UNICEF: Children with Disabilities Must Have Their Rights Protected
Disability Community Mentors
Pass the Torch to D.C. Interns

By Janine Bertram Kemp

Hope was on display recently in Washington, D.C.

On July 23rd, Washington’s disability community turned out as AAPD showcased 29 summer interns at the Justice for All awards dinner. For the occasion, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, secured a beautiful room on top of the Hart Senate Office Building. Guests beheld a stunning view of the nation’s capital that set the stage for honoring the interns and those who mentor them.

Each year, the American Association of People with Disabilities coordinates internships in Washington for young people with cross-disabilities. Interns come from all parts of the nation and are placed in federal agencies, corporations, nonprofit agencies and congressional offices. In addition to gaining work experience, each intern is paired with a leader in the disability community who mentors them. This year, for example, Yoshiko Dart mentored Rosemary McDonnell-Horita, and Curtis Richards mentored Micah Fialka-Feldman.

Andrew Kletzein, 20, said he has been “waiting to come of age so I can actually start doing things instead of watching. My passions are social justice and equal treatment under the law.” Kletzein, from Menomonee Falls, Wis., studies political science at Loyola University. He interned for the summer with JBS International, a government contractor. His D.C. mentor was Jill Houghton, executive director of the U.S. Business Leadership Network.

“This internship has been valuable in helping me see how Washington works on a person,” said Kletzein, who wants to work in the media/communications field. “It has also allowed me to become more involved with the disability community.”

Megan Buckles, 21, is a wheelchair user who interned with the Public Affairs Office in the federal Department of Agriculture. She hopes to work for the federal government in a communications/public relations capacity.

“I’m proud of what’s been accomplished by the disability rights movement, but there is more to do,” she said. “Non-disabled people do not understand disability. They have one view. We are such a diverse group. We are not unable. That is the furthest thing from the truth.”

Tom Olin, social documentarian photographer and longtime disability activist, sang the praises of the 2013 interns, most of who range in age from 18 to 23.

“A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to write will die without putting a word on paper.” So said E.B. White of “Charlotte’s Web” and “The Elements of Style” fame. It occurred to me recently that this tenet applies to all of us. Those who wait for ideal conditions before they give themselves permission to live the life they want and have a right to live will remain unhappily stuck in neutral.

Now, I’d be lying through my teeth if I said I’m never stuck in neutral. I am at times. But I have been less so in recent years. This may be because I will be 60 soon and know my time is running out. Life does not go on forever, alas. Moreover, life itself delivers unasked-for harsh reminders. It recently delivered one pulverizing reminder to me soon after I began this essay. A woman I’d been in a five-year relationship with some years ago, as loving and gentle and kind a human being as ever walked the earth, died suddenly at age 56. It was a crushing reminder that we are not here forever, and a reminder that if we wait for ideal conditions before we live our lives, we might run out of time.

Those of us with disabilities face certain barriers when it comes to living the lives we’ve dreamed, as Henry David Thoreau would say. Those barriers are not of our making. There are barriers to one’s ability to be mobile throughout the community, barriers to even being in the community, barriers that are, more often than not, heavily influenced and in some cases designed by those who experience us as being less than human (though a mind that dehumanizes others ought to top the list of the more severe disabilities).

Sadly -- no -- tragically, there seems to be little rush to change this. People with disabilities, or PWDs, in the United States of America remain an oppressed lot to be sure.

It was disheartening and inexcusable, to say the least, when New York Governor Andrew Cuomo recently signed a bill authorizing the return of lever voting machines for New York City’s mayoral primary race. That led to the unanimous vote by the New York City Board of Elections to use the lever machines in the election. Everybody knows that those machines are unmanageable for some people with disabilities. The very fact that New York state and New York City have made this choice -- in
UNICEF: Children with Disabilities Must Have Their Rights Protected

By Mike Ervin


The 2013 report focused on children with disabilities. It’s no surprise that the report stated: “Even where children share the same disadvantages, children with disabilities confront additional challenges as a result of their impairments and the many barriers that society throws in their way. Children living in poverty are among the least likely to enjoy the benefits of education and health care, for example, but children who live in poverty and have a disability are even less likely to attend the local school or clinic.”

It’s also not a surprise that the report added, “Girls with disabilities are also less likely to get an education, receive vocational training or find employment than are boys with disabilities or girls without disabilities.”

Rosangela Berman Bieler, senior adviser on children with disabilities for UNICEF, said the report “doesn’t give any new information or any revealing information, but it’s evidence of what we know, which is stigma and discrimination generate exclusion and generate poverty.”

But Berman Bieler said she hopes the report can help change the oppressive perception that children with disabilities deserve nothing beyond protection. “Children with disabilities are treated with a paternalistic approach and a charity approach. They only receive protection. They are not seen as rights holders. It’s a new approach to see children with disabilities beyond protection.”

The decision to focus on disabled children in UNICEF’s annual flagship report, she said, is part of the new focus on disability in general at the United Nations. “It’s a momentum that was created with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).”

The UNICEF report said that “many of the deprivations endured by children with disabilities stem from and are perpetuated by their invisibility.” Children with disabilities are so invisible that there isn’t even an accurate calculation of how many of them there are, according to the report. Often these children literally have no legal identity. “In societies where they are stigmatized and their families exposed to social or economic exclusion, many children with disabilities are not even able to obtain an identity document,” the report said.

There are other factors that have made taking an international head count difficult, Berman Bieler said, such as varying definitions of disability. She estimated that children with disabilities are about 10 percent of the world’s population.

The report said, “A society cannot be equitable unless all children are included, and children with disabilities cannot be included unless sound data collection and analysis render them visible.”
**Commentary**

Disability, Gay Rights Communities Should Try to Learn from Each Other  
By Kathi Wolfe

Growing up legally blind and lesbian, I didn’t think folks like me got married. TV’s June and Ward Cleaver were understanding, but they didn’t have a disability, and their show’s sponsors would have freaked if they’d been gay.

Yet, as I write this on August 1st in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent historic same-sex marriage ruling, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak is performing gay weddings all day because a law legalizing those ceremonies just went into effect in his state. A deaf couple tied the knot using sign language. There’s also a rush of weddings today in Rhode Island, where a law permitting same-sex marriage also has just gone into effect.

As of this writing, 13 states plus the District of Columbia permit same-sex couples to marry. About 30 percent of people in the United States now live in areas where gays and lesbians can marry, according to the gay rights group Freedom to Marry. My younger self wouldn’t have dreamed that this was possible.

I’ve been on a high since the Supreme Court handed down its historic decisions supporting marriage equality in June. In the United States v. Windsor, the country’s highest court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In 1996, President Clinton, backed by Congress, signed DOMA. According to that law, the federal government wouldn’t recognize gay marriages that were performed in states where same-sex marriage was legal. Since its passage, DOMA has denied same-sex couples more than 1,138 federal benefits that the U.S. government gives to straight married couples.

These “perks,” which range from Social Security benefits to military survivors’ benefits to hospital visitation rights, are hugely important to any marriage. In United States v. Windsor, the plaintiff, Edith Windsor, 83, was told that she had to pay $300,000 in inheritance taxes after Thea Spyer, her spouse of more than 40 years, died. Windsor and Spyer were married twice: first in Toronto and then again in New York, when same-sex marriage was legalized in that state. Spyer, a psychologist, had multiple sclerosis, which was diagnosed in 1977.

The force of the United States v. Windsor ruling was spelled out by Justice Anthony M. Kennedy in the majority opinion. “The federal statute (DOMA) is invalid, for no legitimate purpose overcomes the purpose and effect to disparage and injure those whom the State, by its marriage laws, sought to protect in personhood and dignity,”

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**Challenge of College a Major Test for Some Youths with Disabilities**  
By John M. Williams

Ohio resident Jonathan Sanford is 22 years old and a daily dreamer. He is dreaming of 2014, when he can start his freshman year at Ohio State University. It has been a difficult four years for him. In 2009, one week after he graduated from high school, he learned that he has multiple sclerosis. Since then, it has been an uphill battle.

MS is a chronic, often disabling, disease that attacks the central nervous system, which is made up of the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves. Symptoms may be mild (for example, numbness in the limbs) or severe (for instance, paralysis or loss of vision). The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from one person to another. New treatments and advances in research are giving hope to people affected by the disease.

While the cause of MS is still not known, scientists believe that a combination of several factors may be involved. Studies are ongoing in the areas of immunology (the science of the body’s immune system), epidemiology (the study of the patterns of disease in defined populations) and genetics in an effort to learn its cause. Understanding what causes MS will be an important step toward finding more effective ways to treat it and – ultimately -- cure it, or even prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Over the last four years, Sanford dropped 60 pounds and lost his ability to walk. Fatigue is part of his daily routine. Still, his mind is as sharp as a razor, and his vision is excellent. His family, friends and pastor encouraged him to pursue his dream. That dream is to graduate from Ohio State. If he succeeds, he wants to go to law school.

His family association with OSU goes back generations. His grandfather on his father’s side graduated from the college. His mother, her father and her grandfather are OSU alumni. So far, Sanford has visited the OSU campus three times in 2013. He has toured the dormitory where he will live, the Office of Disability Services and many of the assistive technology
The notion that anyone might be able to get a decent job without first learning how to read would raise eyebrows in any gathering, but that doesn’t seem to be a concern in the fields of education and rehabilitation for blind children and adults over the last 40 years.

In the 1960s, 50 percent of all blind children were taught to read braille. Today, that number has dropped to about 10 percent. The thought behind this drop-off has been that blind children and adults no longer need to learn braille. With audio recordings and computers that “talk,” kids no longer need to learn braille.

In today’s economic environment, some question how people can write intelligent memos, reports, email messages or notes to their boss if they are not familiar with the words and punctuation required. For those who can’t see to use conventional print, the tactile literacy system named for its 19th-century French inventor, Louis Braille -- who was himself blinded at age 3 – seems to be the only real solution.

Yet, the employment rate among blind and low-vision adults remains very low. Among the 30 percent of all working-age blind adults who do have jobs, 90 percent of them report using braille on the job.

I don’t need to tell those of you who live with a disability how the voice of the disability community is silenced on some fronts, ignored and ridiculed on others, and given little if any coverage by mainstream media unless, of course, one of us gets killed by the actions of a health care provider. Then we make good copy.

In far too many ways, people with disabilities (PWDs) are viewed as non-existent, an inconvenience, forever asking for “unreasonable” accommodations such as wheelchair ramps or accessible voting machines or access for guide dogs.

We are also seen on too many fronts as nothing more than revenue streams -- ways to make money. “Load those folks up with as many services as we can think of so we can bill for them and make money,” seems to be the marching orders for many in the health care industry.

I remember talking with a woman some years ago whose husband lived with a brain injury as a result of a car accident. She said, “As soon as he got his discharge, he went to a hospital. The point is that he could not walk and was a wheelchair user. Given the view of PWDs at that time, those facts were kept largely hidden from the general public.

What makes this particular paper special and critically important to PWDs’ ongoing struggle for equal rights things for those on disability. One example concerns Section 8, a federal program that provides rental assistance to low-income families. Voucher amounts for that program have plummeted precipitously, increasing the financial burden on those with fixed incomes.

This newspaper’s name, Independence Today, says it all -- today, not tomorrow. The current state of affairs for far too many PWDs in this country includes a financially shaky existence.

It strikes me as rather poignant that it was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who said: “True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.” It is poignant because, as you know, FDR was a PWD. He was struck with what was then diagnosed as polio-myelitis when he was 39. A 2003 study concluded that he also had contracted Guillain-Barré syndrome. The point is that he could not walk and was a wheelchair user. Given the view of PWDs at that time, those facts were kept largely hidden from the general public.

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we want to live, which permission to live the lives before we give ourselves until everything is in place few of us can afford to wait for equal rights, then

By giving ourselves permission to be who we are, we may not achieve all we want, but we will, I assure you, get noticed. There is a reason that “the squeaky wheel gets the oil” is a cliché (and a damn fine one at that.)

Some of us may not see the changes in our lifetimes, but by being ourselves now -- as fully, boldly and bravely as we possibly can -- we will no doubt make the journey for those who follow us a little bit easier.

You can rest assured that you will make a difference. William James said: “Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”

Robert F. Kennedy was right when he said, "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

We must push the edge of the envelope, whether we are pushing back against the disability itself or a challenge presented by the bigotry coursing through the veins of far too many of those in power.

The changes in our lives -- the distance.

The 21st century no less! -- reflects how low on the totem pole we are in the eyes of some.

Any claim by elected officials that the development of accessible voting machines will take time is, if true, a complete disgrace and testimony to the perpetual dehumanization of PWDs. If the claim is not true, then it is flat out disingenuous -- a lie. After all, the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 requires polling places in the United States to be accessible to people with disabilities for federal elections.

One would think that, had all parties lived up to that mandate, those same accessible voting places and machines would now be available for all elections. In other words, it's been almost 30 years since the act was passed and, still, New York State and NYC haven't gotten their act together. If our elected leaders really believed in equal rights for everyone as opposed to just saying they believe in equal rights for everyone, this issue would have been resolved long ago.

If you believe, as I do, that each of us who lives with a disability ought to, if reasonably possible, contribute something to our struggle for equal rights, then few of us can afford to wait until everything is in place before we give ourselves permission to live the lives we want to live, which includes participation in the election process.


Advocating for accessible transportation was a major theme of his life. Late in his career, Winter was an employee of the U.S. Department of Transportation and its Federal Transit Administration.

"Michael was a lifelong advocate for people with disabilities and a true champion for accessible transportation options," FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff said in a statement. “During his years of service at FTA, he made significant contributions to advancing transit access for all Americans and ensuring that the nation's public transit systems fully complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act. His expertise, commitment, and good humor will be missed by all of us. We offer our heartfelt condolences to his wife and to all his family and friends. He will be greatly missed.”

In 2011, Winter was one of the subjects featured by Eric Neudel in his award-winning documentary “Lives Worth Living,” which chronicled the rise of the disability rights movement in the United States after World War II.

In the film, Winter recalled an incident when a large group of disability activists gathered in the U.S. Capitol rotunda to protest inaction on the ADA. The group was approached by a young, non-disabled woman excited by the size of the crowd. She was a tour guide who expected to host a group of “handicapped” people on a tour through the Capitol.

"I have to tell you something," Winter wryly informed her -- and viewers of the film later. "I don't think these people are here for a tour." Humor was a hallmark of Winter’s personality.

"As his star role in the documentary illustrated, Michael's life was certainly worth living," said NCD chairman Jeff Rosen. “His contributions through direct and often radical advocacy..."
were immense. On a personal note, I will always fondly remember Michael's eclectic collection of slippers that he would jauntily wear about town. He will be greatly missed.

Winter was born in Chicago with osteogenesis imperfecta (known informally asOI or "brittle bones") and used a wheelchair his whole life. He was sent to a "special" grammar school and then to Spaulding High School, in which every student had a disability.

In a 2007 interview with Independence Today, Winter recalled a telling incident when he was a freshman at Spaulding in 1965. When he and his fellow students learned from school officials that they couldn't have any french fries, approximately 300 students, opposed to being served "institutional food," sang protest songs and staged a lunch strike that lasted about three weeks.

"The principal was saying how bad we were, how 'crippled' kids weren’t allowed to go to school before us," Winter said. In the end, though, "We won!" he said, adding that the experience was "good preparation for becoming an advocate. My identity as a disabled person helped launch my advocacy career."

In 1969, Winter enrolled at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Ill., where he studied the work of community organizer and Chicago native Saul Alinsky. Taking a cue from Alinsky, Winter and other students with disabilities once took over the university president's office and chained a wheelchair to his desk to make their point about the need for accessible transportation. The university complied.

In 1977, after completing college and a stint in grad school, Winter moved west and interned for six months at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, Calif. He stayed on as the CIL's client service manager, a position he held for four years. He left to direct a CIL in Hawaii for two years before returning to the Berkeley CIL, where he served as executive director for 12 years.

During his term at the Berkeley CIL, Winter studied business administration at San Francisco State University and successfully campaigned for a seat on the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District Board of Directors. He served on the board for six years, which included four years as chairman of the finance committee.

He also was a member of the National Council on Independent Living and served as president of its board of directors from 1989-1991.

From 1994 to 1997, Winter was a special assistant to the associate deputy secretary and director of the Office of Intermodalism, a branch within the office of the DOT's secretary of transportation. Winter was

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**Braille Continued from page 5**

ing (BELL) program created by the National Federation of the Blind's Jernigan Institute. It is now in its fifth year.

Some 20 programs were held in more than a dozen states around the country this summer. BELL is a two-week day camp for blind and low-vision children ages 4 to 12. The idea is to enhance children's exposure to braille reading and writing, along with other life skills and experiences, in an environment that is fun, active and kid friendly.

As a volunteer in Ohio's BELL program this July, I can say that I'm not quite sure who derives more education and satisfaction from the experience, the kids or the adults, but I can say that this is a program that works!

How do you make braille fun for kids?

First, everybody gets a bell (with his or her name in braille, of course) to ring at every possible celebratory achievement. Just about any personal success constitutes a bell-ringer. Suzy helped her mom with the dishes last night? Ring those bells! Johnny read a whole braille storybook? Ring 'em! Mickey was the winner in the braille scavenger hunt? Ring 'em again! You get the idea.

Then, everyone learns the words (and dances) to the braille rap song. There are conventional approaches to reading and writing skills — alphabet and word cards, journal writing at day's end, and making braille with a variety of innovative toys and tools — but the play activities make it come alive.

In the braille Twister game, each child is given a Twister mat that is a gigantic replica of a braille cell: two vertical rows of three dots each. Each "dot" is four or five inches in diameter and made of various textures: fur, velvet, corduroy, sandpaper. As in the braille cell, dots are numbered 1, 2 and 3 down the left side, and 4, 5 and 6 down the right.

The Twister leader might shout: "Put your left foot on dot 1. . . . Your right hand on dot 5. . . . Your right foot on dot 3. . . . Your left hand on dot 2." If you can manage all that, you've made the letter "R" in braille, by the
Factors such as segregation and isolation increase invisibility. "Institutions are poor substitutes for a nurturing home life, even if they are well run and monitored," the report said. Therefore, among the report's recommendations for action is a call for a moratorium on all new admissions of children with disabilities to institutions. The report said that "this should be accompanied by the promotion of and increased support for family-based care and community-based rehabilitation. Making public services, schools and health systems accessible and responsive to the needs of children with disabilities and their families will reduce the pressure to send children away in the first place."

Berman Bieler said a great strength of the report is that it reaffirms the idea that there must be, as she put it, "inclusion and accessibility in everything that's built or developed."

The report said: "Inclusive approaches are built around the concept of accessibility, with the aim of making the mainstream work for everyone rather than creating parallel systems. ... To take an example from the field of education, integration might be attempted simply by admitting children with disabilities to 'regular' schools. Inclusion, however, is possible only when schools are designed and administered so that all children can learn and play together."

The report concluded that, "Children with disabilities grow up poorer, have less access to education and health-care services, and are worse off on a host of measures including the likelihood of family breakup and abuse." Children with disabilities are also three to four times more likely to be victims of violence, according to the report.

Another major proposed step advocated in the report is further ratification and implementation of CRPD. While Berman Bieler agreed that this is important, she said the most important immediate action individuals and organi-
“This is an accomplished group of young people,” Olin said. “They are not just on the bureaucratic ‘me first’ fast track. Most of the interns I spoke with have a commitment to social justice. And they want to know disability rights movement history. Youth often don’t care what went before them, but these interns want to learn from it.”

Micah Fialka-Feldman is grateful for his intern experience at the recently created federal Administration for Community Living. “It was a significant chance to work in D.C., learn about public policy and network with the disability community,” he said.

(Fialka-Feldman, who lives in Syracuse, N.Y., was involved in a noted court case over the right to live in his college dorm. More information about that case can be found at www.throughthesamedoor.com)

Push for ACCESS at Youth Panel

The same day that AAPD showcased its 2013 class of interns, the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) and the World Institute on Disability (WID) co-sponsored a preconference on youth employment that discussed work disincentives and a pilot program called ACCESS.

Kendra Scalia, 29, who moderated the policy session, related her story and how the proposed ACCESS reform could have supported her career in her mid-20s.

The goal of ACCESS pilot projects is to transform Supplemental Security Income (SSI) incrementally over a 12-year period. Individuals age 18-28 can enroll in ACCESS pilot projects. Benefit rates remain the same throughout enrollment regardless of a person’s earnings.

Those enrolled in ACCESS enjoy relaxed asset-building rules, and the assets acquired while enrolled are portable and held whole after a person leaves from the program. In addition, enrollees receive life-coaching services to provide guidance on current available resources to support their individual career plan.

Scalia graduated with a master’s degree in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley and worked for the city of Oakland’s ADA Programs Division and the National Senior Citizens Law Center. But in July 2012, due to disability, she had to stop working. Because she could no longer afford out-of-pocket medical expenses, she applied for Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid. She now receives SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance.

"Kendra’s story epitomizes why the ACCESS pilot projects are needed," said Bryon MacDonald of WID.

"When Kendra describes the shame she experienced proving work incapacity to Social Security, well into the early years of a successful career, you can hear a pin drop in the room," he said. “She shared how she had to apply for SSI just to get the benefits she needed to survive with a disability. The SSI strict income limits and other arcane rules are real-life hurdles to getting back to her career."

More information on the ACCESS pilot projects for SSI-eligible youth can be found at www.wid.org. For more about NCIL, go to www.ncil.org.

Janine Bertram Kemp is a writer, advocate and president of the Disability Rights Center. She also is a member of ADAPT.
is that, in addition to lifting a curtain on the world of disability, it includes articles that have nothing to do with disability at all. And that fact is extraordinarily important. Why? Because this paper, like each of us who lives with a disability, is a reflection of us in that it is not defined by disability alone. Neither are we. We are individuals who happen to have a disability. We are not the disability.

I remember conversations with Patricio “Pat” Figueroa Jr., the remarkable man who was, among many other things, the late publisher of this paper. More than once, he talked about the importance of including content that had nothing to do with disability, in this paper and in others, including what are sometimes referred to as disability blogs. We talked about how easy it is for any of us to get caught up in the myth that tells us we are, in truth, nothing more than our disabilities, and how important it is for each of us to give ourselves permission to be who we are. And who we are entails way, way, way more than our respective disabilities.

This newspaper is a remarkable reflection of that simple fact: that none of us (including this paper) are defined by disability.

And so, here’s the thing. Were life a globally fair and just place to be, this paper would be in every newsstand and on every doorstep. It would be a favorite of every Web user.

The notion that it should be this way solely for the sake of PWDs is rubbish. Here’s why: If we agree that every law-abiding individual deserves equal rights, which means the freedom to be who you are, then we must agree that being who we are, disability or no disability, can at times be heavy sledding. Which is why, in my opinion, few if any groups of people are any more inspirational than PWDs. After all, we are the ones who prove that you don’t have to be able to stand up to stand tall, that you don’t have to be able to hear to know the sounds of justice, that you don’t have to be able to see to have real vision in life.

Pretty damned inspirational in my book, just like this newspaper.

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Peter S. Kahrmann is a writer and an advocate for people with disabilities.

UNICEF

**UNICEF graphic/Google Images**

Don’t wait for ideal conditions to be yourself. Now is the time. If not now, when?

In the meantime, be well, stay safe and remember to live.

Peter S. Kahrmann writes a blog on disability issues. He resides in Massachusetts.
To Many, New Poll-Booth Changes Bring Fears of Disenfranchisement

By John M. Williams

Seventy-five-year old William Jason Lee is a resident of Philadelphia, Pa. His blindness and paralyzed left leg make it difficult for him to get around. A proud American, he has voted in every local, state and federal election since he turned 21. Lee is proud of his voting record and his affiliation with the Democratic Party. But now he is worried.

“The Republicans are making it difficult for me and others like me to vote,” Lee said bitterly. “I don’t have a government-issued photo of myself.”

To get a Pennsylvania Department of State voter ID, Lee must provide PennDOT with his name, date of birth, address, and last four digits of his Social Security number.

For Lee to vote in 2014, he must go to one of the state’s offices that issues voter identification cards. Going to a state office is a financial hardship for Lee. He must take a cab. The fare is $14 each way. Then he must wait, maybe all day.

“They don’t want us elderly blacks to vote,” Lee said. “I thought Jim Crow days vanished decades ago. It ain’t so.”

Another concern for Lee, who is legally blind, is that he will not be allowed to have someone accompany him into a voting booth to assist him in voting. He is convinced that Republicans would prohibit voting assistance if they could get away with it.

A call to the Pennsylvania Department of State concerning whether the state was planning to prevent someone from assisting a person with a disability in the voting booth resulted in this answer: “Pennsylvania has no plans now and in the future to develop policies that deny voting assistance to persons with disabilities. This includes blindness, cognitive disabilities and any other disability.”

Rights Act of 1964 and environmental justice issues.

At the time of his death, Winter served as senior program analyst with the Office of Research Management of the FTA.

Winter was active in wheelchair sports and a die-hard fan of the Chicago Cubs and Chicago Bears.

Survivors include Atsuko Kuwana, his wife of 29 years, and his son, Takayoshi Winter-Kuwana.

Linda K. Gonzales (May 25th 1945 – July 27th, 2013). Gonzales, a founding member of the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living who established nationwide centers for independent living, passed away from complications caused by muscular dystrophy. She was 68.

Gonzales worked tirelessly to improve the availability of accessible transportation for rural residents with disabilities, and she helped create and implement standards for the Americans with Disabilities Act adopted by President Bill Clinton.

While attending graduate school at California State University at Northridge in 1980, Gonzales discovered her calling. In order to conduct research for her thesis on the psychosocial needs of people with muscular dystrophy, she attended the Muscular Dystrophy Association’s summer camps.

“I met some wonderful people at MDA camp, including a gal who worked at Westside CIL in Los Angeles,” Gonzales said in an interview with Independence Today earlier this year. “She talked about the philosophy of IL, and it was similar to my conclusions. She said there was a movement that exists. I got my degree and became a peer counselor at WCIL.”

She earned her master’s degree in education, educational psychology, and guidance counseling at Cal State in 1981. The following year, she moved to New Mexico and was hired at the New Vistas Center for Independent Living in Santa Fe. She began as an outreach worker, driving her van across the nine easternmost counties in the state and connecting with the rural residents of that area. She later became a counselor at New Vistas and, eventually, its chief.

In 1986, she was one of 12 directors from different states brought to Houston to discuss rural CILs. APRIL was
Kennedy wrote. “By seeking to displace this protection and treating these persons as living in marriages less respected than others, the federal statute is in violation of the Fifth Amendment.”

In another decision, in Hollingsworth v. Perry, the Supreme Court ruled that the proponents of Proposition 8, a law prohibiting same-sex marriage in California, had no legal standing to appeal an adverse decision when public officials refused to do so. Though this ruling wasn’t the win for marriage equality that gay rights advocates hoped for, it was a partial victory. While the court didn’t declare Prop 8 or other same-sex marriage bans to be unconstitutional, gay couples will be able to marry again in California.

What does the current cultural climate around same-sex marriage and gay rights mean to the disability community? What’s it like to have a disability and to be LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender)? How are disability civil rights and gay rights alike, and what have their supporters learned from each other’s struggles? As Facebook says, “It’s complicated.” (Some of us who have a disability and are LGBT use the words “crip” and “queer” to describe ourselves. We use these terms not as epithets, but in the spirit of reclaiming once-derogatory terms.)

I’ll share a few of my thoughts on these complex issues with you.

Nearly one in five (57 million) Americans has a disability, and there are three to five million people in this country with disabilities who are LGBT, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. I’d bet that, because some people aren’t open about their sexual orientation, there are more of us who are crip and queer than are reported to the Census Bureau. We who have disabilities and also are LGBT have families (sometimes parents, increasingly children), friends and, sometimes, co-workers who believe in gay and disability rights.

Yet, this having been said, some of us, myself included, sometimes feel like outsiders within the disability and LGBT communities. For one thing, there’s the still widespread inaccessibility of the queer community, more than 20 years after the ADA was passed. To my knowledge, in the area where I live, there is only one wheelchair-accessible gay bar in Washington, D.C. I’ve seen few sign language interpreters or materials in large print or Braille at LGBT centers and events.

Equally, perhaps even more important, ableism (prejudice against people with disabilities) is as ubiquitous as the air we breathe or mosquitoes in the summertime in the gay community. Sometimes (more frequently in the case of gay men, but true for some lesbians), if you have a disability, you’re rejected because you don’t meet cultural standards of beauty. At other times, you’re ignored because people think you’re asexual. Once at a gay bar in New York City, a woman turned to me, saw my white cane and said: “I love Helen Keller! But what are you doing in a place like this?”

There are many in the disability community who support gay rights, nurture their gay children, work respectfully and comfortably with their LGBT co-workers, and socialize with their queer friends. Yet, as in society at large, homophobia still exists in our community. A disability dating service didn’t know what to say when I asked if it served LGBT people. A year or so ago, I queried a disability lifestyle magazine about doing a story of transgender people with disabilities. “This is too marginalized a group to interest our readers,” the publication’s editor told me.

Yet, despite the messy reality of discrimination that has existed between the LGBT and disability community, I’m hopeful. The American Council of the Blind has a BFLAG (Blind Friends of Lesbians and Gays) affiliate. Mark Perriello, an openly gay man, heads the American Association of People with Disabilities. We’re bombarded with stereotypical images of disability in straight and gay culture, Perriello told me when I interviewed him for “The Washington Blade” in 2011. “At AAPD we’re hoping to change that,” he said.

The National Association of the Deaf endorsed marriage equality. “At one point in our history, many hearing people thought two Deaf individuals should not be allowed to marry because...
Lee is not the only person with a disability worried about voting suppression. People with disabilities in New Hampshire, Texas, Mississippi, Virginia, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and other states fear that they may be prevented from voting or their vote will not count.

The 33 voter ID laws that have been enacted vary in their details. Two key distinctions are whether a law is strict and whether the required ID must include a photo.

In the "strict" states, a voter cannot cast a valid ballot without first presenting ID. Voters who are unable to show ID at the polls are given a provisional ballot. Those provisional ballots are kept separate from the regular ballots. If the voter returns to the appropriate election officials within a short period of time after the election (generally a few days) and presents acceptable ID, the provisional ballot is counted. If the voter does not come back to show ID, that provisional ballot is never counted.

Carol Hernandez lives in Winston-Salem, N.C., and attends the University of North Carolina. Between 2004 and 2006, she served in the U.S. Army. She spent nearly a year as a combat soldier in Iraq, where she saw a fragile nation struggling to hold free elections while creating a democratic country. As a result of a car accident five years ago, she is paralyzed from the waist down.

Hernandez is politically active. Recently, she participated in one of the weekly demonstrations in Charlotte, N.C., known as "Moral Mondays" to protest Republican legislative actions. Thousands protested against Republican-led legislation on issues such as abortion rights, voting rights, education funding and unemployment benefits. More than 900 people were arrested at the protests. Hernandez was baffled when the North Carolina Legislature passed the country’s toughest voter ID bill on July 25th. The measure would prohibit the use of a student or public employee ID in order to cast a ballot.

"Hundreds of thousands of people, including people with disabilities, can be disenfranchised enough (that) they will not vote," said Hernandez, visibly irate. She sees the law as fraudulent and an effort to prevent minorities and elderly people with disabilities from voting.

"It is obvious to me that no Republican in the state legislature ever served in the military. If they had, they would oppose this bill," said Thomas Watson, a disabled veteran and a friend of Hernandez.

The bill would reduce the number of early voting days by a week and eliminate same-day voter registration during the early voting period. Hernandez said she knows disabled people who took advantage of same-day voter registration before. If the bill becomes law, that can’t happen.

Calls to the Secretary of State’s office to discuss fears of voter suppression by people with disabilities as a result of the new voting requirements were not returned.

Fifty-eight-year-old James Beard is a recent resident of Houston, Texas. He has a learning disability. Due to a severe back injury, he uses a wheelchair. He has a strong record of voting. When voting, he needs someone to enter the booth with him to help him understand the issues so he can vote for the candidate of his choice. He laughed when he was read the voting rights requirements in Texas for people with disabilities.

"I've been to polling places that were not accessible and could not get someone to bring a ballot outside to me even though it is the law," Beard said. He said the state does not meet the accessibility requirements for voting places mandated by state law. He said the state does not spend enough money to make polling places physically accessible, information accessible, and accessible to personnel assistance.

In 2012, he had to plead for assistance to vote. He is concerned that with the new voting requirements, it will even be harder for people with disabilities to vote.
locations on campus.

And he is familiar with Ohio State’s ACT Wiki: Accessibility Repository. The Accessible Classroom Technologies (ACT) wiki, or website, is a repository of tips, guidelines, techniques and other resources dedicated to making classroom media and other technologies at OSU usable for everyone, including people with disabilities. The university’s Office of Disability Services collaborates with and empowers students with disabilities to coordinate support services and programs that allow equal access to an education and university life.

Sanford said he already feels welcome at OSU. A spokesperson for OSU admissions said, “We are very pleased to have Mr. Sanford attend our great university.”

Getting into OSU was not an easy task for Sanford. In high school, he was a C+ student. He had low SAT scores, and OSU rejected his application twice. His parents and grandparents refused to use their influence to get OSU to accept him.

“He had to get accepted on his own merit,” said Brian Sanford, Jonathan’s father.

While coping with his MS, Jonathan buckled down and started reading books on science, mathematics, history and English. He took the college entrance exam and scored 2000. OSU accepted him. His future is no longer in doubt.

“Having MS made me realize that I could feel sorry for myself and do nothing, or I could deal positively with the MS and become someone,” Sanford said. “I decided to make something of myself.”

While attending OSU, Sanford will have a personal care assistant 17 out of 24 hours daily. He will not have a PCA from 11 p.m. until 6 a.m.

Initially, Sanford will attend nine hours of class weekly until he feels comfortable enough to increase that to 15 hours. He will use a tape recorder in his classes, and speech recognition for other purposes.

Sanford does not worry about the cost to attend OSU, even though tuition for Ohio residents averages $25,000 a year. His family is well off financially. His father is a successful financial counselor, and his mother is a corporate attorney. His grandparents on both sides of the family are economic successes.

Sanford said that although MS sidelined him for a while, he is determined to graduate and emulate the success of his parents and grandparents.

“I can choose to feel sorry for myself or to be master of my own destiny,” he said. “I choose to be master of my destiny.”

Marion Watson’s Story

More than 2,000 miles

Braille

Continued from page 7

Kids decorate cookies with their M&M’s, forming their initials in braille, and practice pouring drinks to go with those cookies (with sleep shades on, of course.)

There are special visits from firefighters and police officers – including the opportunity to get hands on the uniforms and equipment used and a chance to climb around in the emergency vehicles. Field trips have included outings to stores, restaurants, children’s museums, swimming pools and amusement parks to practice cane skills and use money. Demonstrations in adaptive sports such as goal ball teach kids that you can do anything you set out to do, for that matter, with or without vision. And that’s cause for ringing your bell!

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A call to the Office of the Secretary of State in Austin regarding accessibility issues for voters with disabilities produced this response, “On September 1, 1999, Texas was the first state requiring new voting places and systems be accessible to voters with disabilities and to provide a practical and effective means for voters with disabilities to cast a secret ballot.”

When asked, “Do you receive complaints from voters with disabilities regarding obstacles to voting?” The response was, “Yes.”

When asked, “Will the new voting requirements for Texas voters with disabilities produce undue burdens on people with disabilities either in voting or registering to vote?” The response was, “They shouldn’t.” Then there was a click, and the conversation was over.

Two other people with disabilities (they did not want to be named out of fear of retaliation) said that voting in Texas is a real challenge, and they believe that the new voting requirements will decrease voting rights for people with disabilities.

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“We should make it easy for people to vote and not penalize them for voting for Democrats,” Beard said.

Watson’s family, which emigrated from Mexico, never had the money to have her foot corrected. They are migrant workers who are in the United States legally.

“All my life, people have laughed at me because of my foot,” Watson said.

Watson, 21, is the oldest of seven children. Her father is dead. Her mother is in frail health. When she graduated from high school three years ago, her uncles, aunts and cousins hatched a plan to send her to a community college. They would pay the $3,000 tuition and $2,000 for books and other expenses if she agreed to attend the college full time and major in computer science. She agreed. Clackamus was picked because it is located near where her family works and lives. Fearful of government intrusion into their private lives, Watson’s family agreed not to apply for any financial aid.

Watson has maintained a B+ average in her major. She took a computer class in summer school and earned a B+. She worked as a temporary data input processor during the summer. She will apply to four-year colleges in the fall of 2014. She worked 20 hours a week during the 2012-2013 semesters. She will continue to work part time in 2013 and 2014. Her goal is to attend the University of Oregon and earn a bachelor of science degree in computer technology and information. She wants a good-paying job.

Watson has not used any of the college’s services offered to students with disabilities. “In Mexico, we take care of our own family members with disabilities,” Watson said.

Future plans are for her 16-year-old twin brothers to attend Clackamus Community College in 2015.

Watson does not dwell on her disabilities. She feels they inspire her. When she can, she will have her club foot corrected. She considers herself to be one of 8,000 industrious students at Clackamus.
We Remember Continued from page 11

born out of the idea that it would be helpful to have a national organization that focused on rural issues.

“Linda made a significant contribution to the disability rights movement when she took a gamble on rural independent living,” said Tom Seekins, director of the Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities at the University of Montana and a longtime colleague of Gonzales.

“She had a secure position as director at the Santa Fe CIL,” Seekins said in a recent interview with Independence Today. “She was doing great things, but for some reason she saw the need for a focal point on rural disability issues and took on the responsibility to be that organizing force for APRIL. Linda took that risk with no funding and not many resources except the trust and commitment of other CIL directors around the country.”

Gonzales left New Vistas in 1993 and founded APRIL the following year. She remained with the organization for 16 years, turning it from a small, struggling center into a national innovator.

During the George W. Bush presidency, APRIL led the struggle that convinced the Federal Transit Administration that transportation vouchers were a legitimate use for New Freedom Initiative funds and should be specified in regulations. In 2001, APRIL received funding from the U.S. Department of Education for a five-year demonstration project to implement a transportation voucher system.

With the grant, Gonzales focused on transportation, which, she said, “was a huge stumbling block for everyone out there in rural areas.”

“To me, (APRIL) was a great organization with a warm leader (who had) a passion for getting young people involved,” said Tim Fuchs, operations director of the National Council on Independent Living. “There was a family aspect to APRIL that Linda created. She could be a fierce advocate when she had to be but also warm and loving to get APRIL to the point that it reached. She was a great leader.”

Every year, APRIL presents the Linda Gonzales Award for Outstanding Rural Youth to a deserving youngster. In a statement on its website, the organization wrote of her: “The impact that Linda had on Rural Independent Living is evident in Federal laws that have been enacted, in language we have come to rely on, and in rules we have come to live by. Her impact threads together the rural fabric that is the IL Movement.”

Until her death, Gonzales wrote a blog for ILRU (the Independent Living Research Utilization -- a national center for information, training, research, and technical assistance in independent living) and was on the Consumer Advisory Board for the Center for Research on Women with Disabilities (CROWD) at Baylor College in Houston.

She is survived by her husband, Jerry, whom she married in 1987; her daughter, Melissa Montoya; son-in-law Greg; granddaughters Ashley, Ariana and Audra; great-granddaughter Isabella Hope; sisters Barbara, Rita, Pamela, Deborah and Marlene; and brothers Jim, Joe and Jerry.

-- From staff reports and various sources