach people with all types of disabilities. That became Mouth magazine.

“She made people think about things we’d never thought of before,” Olin said. “She made us laugh a different way and sometimes cry a different way. She would make you angry.”

Evan Kemp and I were supporters of Lucy’s magazine from the time we saw the first issue. We later met Lucy in 1989 at an ADAPT action in San Francisco. We were protesting outside an American Public Transit Association conference when police stopped a woman who used a wheelchair as she tried to enter the hotel to attend the conference. “I’m not with them,” she said.

Lucy Gwin was not happy.

“Look at that!” she exclaimed. “It’s what’s wrong with our movement. Too many want to pass.” That event inspired her to write, “I’m Not With Them.” (The video can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udZCMKZUDk8&feature=share).

A Conversation With:

Director, Star of ‘The Little Tin Man’

By Kathi Wolfe

Whether referring to the book or the 1939 movie, what’s more iconic than “The Wizard of Oz”? Even in this digital age, children and adults still love to watch the Hollywood classic on DVD and Blu-ray.

Yet today, many little people (persons with dwarfism), though embracing the quest for courage -- for a heart -- that runs through the story of “Oz,” find the depiction of the Munchkins in the movie to be stereotypical.

A new movie, “The Little Tin Man” (now available on iTunes, Amazon and Video on Demand), directed by Matthew Perkins, and written and produced by Perkins and Dugan Bridges, tells a different story. It chronicles the story of Herman, a little person and actor who’s tired of working at his half-brother Greg’s restaurant and being typecast in demeaning roles, such as one of Santa’s elves or a leprechaun. After constantly being overlooked for meaningful parts, Herman sets out to be cast as something better than the mayor of Munchkinland in Martin Scorsese’s remake of “The Wizard of Oz.” (The movie is a work of fiction. In real life, Scorsese isn’t remaking “Oz.”)

With his crew of misfits, Herman embarks on a journey of self-discovery as he seeks to transcend limitations and stereotypes. Along the way, Herman and his troupe create many laughs and gain insight into what it means to seek what we love and search for a heart.

The indie comedy, which opened in October 2014 in New York City, stars Aaron Beelner, an actor, entertainer and motivational speaker with dwarfism, as Herman, alongside Kay Cannon, writer of the movie “Pitch Perfect” and the TV show “30 Rock,” in her lead acting debut as Her-
Terry Moakley (Dec. 22, 1944 – Sept. 5, 2014). Moakley, a long-time disability rights advocate known for his unflagging determination to secure public transportation access for wheelchair users, died in Manhattan due to complications of acute myeloid leukemia. He was 69.

Moakley was a member of the United Spinal Association, formerly the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, for 46 years and served as the organization’s president and on its board of directors.

One of his earliest and most significant endeavors was helping unite disabled Vietnam-era veterans and New York City disability activists to fight the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

“He was a disabled vet, and he identified with disabled vets and the disability community,” said Jim Weisman, general counsel of the United Spinal Association. “In the 1960s, when the Vietnam War was going on, the disability rights movement was new, and it really needed a veteran connection. Elected officials who had been used to ignoring the disability community found that they couldn’t ignore disabled veterans any longer.”

In 1979, Moakley, as well as late EPVA director Jim Peters and current Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley Executive Director Denise Figueroa, were plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the MTA that led to bus and limited subway station accessibility, as well as the creation of the Access-A-Ride program. The latter program provides transportation for people with disabilities who are unable to use public bus or subway service for some or all of their trips.

According to Weisman, a colleague and friend of Moakley’s since 1977, some of the concessions extracted in the MTA lawsuit were later included in the Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990.

In the 1980s, Moakley founded Mobility Through Access, a coalition of disabled organizations and individuals seeking access to mass transit.

In 1997, Moakley and others founded the Taxis for All Campaign that in 2014 resulted in wheelchair user access to 50 percent of NYC’s taxicabs.

In 2004, Moakley and others pushed for New York City Council support to modernize its taxi fleet. To demonstrate the enormous challenges they faced trying to use a cab, Moakley was among seven wheelchair users who staged a “roll-in” at a taxi stand outside Manhattan’s Penn Station. A decade later, the city’s Taxi and Limousine Commission agreed to add about 7,000 accessible vehicles to its fleet by 2020. George Daniels, the judge who approved the settlement, said the agreement was one of the most significant acts of inclusion in New York since Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

Moakley was born three days before Christmas in 1944 in Hicks-ville on Long Island, and he earned a B.A. in English in 1966 from St. John’s University in New York City. That same year, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and was assigned to a base in Quantico, Va. A year later, on a one-day pass, he dived into the Rappahannock River and severed his spinal cord. At 22, he was a quadriplegic. He initially was taken to Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland before being transferred to the Bronx Veterans Administration hospital, now the James J. Peters Medical Center, where he remained for almost two years.

“No one knows exactly what went wrong,” he said later, noting that he had dived without incident many times before.

After his release from the hospital, he served for a short time as an English instructor at SUNY Farmingdale and then joined the staff of EPVA. He eventually earned a master’s degree in comparative literature at Hofstra University on Long Island.

In the late 1970s, Moakley worked with a now-defunct program called Access to the Skies, pushing for passage of the Air Carrier Access Act. The legislation became law in 1986.

“One of the main things that it has led to is fold-up or removable armrests on new and renovated aircraft,” which makes transferring to an aircraft seat...
ties and learning differences.

It’s discovering that people with autism, such as Owen, are different but that the disorder does not diminish their abilities.

It’s discovering that other people with children who are autistic are working just as hard to give their children the opportunity to succeed as you are.

It’s discovering that there is a reason autistic children embrace a particular interest and, when you find it, you will find them.

It’s discovering that your child with autism may need you the rest of his or her life.

It’s discovering the power of Disney movies and their ability to bring individuals with autism out of their shells.

It’s discovering that the daunting demands of autism remain bottomless.

It’s discovering that not knowing what works with autistic children makes identifying the essentials nearly impossible.

It’s discovering that your older son, Owen’s big brother, is a hero – not the least of which occurs when he singlehandedly finds in the woods a lost girl with autism.

It’s discovering that your autistic son wants to go to college away from home and preparing for it.

It’s discovering that fear of one’s family being killed can cause a person with autism to become withdrawn for a long time.

It’s discovering what it means when your son’s speech therapist says, “Owen, you are on your way.”

It is also about Owen discovering the true meaning of friendship and the memories of his first real kiss with a young woman.

“Life, Animated” is the best book on coping with and confronting autism that I have read. It reveals dedicated parents who want their son with autism to be given the opportunity to succeed on his terms. Ron Suskind and Cornelia Kennedy are shown to be the strongest advocates for Owen. They are heroes to Owen and other people with autism. Walt is the big brother who protects Owen and accepts the deficiencies associated with Owen’s autism.

The real hero in this book is Owen. He makes a remarkable transformation from someone who can’t be reached to a very talented artist and organizer.

Disney movies and personnel play a remarkable role in this...
Lucy and Olin recruited me to organize the Washington, D.C., portions of the 1997 Not Dead Yet demonstration with Marcie Roth (then with TASH) and Gayle Hafner. It was held on the day the Supreme Court was to hear an Americans with Disabilities Act case about the constitutionality of the Oregon Health Plan because it paid for physician-assisted suicide.

Lucy was committed to Not Dead Yet. She believed that the “death with dignity” and “better dead than disabled” advocates were a threat to the disability community because they were more concerned with keeping down costs than about human lives. She made bracelets (similar to those for diabetes or serious allergies) that sold at the Mouth House store. Those bracelets read: “Keep me alive. Spare no expense.”

Before the demonstration and Supreme Court hearing, Lucy urged Evan to write an opinion piece for The Washington Post. I wrote the piece, Lucy did extensive editing and Evan gave his approval. (By that time, he was chairman of the U.S. EEOC and had staff members or me write his scripts.) The op-ed on The Post ran the morning that the Supreme Court heard the case. Justice David Souter mentioned the article when he questioned the attorney for the state of Oregon.

I first encountered Lucy’s targeted editing then and later after Evan’s death when I wrote for Mouth. Lucy was a laser-sharp editor and made me a far better writer.

“She was an extraordinarily generous mentor,” Byzek said. “It was not unusual for her to just send books or CDs that she thought I might like on a variety of subjects. She was creative and sexy and funny and amazing and also a bit frightening. If any of us, myself included, failed to understand something that was glaringly obvious to her, she would become enraged. It was like standing in the path of a volcano, and a few of us in her inner circle can tell how she would physically lash out too.”

Josie also noted that when Lucy raged at her on the phone, she’d wait a few days and call again. Lucy would tell her she loved her and highly valued Josie’s work.

I had a similar experience when I went to Topeka, Kansas, to help Tom pack for his move to share my condo in Washington, D.C. In retrospect, I think she was angry that I made it possible for Tom to leave Mouth, and so she set me up. My coat was not off when she made some offhand remark about learning to control her anger. I responded with an innocuous “yes,” and she let loose with a long, screaming invective laced with four-letter words.

The non-veterans with disabilities who wrote to me have been unemployed for two years or longer. Most of them are college graduates. Their degrees are in education, computer science, information technology, accounting, business administration, foreign languages, history, government and journalism. Some are former truck drivers, mechanics and daily laborers.

One of them, paraplegic Tommy Edwards, told me: “I have been unemployed for three years. I don’t have any visible means of support. My wife works two jobs. Thanks to Obamacare, we have health insurance.”

Edwards is a former store manager for a major food chain. He was laid off in 2011. Since then, he said he has had about 40 interviews with no job offers.

Helen Bauer, a former Wisconsin state employee who is legally blind, has been unemployed since 2011. Despite her many years in government as a policy-maker, she can’t find a job. Since November 2011, Bauer said she has been interviewed several dozen times without success. She said she has many friends with disabilities who are jobless. These friends include disabled veterans.

Then there is 24-year-old Cary Andrews (no relation to William Andrews). In 2010, a motorcycle accident resulted in the loss of his left leg. He has been unemployed since April 2012. Prior to his accident, he had worked construction for five years. Now, despite his background as a construction worker, he said no one will hire him. He said he has been on more than two dozen interviews. He has even driven to other states for interviews. He’s angry over his situation. He wants to get married next year but won’t if he is unemployed.

U.S. Department of Labor statistics indicate that 13.1% of working-age people with disabilities are unemployed. That percentage is more than twice the national average.

Edwards said he believes that employers don’t want to hire people with disabilities because they don’t think PWDs can perform the necessary tasks.

“They are wrong -- 100 percent dead wrong,” said Edwards, who added that those employers should be ashamed of themselves for being so out of touch with reality when it comes to judging the abilities of people with disabilities.

Edwards and Cary Andrews are working with employment agencies. Edwards thinks he may get a job offer soon.

Before an interview, Edwards devours information on the company in question, and he asks himself these questions: What strengths do I bring to the company? How can I take advantage of the opportunities to do what I’m good at? Will the employer believe in me as ‘The One’? Will they bring me in for another interview? Would I be suitable in a different position in the company? Would I enjoy the work? Could I do it? Yes, I can deliver, but they have to believe in my potential too.”

Then he revises his answers. “Don’t be too demanding on yourself,” he says. “But be confident and give them reason to want you.”

Edwards believes that job search can be an exciting adventure. “It’s a learning experience,” he says. “I’m a better person for having survived it so far.”

He wants to get married next year but won’t if he is unemployed.

Edwards said he believes that employers don’t want to hire people with disabilities because they don’t think PWDs can perform the necessary tasks.

“They are wrong -- 100 percent dead wrong,” said Edwards, who added that those employers should be ashamed of themselves for being so out of touch with reality when it comes to judging the abilities of people with disabilities.

Edwards and Cary Andrews are working with employment agencies. Edwards thinks he may get a job offer soon.

Before an interview, Edwards devours information on the company in question, and he asks himself these questions: What strengths do I bring to the company? How can I take advantage of the opportunities to do what I’m good at? Will the employer believe in me as ‘The One’? Will they bring me in for another interview? Would I be suitable in a different position in the company? Would I enjoy the work? Could I do it? Yes, I can deliver, but they have to believe in my potential too.”

Then he revises his answers. “Don’t be too demanding on yourself,” he says. “But be confident and give them reason to want you.”

Edwards believes that job search can be an exciting adventure. “It’s a learning experience,” he says. “I’m a better person for having survived it so far.”

He wants to get married next year but won’t if he is unemployed.

Edwards said he believes that employers don’t want to hire people with disabilities because they don’t think PWDs can perform the necessary tasks.

“They are wrong -- 100 percent dead wrong,” said Edwards, who added that those employers should be ashamed of themselves for being so out of touch with reality when it comes to judging the abilities of people with disabilities.

Edwards and Cary Andrews are working with employment agencies. Edwards thinks he may get a job offer soon.

Before an interview, Edwards devours information on the company in question, and he asks himself these questions: What strengths do I bring to the company? How can I take advantage of the opportunities to do what I’m good at? Will the employer believe in me as ‘The One’? Will they bring me in for another interview? Would I be suitable in a different position in the company? Would I enjoy the work? Could I do it? Yes, I can deliver, but they have to believe in my potential too.”

Then he revises his answers. “Don’t be too demanding on yourself,” he says. “But be confident and give them reason to want you.”

Edwards believes that job search can be an exciting adventure. “It’s a learning experience,” he says. “I’m a better person for having survived it so far.”

He wants to get married next year but won’t if he is unemployed.

Edwards said he believes that employers don’t want to hire people with disabilities because they don’t think PWDs can perform the necessary tasks.

“They are wrong -- 100 percent dead wrong,” said Edwards, who added that those employers should be ashamed of themselves for being so out of touch with reality when it comes to judging the abilities of people with disabilities.

Edwards and Cary Andrews are working with employment agencies. Edwards thinks he may get a job offer soon.

Before an interview, Edwards devours information on the company in question, and he asks himself these questions: What strengths do I bring to the company? How can I take advantage of the opportunities to do what I’m good at? Will the employer believe in me as ‘The One’? Will they bring me in for another interview? Would I be suitable in a different position in the company? Would I enjoy the work? Could I do it? Yes, I can deliver, but they have to believe in my potential too.”

Then he revises his answers. “Don’t be too demanding on yourself,” he says. “But be confident and give them reason to want you.”

Edwards believes that job search can be an exciting adventure. “It’s a learning experience,” he says. “I’m a better person for having survived it so far.”

He wants to get married next year but won’t if he is unemployed.
man’s best friend, Miller.

The film also features actors from the renowned Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre and Broadway. “The Little Tin Man” has been shown at many film festivals, including the Austin Film Festival and the Cinema Touching Disability Film Festival. The film received the Audience Award for Best Narrative Fiction and the Indie Spirit Award from the Naples International Film Festival. Beelner, Perkins and Bridges met while they were students at the University of Georgia in 2004.

Recently, Independence Today chatted with Perkins and Beelner by telephone about “The Little Tin Man.” Excerpts from the interviews are as follows:

Matthew Perkins

Q: It was great that Herman was so determined to escape the awful leprechaun stereotypes!
A: It’s what Aaron’s experienced throughout his career -- people invade his personal space. They’ll touch him, which is just bizarre. The point of the film is that he’s not a spectacle. He’s a human being.

Q: How did you get the idea for the movie?
A: I’ll start when we were in college—in Athens, Georgia. Aaron was performing in a one-man show called “Reaching for Anything” that highlighted his experiences as a little person. Dugan and I saw the show and thought it was interesting. Aaron was the first little person we’d ever met. After we graduated, we started writing a (movie) script mixing in some of Aaron’s real-life experience and some of my and Dugan’s personal experience. We’d felt rejected throughout our careers as well.

Aaron’s being a little person -- that’s a good analogy that goes for any artist because they’ve all felt rejected at some point. But Aaron can’t turn that off when he walks out of an audition. Then we spent years trying to raise money for it, spinning our wheels. Finally, we decided that we either needed to make it or never speak of it again. So we raised $100,000 for it through Kickstarter.

At that point, in 2012, we were catapulted. We’d started this process in 2004! The script was written. We shot the movie in 18 days.

Q: What gave you the idea of putting “The Wizard of Oz” in the film?
A: We started thinking about a project that involves little people, and that’s the most iconic one. It’s probably the most beloved movie in American culture, and the book is in the public domain. That gave us the ability to reference it.

We thought it has some cool parallels, especially with the Tin Man. There is a line from the film, “He really is just a guy looking for a heart.” There’s no specificity about his height or his body type. There was the idea: Why does any little person have to be typecast? Why couldn’t they play something else? We were able to add many jokes and layers to the story and make it feel like it’s not preachy at all!

Q: Has the response to “The Little Tin Man” been good? What’s been the reaction from little people?
A: We’ve been trying to engage (the little people) community for a while. It wasn’t until this week (the time of this interview) that we had a breakthrough. October is Dwarfism Awareness Month. We shot a video with Aaron when he was in New York for the opening (of “The Little Tin Man”). We went on the street and asked people if they’d ever heard of (Dwarfism Awareness Month). We asked how they felt about the term “midget.” Most people said, “It’s a short person.” They didn’t get that it’s a dehumanizing term derived from the word “midge” -- a bug. We’re not trying to be the PC police, but if you used that kind of slur about any other minority, people would be really upset about it.

The video was picked up by The Huffington Post. It’s been getting comments like, “Thank you so much for making this video! It articulates the message we’ve been trying to say for so long!” and “My son has dwarfism and I really appreciate your standing up for this community.” It’s been really gratifying to know that we’ve had some sort of impact with our movie! I’m so hopeful that as word spreads about (“The Little Tin Man”) that Aaron will start getting calls from people who want to showcase his talent.

Q: Thanks so much for the interview!

Aaron Beelner

Q: I loved the grocery store scene in the film. (In it, a store employee keeps following Herman around, touching him, and saying strange things to him.) Did some of this film come out of your own experience?
A: That grocery scene actually occurred to me. In the film, she (the store employee) has a unique persona. She comes out and says that getting drunk is so much more fun with humans than with cats.

Q: She said that to you in real life?
A: In real life, she (falsely) claimed to work for the grocery. I asked her to grab something off the top shelf. (To her) that made for an instant friendship! She was wear-
We Remember

Continued from page 9

a lot easier for a wheelchair user, Moakley said in a 2007 Independence Today article.

The law also requires a provision for on-board wheelchairs, especially for longer flights and larger aircraft, “so that, with some assistance from the crew, someone who is paralyzed or has difficulty walking can reach the lavatory,” Moakley said. Another provision of the Air Carrier Access Act is that at least one lavatory have “better accessibility features,” Moakley said.

He worked to improve access to health care for veterans and for those with spinal cord injuries. He also served on the New York State Building Code Council, drafting the accessibility provisions of the code and Local Law 58, New York City’s barrier-free design law.

“Terry became an architectural accessibility expert and was instrumental in drafting the accessibility provisions of building codes on the state, city and federal levels,” Weisman said.

Danny Perry, director of community engagement for the Independence Care System, worked with Moakley at the EPVA. On the ICS website, he wrote: “Terry Moakley, single-handedly and very quickly, probably without knowing he was doing it, re-educated me about what being quadriplegic is. I thought quadriplegics were fundamentally disabled, unable to move or take any part in life beyond their beds. Terry just blew that false image I had (which I think way too many people have) right out of the water.

"Here was a man in his early fifties (this was 1995) who was pushing a manual chair around the office, to which he drove every day in his adapted van, taking on piles of work (as the piles of paper on his desk attested). And this was not easy work! It involved composing articles, letters, speeches; driving, riding or flying around the city, state and nation; (and) making the argument for full accessibility to the public, to legislators, and to people with disabilities who were less confident about their abilities than Terry was about his.”

“Terry was very funny – a very bright guy,” Weisman said. “He is a good lesson for able-bodied people. After college, he joined the Marines. He was a tough guy (but) after the accident, he never lost any of his toughness or his sense of humor -- he just employed it differently.”

Survivors include his third wife, Daisy, to whom he was married for eight years; a stepdaughter, Carlin Admirand, the daughter of his second wife; and Daisy Moakley’s three daughters, a son and three grandchildren.

-- Mike Piekarski and various sources

For the online version of Independence Today go to www.ilchv.org

Polio

Continued from page 10

Donald Anderson, first poster child of the March of Dimes, 1946./March of Dimes Foundation

a regional March of Dimes poster child for the St. Louis area. Jones liked being a poster child until one spring day when she was in first grade. “The teacher held up a March of Dimes flyer urging parents to vaccinate their kids,” she recalled. “On one side was a photo of kids running in a field. Above the photo it said ‘This.’ On the other side was a photo of me in my party dress with my braces and crutches. Above it, it said, ‘Not this.’”

Why wouldn’t someone want to be like me? Jones wondered.

“I was dressed up nice! The kids on the other side were scraggly! I was embarrassed. I felt like melting. I told my mom, ‘They (the March of Dimes) can’t use my photo any more.’”

Reflecting on the stories of Jones and other polio survivors whom I’ve known, it’s not surprising to me that so many people in the disability rights movement -- from Judith E. Heumann to the late Justin Dart Jr. and Ed Roberts -- have (or had) polio.

“Lots of people with polio are ‘type A’s’ -- people who want to get things (such as overcoming ableism) done,” Jones said.

Nor was I surprised to learn that the late Dr. Linda Lauben-
ing a crossing guard outfit and started following me. Finally, I purchased my items and moved out of the store! There are all types.

Granted the film is exaggerated from reality, but a lot of incidents in the movies I’ve experienced personally. At the very end (of the movie), Herman’s agent says he has this wonderful idea where Herman’s wearing a sombrero and babes in bikinis are eating pico de gallo (sauce similar to salsa) off his head! In real life, I had an offer -- they wanted me to wear a sombrero, and they were going to put salsa and guacamole in the brim. The people would dip chips in my head. I said, “No! No!”

Recently, they asked me to be the “New Year’s baby.” I’m a man! (Beelner is now 40.) They asked me, “What’s your price?” I said, “I don’t think you understand. No matter what, I’m not doing that!”

Q: I don’t think people are aware of much about dwarfism.

“Edwards has the ability to perform many meaningful office tasks,” said Harry Wilkes, manager of the Robert Half employment agency of Chicago.

“Andrews will land a job,” said J.P. Compton of the Compton Agency of San Diego. “An employer will see what he has to offer and will hire him.”

The Compton and Robert Half agencies encourage more people with disabilities to sign with employment agencies. Edwards and Andrews are the first people with disabilities to sign with these agencies.

Meanwhile, unemployed people with disabilities are asking, “Where are the jobs?”

John M. Williams specializes in writing about disability issues. He can be reached at jwilliams@atechnews.com.

Polio

stein, a pioneer in AIDS research, had polio. Laubenstein, the real-life model for the character of Dr. Emma Brookner in Larry Kramer’s searing drama “The Normal Heart,” was one of only a few doctors who would treat people with AIDS in the early stages of that epidemic.

Polio and AIDS are quite different. Yet I’d bet that living with the inaccessibility and stigma that many polio survivors encountered made Laubenstein empathetic with people who had AIDS.

As this centennial year of the birth of Jonas Salk closes, I’ll drink a toast to Salk, who developed a vaccine against a feared disease. Then I’ll raise a glass to the polio survivors who’ve fought for the rights of all of us with disabilities.

Kathi Wolfe, a regular contributor to Independence Today, writes frequently about disability issues and the arts.

Jobs

the company into the future?

“Edwards has the ability to perform many meaningful office tasks,” said Harry Wilkes, manager of the Robert Half employment agency of Chicago.

“Andrews will land a job,” said J.P. Compton of the Compton Agency of San Diego. “An employer will see what he has to offer and will hire him.”

The Compton and Robert Half agencies encourage more people with disabilities to sign with employment agencies. Edwards and Andrews are the first people with disabilities to sign with these agencies.

Meanwhile, unemployed people with disabilities are asking, “Where are the jobs?”

John M. Williams specializes in writing about disability issues. He can be reached at jwilliams@atechnews.com.

Writers Wanted

Contact us at:
INDEPENDENCE TODAY2@GMAIL.COM
But over time, and in sobriety, something became clear to me: Because you may feel responsible does not mean you are. The feeling defines the emotional experience you’re in at the time; it is not autobiographical in nature.

Concerning those who are thinking about suicide, here is what I believe. I think that they believe they have no control over their lives or the trajectories they believe they are on. Knowing they have the ability to end their lives offers them a sense of control, and I don’t want to sever that. What I want to do -- not as a form of deceitful manipulation, but because I believe it is the healthiest choice on the table -- is help them identify any and all options they have.

On more than one occasion, I’ve asked someone: “If there are options out there that you may not be aware of, don’t you think you’ve got a right to know about them? It doesn’t mean you have to choose them, but don’t you think you have a right to know?”

In all cases except one, the person said yes. On the one occasion that did not happen, I disagreed. I asked the individual to try on the possibility that the inner struggle might have a greater influence on, or even control over, the person’s perception than it deserved. That was agreed to, and we began identifying options.

When people realize they have options, that very fact offers them a sense of control simply because they can say yes or no to them. And people have that right.

Suicide

I went down to Tom’s basement apartment and did not see Lucy for the rest of my stay. Two months later, she called me with loving words, and all was healed between us. She still wanted me to write for Mouth. She sent me Photoshop and graphics programs, and I sent her a book called “Corvids.”

“Lucy was estranged from most of her family, including her children, and I think her raging may have had something to do with this,” Byzek said. “She would be angry with me if I took the easy route of blaming her rages and general intractability on her head injury, but she had said that she lived with clanging bells in her head most of the time. That could make a person edgy.

“Still, I take her at her word that she always was the complex, intelligent woman so many of us came to love and follow. Part of this complexity was that she was not always a nice, easy person to be around.”

For those who worked closely with Lucy, her occasional rage was a small price to pay for loving her and being a small part of Mouth magazine. She was exceptional for her skills, kindness, and unmatched activist brainpower.

In addition to attacks on physician-assisted suicide, she also made home- and community-based services a priority issue. Her dream was for every state to have consumer-directed HCBS, and she developed a guide for activists to make sure that dream was manifested. She called her guide “You Choose.” Although information on it can be found by searching the Internet, the entire guide is no longer available.

According to Pelka, Gwin’s oral history recordings are archived at the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, and her papers -- including a complete collection of Mouth magazines -- are available at the W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, in Amherst.

Janine Bertram Kemp is a writer, advocate and president of the Disability Rights Center. She also is a member of ADAPT.

I still miss Robin Williams -- very much. I still miss the family members and friends that have left this world by their own hand. I will always miss them. Like I said earlier, the last thing suicide deserves is the power to stop love. It will never stop mine.

Be safe, take gentle care of yourself and, please, remember to live.

Peter S. Kahrmann writes a blog on disability issues. He resides in Massachusetts.

Actors

But Valenti knows she can’t afford to finance another season like that, so she hopes to build enough of an audience to attract investors. Anyone can help, she said, by going to the “Interrogation” YouTube channel and subscribing to www.youtube.com/user/InterrogationWeb.

“Oh, and after you subscribe, you should probably watch the series … and show all your friends,” Valenti said.

Mike Ervin is a writer who lives in Chicago. His blog, “Smart Ass cripple,” appears at smartasscripple.blogspot.com.
A: Not to make a joke of it, but by number, little people aren’t a giant mass. You’re talking about only 200,000-300,000 people with dwarfism on this planet. People are still not aware. It bothers me when you educate people and then they still ... In 2003, Jimmy Kimmel used little people in a sketch parodying Fox Sports Sunday personalities. At the end, Kimmel said: “Aren’t midgets fun? Everyone should own a midget!”

Our movie’s goal was to inform, not to preach. We didn’t want to pound it down their throats. The intention was to have people laugh with Herman -- not at him.

Herman is a little person. But the message of the movie isn’t exclusive to people with dwarfism. It’s universal -- we’ve all been in that spot -- of wanting to be considered equal, wanting an opportunity to prove yourself.

Q: Do you see any positive change for little people who want to be actors?

A: Yes. I think little people are further ahead than they’ve ever been in the entertainment world and the professional world. But there’s still a long way to go.

Q: Thanks so much for the interview!

Kathi Wolfe is a writer and poet. Her poetry collection The Uppity Blind Girl Poems is forthcoming from BrickHouse Books.

Once I started reading, I wanted to keep on going. Ron Suskind is not only a journalist but a historian. The book is filled with details about Disney and other movies that may appeal to some readers.

The last of the book’s 12 chapters, titled “The Animated Life,” was written by Ron and Owen Suskind and includes drawings by Owen. I was greatly impressed by them. They reminded me of a certain pearl of wisdom: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” In Owen’s case, this statement was never truer.

I purchased the book on Amazon for less than $10.

John Williams is a frequent contributor to this publication. His website address is www.atechnews.com.