Indiana’s Ralph Braun Used Brains to Start a Mobility Revolution
I have known Joseph Maxwell “Max” Cleland for 35 years. I met him when he was the administrator of the Veterans Administration under former President Jimmy Carter. I was working for the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities and was serving as a consultant on a CBS documentary on disability. CBS wanted to interview Max. I called his office and asked if we could have 90 minutes together, and two days later we were in his office.

From our first meeting, Max and I developed a strong bond that I believe has benefited both of us personally, psychologically and spiritually. Since then, we have had dozens of lunches and numerous suppers together. We have discussed politics, family, personal demons and religion. He is a man of strong religious beliefs.

Except for the period when he was a U.S. senator and people called him “Senator,” everyone whom I know who knows him calls him Max. He was born August 24th, 1942, in Georgia. He is a disabled Vietnam Army veteran. As a former captain, his courage earned him the Silver Star and the Bronze Star. The Silver Star, for valor in action against an enemy, is the third-highest military decoration that can be awarded to any member of the United States Armed Forces. The Bronze Star Medal (BSM, or BSV with valor device) is a United States Armed Forces individual military decoration awarded for bravery, acts of merit or meritorious service.

Cleland is the only triple amputee whom I know. At 25 years of age, Cle-
Indiana’s Braun Used Brains to Start a Mobility Revolution

By Mike Ervin

BraunAbility, which generates $20 million to $50 million in annual revenue and employs 850 people, has its headquarters in the tiny town of Winamac, Ind., population 2,483.

How did that happen? Well, it all began in 1875, when German immigrant Frances Braun settled in northwest Indiana. His son, Joseph, was born in 1908, and Joseph’s son, Ralph, was born on December 18th, 1940. Ralph Braun had what was eventually diagnosed as spinal muscular atrophy and, by age 15, was unable to walk. BraunAbility was born of his simple desire to get around.

In his autobiography “Rise Above,” BraunAbility founder and CEO Ralph Braun wrote, "When I started my business in 1962, it was more out of necessity than as part of a grand plan."

First, Braun assembled a three-wheeled motorized chair for his own use. “I called the first chair ‘Frankenstein,’” he said. “It was a mishmash of parts.”

In his old photos, an early prototype looks like a giant wooden skateboard. Mounted atop it are what looks like a fiberglass waiting-room chair, car batteries and a steering column. He created it after he dropped out of Indiana State University following his freshman year because getting around campus in a manual wheelchair was extraordinarily difficult. He returned to Winamac and got a job at a local automotive supply factory as a quality control technician. He used Frankensteins to commute to and from work.

But word of mouth spread fast about this man and his magic chair. So in 1962, Braun manufactured his chair for others in his parents’ garage in his spare time. He called his company Save-A-Step Manufacturing.

“It was never my intention to do more than give myself a little more freedom, but when I saw the reaction from other wheelchair users and their families, I realized that this was bigger than just my personal mobility,” Braun said. “I had no idea what kind of mobility revolution would take place.”

Hard work was a central value in the Braun family culture. In “Rise Above,” he wrote: “To use an old farm expression, I come from a long line of ‘dirt farmers.’ My ‘official’ definition of dirt farmer is someone who farms for subsistence, who does not have any hired hands, who does all of the work himself/herself. Depending on how the nickname is delivered, it can be either an insult or a compliment. “To me, it’s a compliment.”

Braun’s next personal innovation was motivated by his desire to avoid driving Frankensteins outdoors in the harsh winter weather. So he purchased a used mail carrier Jeep and designed a hydraulic wheelchair lift that was mounted to the back. He upgraded in 1970 when he purchased one of the first full-size Dodge vans and equipped it with a lift. And, again, word spread fast.
Mother, Daughter Taking Personal Struggle Public

By Kathi Wolfe

Cinda Johnson, professor and director of special education at Seattle University’s College of Education, thought she was an expert in the disability field -- until her professional and personal worlds collided when her teenage daughter Linea was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Living with mental illness -- from coping with pain and stigma to managing treatment to trying to describe what it’s like to family, friends and colleagues -- is fraught with challenges. Yet, Linea Johnson, now 26, is a nationally known mental health advocate, public speaker and writer. She is also working with the University of Washington’s Harbor View Medical Center on a research project on fibromyalgia.

Linea and Cinda Johnson have not only privately struggled with mental illness, they’ve gone public with their story. They co-wrote “Perfect Chaos: A Daughter’s Journey to Survive Bipolar, a Mother’s Struggle to Save Her” (St. Martin’s), an insightful, gut-wrenching account of their experience that has been generating buzz since its release in May.

Recently, Cinda and Linea Johnson talked by telephone with Independence Today on topics ranging from living with bipolar disorder to why they felt compelled to reveal their story to educating students with mental illnesses as to what they can do to get the accommodations they need. Excerpts from the conversation are as follows:

Q: What compelled you to write your story?

Linea: There were a lot of different reasons. One reason was that I was able to express what I was going through better than a lot of other patients. I’d always considered myself to be a musician, but I’d (kept a journal) since I was a child. Writing is a way of coping for

perfect chaos
a daughter’s journey to survive bipolar,
a mother’s struggle to save her

My Advocacy? Yes, It’s Personal!

By Peter S. Kahrmann

Some years ago I watched a friend of mine named Yvette take to task a medical professional who’d just treated her as if she were an inanimate object. She has a brain injury and uses a wheelchair. “I’m brain injured, not brain dead,” she snapped.

I almost stood up and applauded.

The truth is Yvette’s experience is anything but unique for people with disabilities. Being treated as if we are less human or of less worth than others is all too common, and deeply wounding. On top of that, there are some in the health care field who see us as little more than revenue streams. The wife of one man I know who has a brain injury said, “The moment my husband got a brain injury he became a cottage industry.”

“You seem to take it personally sometimes in your advocacy,” a friend of mine recently observed after reading a sharply worded critique I wrote about a program for children with disabilities in Albany, N.Y., that allows its director to misrepresent his educational credentials. He claims to have a valid Ph.D. and a master’s degree and doesn’t. Both of his so-called degrees were issued by a now-defunct diploma mill called Greenwich University (not to be confused with the prestigious University of Greenwich in London). Degrees from the aforementioned diploma mill are not recognized as valid anywhere on planet Earth.

My friend is right. I do take it personally. Not just when I witness, in this case, a program seeking to take advantage of children with disabilities, but when people, disabled or not, are being denied their equal rights.

Moreover, denying people their rights is not only immoral and inhumane, it is, if we are going to abide by our constitution, un-American. After all, if we are indeed “endowed by (our) creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” then the denial of these rights wounds our quality of life, denies us our liberty and makes happiness much harder to come by.

The fullness of one’s humanity and equal rights is never diminished by a disability – any disability.

My friend thinks I’d be a wiser and more effective advocate if I didn’t take things personally. Perhaps. But the truth is I find it impossible not to feel it on a deeply emo-
FAIRFAX, Va. -- George Mason University’s assistive technology lab is unique.

It is a high-tech computer lab consisting of 22 laptop computers, all with Windows XP. There are also seven accessible desktop computer stations (one Macintosh and six Windows XP machines). The lab also has many high-tech instructional tools including two large, wall-mounted screen monitors, document cameras and Tandberg video-conferencing cameras.

The lab is designed to support both students who are pursuing degrees in the area of assistive technology and students and George Mason University employees with disabilities. The accessible desktop stations are located around the perimeter of the lab on adjustable-height computer tables to accommodate faculty, staff and students in wheelchairs. Each station is designed to address a particular functional disability.

“The accessible computer stations are organized by disability type,” said Kristine Neuber, AT specialist and director of the college’s Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities. For example, she said, each individual with a disability has access to an alternative keyboard, a mouse, switches and voice-recognition technology. Individuals with visual impairments have access to screen enlargement, document scanning and voice recognition.

Screen reading and Braille are available to blind users, and talking word processors and graphic organizers are available for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Technological assistance for people who are deaf or hard of hearing includes amplification, TTY, speech to text, speech to video sign language, speech to computer-generated voice, and text to computer-generated voice or video sign language. For speech-challenged individuals, there is a variety of augmentative communication products.

According to the university, assistive technology is technology used by individuals with disabilities to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. Assistive technology can include mobility devices such as walkers and wheelchairs, as well as hardware, software and peripherals that assist people with disabilities in accessing computers or other information technologies.

The assistive technology lab was designed to be an ideal instructional environment. It incorporates several design features and instructional technology tools designed to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning for both people with and without disabilities. These features include height-adjustable computer tables, raised flooring and rear-projection television.

Using a hand crank, a table’s height can be easily raised or lowered. The raised flooring minimizes the effect of the cables on the floor, which can cause a tripping hazard and subsequent damage to the cables. In addition, power outlets are positioned under the floor on 8-foot extensions to allow for flexibility.

A television is provided for the projection of either a PC or a Macintosh computer onto a large screen to allow students to better see the instructor’s presentation. The instructor can connect his own laptop to the television if desired.

How important are these technologies and accessibility services to students with disabilities?

One blind student said, “Without these technologies and services, especially the workstations, I could not be educated.”

The university said it does not track the number of students using its workstations. The equipment at each of the nine workstations on the GMU campuses in Fairfax, Arlington and Prince William counties includes WYNN Wizard (a literacy program), JAWS for Windows (a screen reader), ZoomText (a screen magnifier), Read & Write Gold (a literacy aid), Dragon Naturally Speaking (voice-recognition software) and closed-circuit televisions.

“My future lies here,” said a student with an intellectual disability.

A spokesman for the university said that 70 percent of the students coming...
More than two decades after the ADA was passed, and despite the breakout performances of R.J. Mitte of the cult TV show “Breaking Bad” and other actors with disabilities, many don’t connect the theater with performers or playwrights with disabilities.

This has never been true for Ike Schambelan, artistic director of Theater Breaking Through Barriers (known until 2008 as Theater By The Blind). TBTB is an Off-Broadway theater company of actors, writers, directors, stage managers and others with and without disabilities. It is the only Off-Broadway theater -- and one of the few companies in the country -- dedicated to advancing the careers of actors and writers with disabilities.

“We don’t do feel-good work or art therapy,” Schambelan said. “We do art.”

Schambelan chatted with a reporter in July at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., after TBTB had performed its 10-Minute Play Festival “More of Our Parts: 6 New Plays About Disability in 70 Minutes.” (In June in New York, TBTB performed the 10-Minute Play Festival, which The New York Times called an “entertaining and worthwhile mini-evening.”)

“My grandmom went blind when she was 6 and lived with us until I was 10. We went to the movies together,” Schambelan said in a phone interview from New York. “I’d sit on her bed, brush her hair and listen to Lux Radio Theater. Through her, I came to associate theater, love and blindness.”

Thirty-three years ago, at age 39, Schambelan founded Theater By The Blind after being spurred on by his childhood memories of his grandmother and his passion for theater. Until 2008, TBTB was a mix of sighted and blind and visually impaired actors and writers. Since then, the company has been a mix of performers and playwrights with and without physical disabilities. “I did it more to support my directing addiction than to be a good guy,” said Schambelan, who doesn’t have a disability.

But there was a social justice component involved in this undertaking. “I went to Swarthmore, a Quaker college,” Schambelan said. “The project (TBTB) has combined aesthetics and politics. We feature people with disabilities – a group that hasn’t been seen in our society or on the stage. We could bring them into the public eye.

“Ethnic or other minority groups that have advanced in our culture have always had theaters presenting their lives,” he added, citing such theater troupes as the renowned Negro Ensemble Company.

Schambelan began by recording, with sighted actors, plays for In Touch, a New York City radio reading service for people who are blind and visually impaired. He later taught acting to blind and visually impaired seniors at the Jewish Guild for the Blind.

“Three came with me from the guild,” he said. “We recorded plays. Then, in Princeton, I met George Ashiotis, an actor who’s blind. We began working together. He wasn’t a senior citizen. We began to get younger people. We first performed a revue of material about blindness in 1984.”

Since that first revue, TBTB has performed comedies and tragedies – everything from “Romeo and Juliet” to works by contemporary playwrights such as award-winning chronicler of the American WASP experience A.R. Gurney, gender-bending Neil LaBute and burgeoning young playwright Bruce Graham.

Performers with and without disabilities haven’t had a problem working together, Schambelan said. “The mix has always been easy. Actors like to work with different kinds of people. Plays are all about the truthful connection between actors. Blindness and other disabilities become an irrelevance for the actors.”

When needed, accommodations are made for TBTB performers with disabilities, Schambelan said. As an example, for performers who are blind, he said: “We tend to set up spaces that are clear, geometric shapes. You want people to be as comfortable … about the space as if they were in their own living rooms. We sometimes use half-rounds tacked to the floor to mark movement patterns.”

Working with TBTB is a pleasure, actress and playwright Pamela Sabaugh said in a recent telephone interview. “When I worked with other companies, I leveled the playing field for myself,” said Sabaugh, who is legally blind. “I made adjustments, like putting the script in large print. I knew I’d need extra time to read in rehearsals. I’d memorize my part ahead of time because I wouldn’t be given the time I needed to read it.”
Forum Highlights Disability Issues

By Deborah Kendrick

The only forum of its kind recently wrapped up in Columbus, Ohio. The National Forum on Disability Issues, held September 28th, is the only venue solely established to give candidates the opportunity to roll out their disability policies and field questions accordingly.

The event, held at the Hyatt Regency, was filled to its capacity of 500. In addition, an estimated 2,500 sites tuned in for the live webcast from around the country.

The forum was sponsored by more than 80 organizations, including the American Association of People with Disabilities, United Cerebral Palsy, the National Council on Aging, the National Federation of the Blind, and the National Council on Independent Living, representing every disability type from learning disabilities and mental health disorders to spinal cord injuries and hearing loss, and every interest group from universities to veterinarians.

The format allowed each candidate or surrogate 10 minutes to speak about disability issues, followed by questions presented by moderator Frank Sesno, director of the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University and former CNN White House correspondent. Questions were gleaned from those submitted in advance by sponsoring organizations.

Sesno highlighted the magnitude of the disability vote and set the tone by mentioning the following facts:

-- One in five Americans has a disability.
-- One in four veterans is returning home with a disability.
-- Sixty-eight percent of working-age Americans with disabilities are unemployed.
-- Fourteen million Americans with disabilities voted in 2008.

President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, though invited to speak, did not attend. Their surrogates, Edward M. “Ted” Kennedy Jr. and Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., respectively, spoke on their behalf. Other speakers included Nancy Garland, D-New Albany, of the Ohio legislature, speaking on behalf of Democrat Sen. Sherrod Brown, and Republican Josh Mandel, Ohio’s state treasurer. Brown, the incumbent, and Mandel, are running for an Ohio Senate seat.

Kennedy, a disability rights attorney and teaching fellow at Harvard, spoke passionately about his family’s 70-year commitment to disability issues. Stating that he is proud to be a person with a disability himself, hav-
So Braun expanded his business and took orders for adapted vans. Demand was rampant, and in 1972 Save-A-Step became the Braun Corporation. In the beginning, he worked out of his parents' garage with just one employee. He was raising a family with three children, so he kept working full time at the factory until 1973.

Even when his business really took off, "I've never questioned keeping my roots in Winamac," Braun said. "I knew that if I want to build a quality product and a quality brand, it's going to have to start with the highest quality of people, and I firmly believe that the hard-working people in our community are the right employees for the job."

The mobility revolution Braun sparked has been an economic godsend for his hometown. Winamac town manager James Connor said BraunAbility is by far the leading employer in the area. "If anything happened to them, we'd be in a world of hurt."

Braun is well aware that the cost of vehicles and mobility equipment is so high that many disabled people cannot obtain what they need. So he launched the Ralph Braun Foundation to help potential customers find technical and financial assistance. "It's not an inexpensive purchase, there's no doubt about it, and I decided that I needed to instill a legacy of generosity in our industry as well."

In its first grant cycle, the foundation provided direct cash assistance and other means of support to help 14 people get on the road in adapted vehicles. Braun said he owes his success in business to his parents. "If there's anything to learn from my experience, it's that with parents like mine who don't allow for self-pity and instill the values of hard work and determination, anything is possible. I have had the common sense and the determined mindset to build a successful life without making excuses, and I owe all of that to my parents."

His mother helped make cushions for the first wheelchairs Braun sold, and she's still at the center of his life. "My mother is 101 years old and is still letting me know when I'm beginning to get too big for my britches."

Braun has been married to his wife, Melody, for 12 years. His first marriage ended in divorce. At age 72, he spends less time working and more time enjoying his other pleasures. "I have five children, and they've all been successful in their adult lives. I'm blessed to have many of my grandkids close by, and I truly love sharing my free time with them. In recent years I've stopped work-

Nicholas Viselli, who does not have a disability, and his wife Ann Marie Morelli, who has multiple sclerosis and uses a wheelchair, learned about TBTB in 1988. Viselli, along with acting in many of the company's productions, has done directing and sound design for TBTB. Morelli has performed with the troupe.

"We're all (those with and without disabilities) artists once we're in rehearsals,"
Cleland

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land lost both legs above the knee when a dropped live grenade exploded near him.

In the three-plus decades I have known him, he has never spoken about his medals. He has spoken painful-ly about the horrors of war. Tears sweep down his face when he recalls the horrors of war. “War! War! Never, never again,” is his creed. He speaks about his military service with pride and strong emotion. He is a proud American and patriot.

Education and public service have always attracted him. His record shows that. He graduated from Stetson University in Florida in 1964 and earned a master’s degree from Emory University in Atlanta.

Cleland believes it is a privilege to be a public servant. His history shows that. He served from 1971 to 1975 in the Georgia Senate and became an advocate for affairs relating to veterans. He served 14 years as Georgia’s secretary of state, from 1982 to 1996, working closely with his future Senate colleague, Zell Miller.

During this period, Cleland promoted a penny stock law in Georgia that would become the template for national regulations to curb stock manipulation abuses. In the 1992 Democratic presidential primaries, Cleland supported fellow Vietnam veteran Bob Kerrey.

Aspiring to higher office, following the retirement of Sam Nunn, Cleland ran for the U.S. Senate in 1996 in Georgia and won. I had spoken to him several times during his campaign. He was full of confidence that he would win.

Cinda: We wanted to take advantage of this ability (what it’s like to struggle with mental illness), which is so hard for others to express. There are so many inequalities with mental illness. So many lack money, health insurance and other resources and the time to stop and say something about it. We wanted to help others.

Linea: Advocacy -- self-advocacy -- should be taught. People may not need to speak in front of seventeen hundred people. But they should know that they’re not alone. They should have the confidence to tell their doctors “these side effects (from medications) are bothering me.”

Q: Cinda, what was it like for you as a professional in the disability field to face mental illness in your own fam-

Max Cleland meets with President Obama.

Cinda and Linea Johnson./Courtesy of Jordan Swain

Mother, Daughter

Continued from page 4

me.

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Q: Cinda, what was it like for you as a professional in the disability field to face mental illness in your own fam-

Mother, Daughter

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Continued from page 15
lifetime caps threatened by the Ryan proposal for Medicaid block grants, McMorris Rodgers repeatedly said that states need flexibility in how they distribute funds for disability programs.

She did, however, cite job opportunities as the issue that she, and therefore presumably Romney, perceived to be the most pressing one facing Americans with disabilities this election year.

Although Sen. Brown later appeared on the program, Garland presented his disability positions. She spoke passionately of Brown’s commitment to disability rights -- primarily the Affordable Care Act, which she dubbed “Obama Cares” -- and the “urgent” need for the U.S. to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She spoke of her own daughter, a successful attorney who has a severe hearing impairment, and she credited that success in large part to IDEA.

Mandel made the briefest comments of the day, mentioning a cousin with a “mental disability” and stating his belief that “taking care” of people with disabilities was an issue all legislators could agree upon.

Other speakers included Cesno; Sue Hetrick, director of public policy for the Ability Center of Greater Toledo, and her son, Micah, who has Down syndrome; John Martin, who spoke on behalf of Ohio Gov. John Kasich; and former congressman Tony Coelho, recognized as one of the driving forces behind the ADA and a longtime leader and advocate.

“In the forty years that I have been in government in one capacity or another, this president (Obama) has done more for the disability movement than any president in that (time),” Coelho said.

Each speaker acknowledged the many strides that have been accomplished on behalf of the disability community with bipartisan cooperation. And each acknowledged that the National Forum on Disabilities Issues was a significant historic event that needs to become de rigueur for elections in years to come.

Brown, quoting a Mississippi civil rights leader, summed up the power of the disability voter when he said: “Don’t tell me what you believe. Show me what you do – and I’ll tell you what you believe.”

Deborah Kendrick is a writer and editor. She is currently working on a biography of Dr. Abraham Nemeth.
So, yes, I take it personally. It is hard not to when you and yours are enduring forms of despicable betrayal and rather savage disrespect.

Can you imagine the NAACP with zero African Americans in its employ? Or the Simon Wiesenthal Center with no Jewish person in its employ? Or the Gay Men’s Health Crisis without a gay person in its employment?

My advocacy style is to openly hold people and organizations accountable for their choices, including those who claim to be advocates but, in truth, are nothing more than lip-service advocates -- hypocrites, to be precise.

Interestingly, when you hold hypocrites accountable, there is a common theme to their response: They take it personally.

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Peter Kahrmann is an advocate for people with disabilities. He resides in Massachusetts.

Walk into Fear

18 laps now -- half a mile! I even ordered a nice pair of swimming goggles this morning. This is my health morning. This is my health regime devotes.

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

Whenever I commit the cultural conversational gaffe, “I don’t watch much television,” I brace myself for the mis-construed interpretation of what I am actually saying. Sometimes, in fact, I quickly add: “I used to watch it all the time. I’ve just gotten out of the habit.”

The misunderstanding I’m scrambling to avoid in these instances is one that goes something like this:

Me: “I don’t watch much television.”

Other person: “Oh, of course. She’s blind. Blind people don’t watch television.”

We are so often defined by the stereotypes connected with our disabilities that such simple statements of preference can thus get ridiculously complicated. The fact is that I don’t watch much television, that I used to watch a ton of television, and that lots of blind people are television devotees.

My not watching doesn’t have a whole lot to do with my blindness. Times change. Programs change. I lost the habit. But now -- because we humans are the quirky creatures that we are -- I might well be on the verge of recapturing that habit, due, in large part, to the implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act.

Although closed captioning is now as ubiquitous as television itself, its counterpart for making television an accessible experience for blind and visually impaired TV fans has had a harder road to acceptance. Captioning, of course, provides a visual text equivalent of spoken dialogue and other sounds so that a person who is deaf or otherwise unable to hear the audio portion of a program has access to what is being heard. Video description does the same thing for people who are blind or unable to see the TV screen. Elements that are entirely visual -- gestures, actions, striking special effects -- are described in an additional audio track, carefully timed to avoid colliding with dialogue.

Although some video description has been available since 1990, providing it has been an entirely voluntary matter. That changed with the passage of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010. The CVAA went into effect July 1st, 2012.

Though the number of television programs that don’t
“Being elected to the U.S. Senate was the pinnacle of my political career and life,” Max told me.

I asked Max whether, during all his campaigns, his opponents had ever used his disability against him. “No” was his answer. He credits the people in Georgia for picking ability over disability.

Max was a centrist in the Senate. He was staunchly pro-choice and pro-environment. He voted against drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and opposed Gale Norton’s nomination as secretary of the Department of the Interior in 2001. He voted to federalize airport security after 9/11, and he supported the war on terror. Cleland

During his years as a senator, I saw Max more than at any time in our relationship. We had many suppers. Each meal started with a prayer. He was a good listener, a wise counselor and a silent confidant. Every time I needed his help, I received it in abundance. There were a few times when he asked me for advice.

Max always asks me about new assistive technology products. I tell him what I know. While he was in the U.S. Senate, I helped install a voice-recognition program in his office. Max wanted to use it. I do not know if it worked for him. and supported he war on terror. Cleland

In 2002 when Max was running for re-election to the Senate, he was defeated by Saxby Chambliss. It was a dirty campaign. Some supporters blamed the loss on a Chambliss TV ad that featured the likenesses of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein while criticizing Cleland’s votes against homeland security measures. Cleland supporters claimed the ad questioned the senator’s patriotism, while Chambliss supporters claimed it simply questioned his judgment. The ad was removed after protests from Vietnam veterans, including Senator John McCain, R-Ariz., and former Senator Chuck Hagel, R-Neb.

I saw the ad, and I wanted to vomit. It was disgraceful and represented a new low in politics. The voters in Georgia should be ashamed of themselves. Max was a good senator.

He would never disgrace his country. Yet, he was defeated by a man who avoided service during the Vietnam War.

Max believes that a major reason the Bush administration went after him with a vengeance was because he strongly supported unionizing federal employees at the newly established Department of Homeland Security. The Bush administration did not want the employees unionized.

Shortly after his defeat, Max went into years of depression. His defeat cost him his home and other possessions. I have talked to him many, many times since his defeat. We have given comfort to each other.

Max has always been concerned about equality for people with disabilities and

--George Mason University Adaptive Technology Department/ www.gmu.edu
have video description will still far outweigh those that do, the implementation of the CVAA represents a big forward step. CVAA requires that ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC provide at least 50 hours per calendar quarter (about four hours per week) of video description for prime-time or children’s programming. One caveat is that only the affiliates in the top 25 markets “must” offer the described programming; other affiliates “may” provide it. In other words, if you live in San Francisco, New York, Cleveland, Tampa or 21 other cities, you can expect the rule to be implemented. If you live in Cincinnati, Buffalo or Austin, maybe not. On the other hand, because the description for most programs will be done at the network level, there may well be many local affiliates that provide the description just because it’s the right thing to do.

Five non-broadcast networks – Disney, Nickelodeon, TBS, TNT and USA – also are named in the CVAA rules. Like the four broadcast networks, these five are required to air at least 50 hours of programming with video description per calendar quarter.

The best way to find out if the broadcast networks – ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC – in your local area are broadcasting the video description track is to call them and ask. Like captioning, video description is an optional feature that can be turned on or off on your individual equipment. Finding out how to turn it on or off, though, can be a bit tricky.

Video description is transmitted via an additional audio signal (every digital TV station has more than one of these available).

How the feature is labeled on one’s particular equipment varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. Usually, there will be a button on the remote control. The button might say “SAP” (secondary audio program). It also might say “Spanish” or “Spa” (because Spanish-language programming also is sometimes broadcast on the secondary audio channel).

When you activate the SAP feature, you will hear the description if video description is being transmitted. If no description currently is playing, you might hear silence, a duplicate of the regular program, or an announcement prepared by the particular station informing you that this is the secondary audio channel and that no description currently is available.

If you have difficulty finding out how to activate the SAP feature, the Federal Communications Commission recommends that you contact the manufacturer or distributor of your equipment. This could mean calling the manufacturer of your TV or the cable or satellite company that provides your service.

The list of programs for which video description is planned is long and varied. “Last Man Standing,” “The Office,” “CSI,” “NCIS,” “The Simpsons” and “Saving Hope” are just a few of them. Some program guides will indicate that a program is described by the letter D, but the best way to find out probably is by visiting the websites of the nine affected networks. It warrants mentioning here that PBS has been providing video description for a great number of children and adult programs for years, and it continues to do so.

Whether your favorite type of TV show is entertainment, education or somewhere in between, television is an integral part of American culture. Without video description, millions of people would be excluded from that cultural element. The promise of the CVAA is that, even if you can’t see the screen, when you tune in programs with video description added, you’ll be getting the whole picture.

For additional information, visit www.fcc.gov or call 888-CALL-FCC (888-225-5322).

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Max Cleland and family in the early days

Max Cleland and family in the early days

women. He has deep concerns about the care veterans receive and made it a priority to meet veterans when they visited his office. I met veterans in Max's office who praised Cleland’s efforts to help them and other veterans from Georgia. One veteran told me, "Max is a hero to me and every veteran in Georgia."

Cleland served on the 9/11 Commission but resigned after being appointed to the board of directors of the Export-Import Bank of the United States. He was not happy at the bank and left.

Max’s goal to continue serving the public was renewed on May 21st, 2009, when President Barack Obama nominated him to serve as the next secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission. The commission administers, operates and maintains 24 permanent American burial grounds on foreign soil. As of May 2006, there were 124,917 U.S. war dead interred at these cemeteries: 30,921 from World War I, 93,246 from World War II and 750 from the Mexican-American war. An additional 6,033 American veterans and others are interred in the Mexico City National Cemetery and the Corozal American Cemetery and Memorial in Panama.

As secretary of the commission, Max is responsible for its day-to-day administration and operation.

Max is the author of many books, including an autobiography (with Ben Raines) titled "Heart of a Patriot – How I Found the Courage to Survive Vietnam, Walter Reed, and Karl Rove."

I have stuttered most of my life. For decades I have experienced chronic back pain. Two years ago I started dealing with a neuromuscular problem that has affected my walking and produced some rigidity in my left wrist. Whenever I start feeling sorry for myself, I think of Max and his courage. My ailments are minor compared to his. He inspires me to move forward even as he deals with some personal demons. Max Cleland is a personal friend who is, in my opinion, a profile in courage.

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**Assistive Technology**

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Additionally, the ATI manages the production of accessible text and media for individuals with disabilities who require equal access to the university curriculum and other resources.

Korey Singleton, ATI manager, said, “Our mission is to provide individuals with disabilities an accessible university environment by supporting access to all technological, architectural and educational resources available at George Mason University through the incorporation of assistive technologies, the provision of technical support, and the development of universitywide strategies for universal access.”

The university also offers an assistive technology presentation portal (ATPP). The portal expands experiences of current and prospective teachers, instructional technology specialists, instructional designers, related services providers, medical professionals, information technology specialists, computer engineers, programmers and legal representatives with assistive and instructional technologies such as tools and strategies.

"ATPP’s goal is to provide a future for those individuals requiring tools and strategies,” Singleton said.

ATPP offers one-hour presentations during class on major categories, trends or tools in a specific area. The class focuses on (a) specific devices and programs, (b) how they can be used, and (c) how they can be integrated into the field — into academic curriculum, service provision, designing and developing products, and policies.

Sample presentations include “508 Compliance,” “Assistive/Instructional Technology for Reading,” “Assistive/Instructional Technology for Writing,” “Augmentative and Alternative Communication,” “Assistive/Instructional Technology for Sport and Recreation,” “AT Laws and Policies,” “Ergonomics in the Workplace” and “Assistive Technology Overview” in the AT lab or in class.

Concerning this activity, retired AT teacher and rehabilitation counselor Thomas Beck said, “George Mason University’s leadership in this AT area should be copied nationwide.”

John Williams coined the term “assistive technology.”
ily, and to write about it?

Cinda: I thought I was an expert. But suddenly my daughter who was bipolar was being hospitalized because she wanted to kill herself. In the professional world, it’s unusual to be so personal and out there. In the world of academic scholarship, it’s different to reveal so much (personal) information. Seattle University has been amazing! They’ve really marketed our work (“Perfect Chaos”). In the realm of scholarship, you don’t walk in the shoes of a family (dealing with mental illness). After Linea was diagnosed as bipolar, I could see how lucky we were to have been born into upper-middle-class privilege, to have good health insurance and connections. We lucked out that Linea wasn’t born to a single mom barely able to keep her family together. Linea taught me how essential advocacy is to recovery.

Q: Linea, would you talk about mental illness as a disability rights -- a civil rights -- issue?

Linea: The disabilities rights movement is the next civil rights movement. Mental health is a part of the larger disability movement. People never talk about it. There’s so much stigma. There’s a lot to learn about invisible disabilities.

Cinda: One of the biggest things about mental illness is that symptoms impact behavior. People who are afraid of the behavior discriminate (against the person with mental illness). People don’t blame someone with a heart problem. With a mood disorder, the person with the mental illness or the family gets blamed.

Linea: There’s so much stigma around mental illness. So many people with mental illness become homeless.

Cinda: Because they can’t get treatment. There’s a very fine line between having resources and getting treatment ... and not getting treatment. The slippery slope through the cracks can happen so fast. Without treatment and support, Linea could have ended up on the streets.

Linea: There are a lot of bad things going on (around the treatment and civil rights) of people with mental illness in some developed and some developing countries. But there is hope. There are communities around this (mental health) in the world -- raising awareness.

Q: Experiencing mental illness can vary greatly from individual to individual. There isn’t any one-size-fits-all answer to this question. But, Cinda, would you talk about what symptoms parents should look for if they think their children may have a mood disorder?

Cinda: The most important thing is to know the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Pay attention to things like if your son or daughter isn’t sleeping or stops doing what he or she likes to do. It’s hard to know when it’s typical teenage behavior and when it’s a mood disorder. It’s really important to have an open relationship between parents and children. Organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org) and the Balanced Mind Foundation (www.thebalancedmind.org) are great resources for parents.

Q: Linea, do you have any advice for what college students with mental illness can do to get the accommodation(s) that they may need?

Linea: Plan ahead. Put a plan in place so that if something does happen (such as a manic episode), accommodation will be there if you need it. Let the teacher know, in case something terrible happens. The first time I overdosed, I didn’t tell the teachers, and I had to scramble to get everything together. When I was a senior, I had to write a paper summing up my whole college career. It brought up a lot of rough things, and I needed extra time. Because I’d told (the professors) what I was going through (with her bipolar disorder), they were much more willing to give me the extra time.

Q: Though it can be treated, bipolar is a lifelong disorder. Would you talk about that?

Cinda: It’s a lifelong illness, but Linea manages her life.

Linea: I was hospitalized in July. I am good at knowing what kind of treatment I need.

Cinda: It’s part of the process (of living with a mental illness).

For more information, go to: www.lineacinda.com

Kathi Wolfe is a writer and poet. She was awarded a 1998-1999 Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for mental health journalism.
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bara Reeves, Ohio University associate provost emerita and associate professor emerita of education. “She was instrumental in passage of landmark legislation regarding the services to those with special needs. She worked tirelessly and persistently for the cause.”

Helsel joined the faculty of Ohio University’s College of Education, now the Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education. She eventually became the chairwoman of special education and director of the Center for Human Development, the first clinic in the region for infants and young children showing developmental delays. She also designed the university’s first program for the disabled.

“Dr. Helsel has established a legacy that is consistent with a very important core value in the Patton College of Education: advocacy,” said Renée Middleton, dean of the college. “Dr. Helsel was a tireless advocate for children with developmental disabilities. She sought to embrace diversity, especially as it related to persons with disability. Her dedication, commitment and leadership are a model for our students and faculty. She will always be remembered by us as someone who cared and who accepted the call to lead.”

Helsel also collaborated. She reached across disciplines to the Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine and College of Health Sciences and Professions (CHSP). She worked to create connections between those who medically treat people with developmental disabilities and those who educate people with developmental disabilities.

“She championed special education as a major when in the College of Education,” Reeves said. “When she moved to the Center (for Human Development) and aligned with the College of Osteopathic Medicine and the College of Health and Human Services (now CHSP), she created a model for collaboration in the delivery of services.”

Helsel was the first chair of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council and led the organization for many years. The Elsie D. Helsel Advocacy Award, which includes a $500 honorarium, was named for her.

In honor of her son, Ohio University established the Rob-in Helsel Award in 1997. The award provides financial support each year to an Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine medical student who demonstrates interest in serving people with developmental disabilities or other special needs and who indicates an intention to practice in a rural area, preferably southeastern Ohio.

Helsel is survived by her son, Robin, and her daughter, Marjorie DeWert.

Note: Most of the information in this piece was from an article written by Colleen Kiphart of Ohio University.