

## OREGON COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

### The People First Connection

*The Voice of Self Advocacy in Oregon*

October, 1999

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#### *Tokenism*

by Liz Obermayer  
Brookline, Massachusetts

My name is Liz Obermayer and I wanted to write this article about the fact that a lot of people with disabilities can get into a situation where they feel like a token. A token is someone who feels like a special member of the Board.

If other Board members are always looking to the person with a disability to talk about their experience or what it is like to have a disability, but they don't go to them for other information, it could be that they are being treated like a token. I think being a token is a bad thing. It could be that a self advocate knows something about membership or how to deal with people at the capitol.

The reason why I can talk about this is because I have been treated as a token in the past. I would like to share a story with you.

I was a person serving in an agency in New Jersey. Within six months of being there they asked me to serve on the Board of Trustees. At first I was honored to have been asked to serve on the Board but it wasn't all about glory. I questioned them about why they wanted me on the Board and not someone else.

Yes, I was flattered, but I had not been there as long as some of my other friends and did not know as much as they did about the organization. I questioned the Board again, but they were positive that they wanted me.

Two years later one of my friends suggested that I leave the Board. My friend saw that I was being treated like a token but I could not see it. People cannot always see when they are being treated like a token.

So I resigned because I felt like she wanted me to. I let them know I felt like they were treating me like a token. I wrote that in a letter because it felt better. I didn't really know what I was writing, but I felt like I needed to write them.

Later, I missed the Board, both the glory and the fun parts of being on the Board. I missed learning information others wouldn't know about. So I wrote a letter asking to rejoin, saying that I had made a mistake, and they took me back again.

Two or three years later, after learning about the national organization SABE (Self Advocates Becoming Empowered) and talking to Tia Nelis and Nancy Ward, they finally helped me to see that I was being treated as a token.

I saw that when the Board members listened to me they were just being polite and really did not care what I had to say. When a parent spoke they took the parent more seriously than me. So I resigned. People were very upset with me but I felt that I needed to.

The other story I want to share is an example of not feeling like a token member of the Board. I have been a member of the TASH Board since 1996. TASH, formerly the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps, is a national advocacy organization.

In the winter of 1998 there was an issue the TASH Board needed to vote on. A staff person explained the issue to all of us. When it came to my turn I said I couldn't vote because I couldn't understand.

I thought that the staff would say how they wanted me to vote, but someone from the Board called me to explain what the issue was all

about and then I make my decision on how to vote.

I didn't vote the way the staff wanted me to vote. Mine was actually one of the votes that kept them from doing what they wanted to do. If they would have treated me as a token, they could have persuaded me to vote their way, but I made my own choice.

For a lot of people seeing the issue of being treated as a token is hard. It can take someone else to step back and see what is happening. I know it is hard to speak up. Don't be afraid to speak up or to disagree with other Board members or staff.

We all fall into the trap of tokenism. We are all human. But I am strong enough not to say when I feel like I am being treated as a token. I couldn't have said that ten years ago. I still have to point it out sometimes.

I recommend having at least two self advocates on a board at all times. Then they won't be so afraid to talk. It is also a way of pointing out that your view is not always the same as those of other self advocates.

Just because we all have disabilities does not mean that we see everything the same way. We can disagree too.

If we are afraid people will walk over us every time. Others don't see people with disabilities as people with power. I might see that and you might see that but they won't.

Tokenism is a very dangerous thing. If you feel you are being treated as a token talk to another self advocate about it.

Contact a self advocate leader in your area or a self advocate leader in your state. Talk to other people who may know what it feels like. If necessary contact your regional SABLE representative. If you have any comments or questions about what I have written please write a letter to Michael Bailey, editor, The People First Connection, 540 24th Place Northeast, Salem, Oregon, 97301.

***Consumer Involvement Fund...***

## ***It's For You!***

by Laurie Schwartz, Staff  
Oregon Developmental Disabilities Council

The Consumer Involvement Fund, C.I.F., was created in the early nineties to give self advocates and family members the opportunity to become more involved in educational and decision making processes at the local, state and national level. These activities may include, but are not limited to, conferences, training's, public forums, task forces and public hearings.

Agencies and organizations may also apply to this fund, as long as it will help Self Advocates and Family Members attend their event. An example may be the annual DD in service at OSU.

The C I F has an annual budget of \$15,000 and is managed through the self advocacy committee of the Oregon Developmental Disabilities Council.

If you know of a conference or training that would help you become a better self advocate or a stronger leader in your community please call 1-800-292-4154 and ask for an application.

The self advocacy committee will review your application either during their meeting or on a conference call. Sometimes they choose to fund the total requested amount and sometimes just a portion of it. It depends on many different things as to how much each applicant receives.

Regardless of amount the C I F fund has helped many people do things they would not otherwise have been able to do.

Give it a try. After all...it's for you!

The People First Connection wants your article. If you are afraid of writing call us at 1-800-292-4154. Everyone's experiences are important. All articles are subject to editing for spelling, grammar and length.

## *There Is Always Something Magic*

by Matthew E. Hasek  
Eugene

My life began on November 6, 1969 in Pensacola, Florida. I was born the son of a proud First Class Naval test pilot.

By the time I was 13 months of age I had developed respiration difficulties which required me to undergo "routine" open heard surgery at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland. As it turned out it was definitely not to be routine surgery. When I entered the hospital I was otherwise a typical healthy one year old toddler. When I left I would never walk again.

As my surgery and recovery progressed, a series of complications - including being inadvertently left for eight minutes without oxygen - were to leave me physically challenged for the rest of my life. The loss of oxygen to my brain damaged my nerve and muscle coordination for my entire body including speech. The name they gave my "condition" is cerebral palsy.

The "good news" about all this is that my intellect was undamaged and left intact. As I was to learn, however, the "bad news" was that few people would take the time to recognize that my mental faculties were undamaged. It is something which I must overcome daily. To this day I struggle with a certain patronization by those who don't take time and just assume that I have mental retardation and am incapable of easily comprehending what is being said.

Well, when life seemed it couldn't get any worse, it did. In 1972 my mother and father were killed by a drunk driver on their way home from a Valentine's Day party. My grandparents were unable to raise me, and consequently, at the age of three years I entered the inept world of social service systems.

From 1972 to 1992 I was kept in foster care institutions and group home facilities. I was told that I could never live independently and that it was useless for me to think of a college education. However,

this advice only incited me all the more to achieve my goals of education, independence and a meaningful career.

In 1995, I received my Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the University of Oregon. Two years later that was followed by a second degree in history.

One might think that with this knowledge, I would be able to find meaningful employment - a job using my education, but generally employers give people with disabilities few opportunities to use their skills and prove their worth. Instead I was limited to such menial tasks as my physical limitations would allow.

Not able to accept this, in the summer of 1999 I formed my own business enterprise: Hasek Consultants of which I am the President.

The tri-fold goals of this endeavor are:

1. The inspiration of foster care facilities, group homes and other institutional employers to provide services to their clients which give the clients a greater amount of dignity, respect and self fulfillment.
2. Delivery of tools and insight to these institutional providers which will enable them to achieve their new goals, and
3. Provision for fair compensation for these services.

The challenge for me then is to inspire those in control of our nation's institutions to desire more effective services for their clientele and to provide to them the insight and tools to achieve their new goals. Having had first hand experience on the receiving end during most of my life, I believe I am the most qualified to provide this inspiration and insight.

The challenge is before me and it is no mean task. To those who may also find themselves challenged, I say: Keep on dreaming and reach for the stars! This is not the end, but a beginning.

Hasek Consultants are located at 3352 15th Ave., Eugene, Oregon, 97402. Phone 541-344-3168. They are happy to discuss their services with anyone.

## **Vote!!!**

All Oregon Elections are vote by mail. No need to go to a polling place.

Call your county election office to register.

## **Something To Think About...**

"If you are still not convinced that work shops and sheltered programs should be closed I challenge you to spend some time in them. I would also encourage you to think about the amount of money people earn and decide if you could live on that wage.

Everyone should be able to find a job that matches their skills and speed. People need to know that they are going to get the kind of support they need to solve a problem, to develop their skills, and show that they have other qualities that are important to their employer."

Liz Obermayer, quoted in the TASH Newsletter, May,June, 1999.

## **Don't Tread on the ADA!**

### ***In the Way***

by Laura Hershey

Denver, Colorado

Could you move, the waitress says,

politely, of course, you're in the way.

A common request, my trusty wheelchair just an impediment,

an obstacle to the busy, a clumsy roadblock I haul with me down every road and when parked an interruption of at least a slowing down of the life I only wish to be part of, a piece of surplus furniture in the already crowded rooms of restaurants, bars, theaters.

Usually, I accommodate, backing into corners turning sideways angling my wheels to leave a clear path asking, politely, of course, is that better? I get in the way without trying. I apologize excuse myself and move out of the way.

But not today. Today I listen to a small, recalcitrant voice inside that insists: Such power should not be wasted.

If I alone can be so much and so often in the way, if I can create such worry among wait persons such consternation in concert halls such alarm in the aisles of grocery stores just imaging the aggravation a dozen or two dozen or three hundred people using wheelchairs can cause people who would rather not see our needs or hear our demands or acknowledge our rights! Just imagine!

Better yet, see me now! See me block this doorway, plant my wheels firm, see me lock my brakes! No, I tell some bureaucrat who wants to get into his office so he can make decisions about my future.

No, I will not turn I will not move over I will not get out of your way not until the police order me to, under threat of arrest and maybe not even then!

In the way in the way all day, I woman this barricade which is mine whenever I need it, this roadblock I haul with me down every road,

this wall I can construct at will, and be happily in the way with, and say no with, and plaster with scrawled signs about freedom, and add to the bigger walls growing around whole buildings, around whole blocks.

I can turn back customers, employees delivery people, even cops. I can keep the usually powerful in or out of their offices.

I can be in the way in the way I can be in the way my way.

from Adapt Poems

copyright 1992 by Laura Hershey.

Laura Hershey's poetry is available for purchase in chapbooks, on audio cassettes and on a poster.

For more information, write to PO Box 9004, Denver, Colorado, 80209 or log onto Laura's web page at

[http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Laura Hershey](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Laura%20Hershey)

### ***My Dream***

by Cheryl Coonce  
Redmond

My name is Cheryl Coonce. I have to explain to people why I am in a wheel chair. I have cerebral palsy. I have lived with it all my life. I am now 38 years old.

I have been married for almost 8 years. John and I are working on getting our own home. We found out that it is going to be difficult, but we will keep our focus on our dream. We have been living in our own apartment independently for the first time since March of 1999. We found out that we like it!

I have worked in sheltered workshops all of my adult life. But I have also dreamed of being an advocate for the disabled. However, I haven't been able to fulfill that dream because I have always felt that I do not have the supports that I need. I have also overcome my fear of getting up in front of people and finally realized I can do this!

I feel it is most important for me to go ahead with this and get myself headed in the right direction. I want to pursue training that will help me reach my goal - whatever it takes to be an advocate for the disabled. This is an obtainable goal for me. I want to help myself and others like me and I am determined.

There are several things I hope to accomplish. Number one is to assist other people with disabilities with their problems and to help them understand their rights.

Number two is to help the community have a better understanding of the needs and rights of the disabled. Most people are good and well meaning, but sometimes they just don't get it. I think I can improve

the situation for all of us!

Thanks to Carol Wilson of Supported Employment of Central Oregon for her help in preparing this article.

### ***Living in My Own Apartment***

by Marcia Dupois  
LaGrande

I lived in Fairview off and on for thirteen years. Then I moved into a group home in Lebanon. Then I moved in with my brother in Elgin to help him look after his twins.

Since March of 1999 I have been living in my own apartment. I live by myself and enjoy it. I am learning how to cook and how to prepare diabetic meals.

I enjoy having company - especially my boyfriend. I very much enjoy having and taking care of my own apartment.

I am trying to save money to go to South Dakota to a school for people who have medical needs like diabetes, cancer and heart problems. I hope to learn more about caring for myself and learn more about diabetes so that I can teach other people.

I want to teach people who do not know how to care for themselves. It has been hard to accept that diabetes is a serious disease, but I am learning to control it.

You can write for the People First Connection. We will help you.

Call 1-800-292-4154 and we will get you the help you need.

### ***Writer's Workshop***

By the Editor

Community Partnerships sponsored a writer's workshop for people who are self advocates at the annual developmental disabilities in

service at Oregon State University in June.

The People First Connection's staff and editorial board members' Charlie Hammett, Jill Flynn and Michael Bailey joined with volunteers to lead the discussion and provide supports to first time writers.

Participants were Marcia Dupuis of LaGrande, Stacy Ward of Baker City, Edna Lander of LaGrande, Jimmy Mathers of Bend, Katie Keenan of Sweet Home, Sheri Koeff of Baker City and Haley Greer of Corvallis.

All of the participants have a story in this issue and all are new contributors. Welcome and congratulations! We hope to hear more in the future from all of you!

**LETTERS... LETTERS... LETTERS... LETTERS...  
LETTERS**

Dear PFC,

Thank you for publishing my Singer letter.

I appreciate your leadership for justice.

I love you.

Lead on!

Justin Dart, Jr.

Washington, DC

Dear PFC,

I am a transition specialist for Deschutes County DD program. Due to my experience in this field I have come to the conclusion that I should be encouraging the young adults that I work with to learn more about self advocacy. I have started to encourage the people I work with to subscribe to the People First Connection.

Thank you for your high quality publication. I expect to be adding more people to your mailing list in the future.

Tom Russell  
Bend, Oregon

***Your Questions: My Privacy***

by Harriet McBryde Johnson  
Charleston, South Carolina

How can I pass up an opportunity to educate the public you ask?

There are a couple of answers.

First, I'm not sure that a street corner spiel from me will really do much good, educationally. I believe that, in general, attitudes change after actions change. When people are forced to treat us as full citizens, they will start to think of us that way.

Talking is useful as an adjunct to action, but I quit giving "what its like" talks several years ago because no matter how articulate I was, my audiences seemed to come away with the impression that I was an oddity, a museum exhibit, someone whose life was so different as to need explaining.

I now speak to varied audiences, but never about myself. I discuss disability rights, various legal and political issues, the telethon, the "right to die". I also appear publicly in support of organized labor and progressive political causes because I am a well rounded citizen and not just a disability object.

I think I have been most effective in changing audiences when I've behaved like a "real person" instead of a "crip totem" - when I've won a client's legal case, accepted a candidate's filing for public office, or tipped well for good service in a restaurant.

Second, I think it is important for the general public to learn about manners and social boundaries, just as they need to learn about disability. Actually, learning not to ask me questions about my

disability is part of learning about disability: people are learning to respect a disabled person's privacy and personal integrity.

When accosted with these questions, I do not act rude or uppity(though perhaps I may rightly feel that way). I give'em my best Dixie grin and say, "I am so sorry, but I am on my way to work and do not have time to give proper attention to a very complicated subject right now.."

The people that ask these questions may not be absorbing info about my specific disability, but they are learning that someone like me has things to do and places to go. In the end I think that is an important lesson.

I used to have more energy for that kind of thing then I do now - I have been conspicuously disabled since I grew out of a stroller into a wheel chair - and I'm 41 years old. But when you're out educating maybe it would be good to warn folks that if they asking personal questions of complete strangers, they will eventually run into someone who prefers not to answer them.

People need to know that it is no more appropriate to intrude on our space than it is to accost any other minority group and demand one-on-one instruction.

Harriet McBryde Johnson is a political activist, writer and attorney in Charleston, South Carolina.

### ***News of Interest***

By the Editor

Judy Cunio has been named the Person of the Year by United Cerebral Palsy of Oregon and Southwest Washington. She received her award and was honored at the Annual Luncheon on October 1 held in conjunction with the Annual UCP Family Conference.

Judy is a member of The People First Connection staff as well as a self advocacy specialist for Community Partnerships. She is also a Commissioner of the Oregon Disability Commission.

Congratulations, Judy!

People First of Oregon held its annual convention over Labor Day weekend in Medford. According to Cindy Helvington of the People First Connection's Editorial Board "it was a success with a few little bumps."

The Oregon Advocacy Centers report on the Oregon Department of Education's handling of Special Education complaints will be the subject of a Public Forum sponsored by Community Partnerships on November 13 at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland. The forum will take place from 9:30 am until noon at 1624 NE Hancock. The church is wheelchair accessible and child care is available with prior notice. For more information call Multnomah County contact Sonya Fisher at 503-661-8074.

Looking for a disability publication with a national perspective? Try The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience in America. Subscriptions are \$17.50 for one year of bimonthly issues. Send payment to PO Box 145, Louisville, Kentucky, 40201.

## **Integration! Not segregation!**

### *I Love Sports*

by Sheri Marie Koeff  
Baker City

My name is Sheri Marie Koeff and I live in Baker City. I like bowling and I like skiing and I love sports.

I have been involved in Special Olympics since 1990. The thing I like best is winning medals. Once I scored 100 points and won the Gold Medal in the long jump.

Once I traveled all the way to Waterloo, Iowa for a bowling tournament. I like regular bowling and not the fancy stuff like cosmic bowling.

In all my bowling team has eighty members. Our team is completely co-ed.

I have my own bowling ball. It is gold and blue. My ball weighs five pounds. Not only do I have my own ball but I have my own bag to carry it in. I am a serious bowler.

My last tournament was last spring. My biggest supporters are my mom and dad. They always come and root for me. My brother also loves to bowl. I love to compete in Special Olympics.

I also love to ski.

The hardest thing about skiing is falling down.

The best thing about skiing is seeing the mountains.

### **Vote!**

If you are 18 years old and a resident of Oregon you have the right to vote!

No matter what your disability is you have the right to vote.

Be powerful!

Vote in every election!

### ***Statement of Self Advocates As Leaders and People First of Oregon***

We believe that being in control of our lives means:

being your own self and not letting anybody tell you what to do

being able to make decisions and take the consequences

being able to make mistakes

living the life one wants

getting help when needed

being responsible and respected

just like everyone else.

Some of the things that get in the way of being in control of our lives are:

people who tell us what to do and make decisions for us,

no transportation to get us where we want to go,

not enough money and no control over our money,

people who tell you "you can't",

people who don't listen to us,

not enough job training and support

people who don't let us make decisions for ourselves,

other peoples attitudes.

Some of the things we can do about it are:

learning to be assertive and strong self advocates,

organizing and working together with a stronger voice,

changing the rules to meet our needs,

writing and talking to our legislators.

Some of the things others can do are:

give us more money than what barely meets our basic needs,

give us flexibility in spending our money,

give us a chance to make the rules,

listen to us,,

give us a little support to live our lives just like everybody else.

### ***Keeping Friendships***

by Katie Keenan  
Sweet Home

My name is Katie Keenan and I live in Sweet Home which is close to Lebanon in Linn County, Oregon. I have done Special Olympics for the last four years. It is one of my favorite activities.

I participate in three events: bowling, swimming and track. I have won medals in all of the events.

My favorite event is bowling because I like the excitement of hitting the pins. Whenever I throw a gutter ball my teammates laugh with me. Together we have a great time.

I enjoy track and swimming because I get to participate with my friends while getting good exercise and staying healthy.

Special Olympics occurs throughout the year and participants get to travel around the state to attend competitions. I love sleeping in motels. Its fun to look in the drawers and check out what the motel has like televisions and personal amenities like shampoo and soap.

Since I graduated from High School last year Special Olympics has allowed me to stay in touch with my friends. It feels good to stay in touch.

It is important to me to know what my friends are doing and to share what I am up to.

I would like to share that I am a self advocate. I stand up for myself and make my own decisions about my life.

e-mail your story to the People First Connection.

Our address is [jonna@teleport.com](mailto:jonna@teleport.com)

### ***Our New Home***

by Edna Lander  
LaGrande

Richard and I were living in the Green Tree Apartments. One day Richard looked in the paper and saw a picture of a house. We went to look at it.

I said "well, I fell in love with the upstairs." Finally we found a place closer to uptown. I like that a lot.

I can easily go to town and walk home. I just love uptown. Our new home is close to Safeway and the Post Office and anywhere I want to go.

Now I have a special place for my chair and I can sit and look out the window and see all the mountains. I just love it!

I really love coming to the In Service Training here at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

I love to come and go through the presentations and sessions and really understand what is being said to us.

Now I have to go back to my new home in LaGrande and I hope to come back to Corvallis next year.

### ***Community Organizing***

By the Editor

If you want more information on becoming a stronger leader or starting an advocacy group for self advocates in your community why not call Jill Flynn of Community Partnerships?

Jill can provide you with information on Self Advocates As Leaders, Partners In Policy Making, Writer's Workshops and other opportunities to be part of the self advocacy movement.

You can call Jill toll free from anywhere in Oregon at 1-800-292-4154. Leave a message and she will call you back.

## ***My Busy Life***

by Stacy Ward  
Baker City

I am on the Arc Board of Baker City. I am also on the County Developmental Disabilities Council. There are many other self advocates on the council.

I am helping parents of children with Downs Syndrome because I am a person with Downs Syndrome. I am 37 years old.

I will soon be on the staff of Step Forward. My responsibilities will be to work as staff to help people who have severe behaviors.

Also I will work with clients like me to help them become a better person.

Some of the people at Step Forward are on the wait list for services. We will have a case manager to help them with their problems.

We have providers we need to contact to serve as group homes or foster homes for people who are coming out of Fairview.

I work with the budget and the phones to help people find jobs to support them in semi-independent living.

Currently I am helping someone move into their own home. The home will be in Baker City and it is exciting for everyone.

I also help others to participate in Special Olympics. I have my own medals from different events in different states.

If people want to participate in Special Olympics they can contact me in Baker City. My number is in the phone book. My phone is blocked so you can call me but I cannot call you back. I can't call out so just keep trying.

I am a fan of country music. My dream is to write country music and make it available to other people. I have had some of my music published. I know all the songs and stars. I am going to Nashville in October and will write about my trip. I will keep a diary and share it

with you when I return.

### ***Life In Central Oregon***

by Jimmy Mathers  
Bend

For the past ten years I have worked at a grocery store in Bend called "Food For Less." My title is 'cardboard manager'. I recycle the cardboard. To do that I use a big machine called a bailer. I create large bails of cardboard and put them on a pallet which is picked up by a truck and taken away for recycling.

The other part of my job is keeping the pop machine full. That is hard to do. I have to get a key and open the machine and then fill it from the shelves. I like my job.

Before this job I worked at the Opportunity Center for 10 years.

For quite a while now I have lived in my own apartment here in Bend. I have a Bugee Bird named "Sunshine" with yellow and red eyes.

My family has been in business here in Central Oregon for a long time. The name of our family business is Mathers Well Drilling "since 1959". Also there is a road in Bend named after my family.

I attended school in Redmond. I was always in special education classes. I liked my time in school My favorite memory of school is the time we took a trip to Sunriver and went swimming.

Once I went to Branson, Missouri with TRIPS, Inc. I saw 'Box Car Willy', Mel Tillis and his daughter, Pam. I went to the Silver Dollar City theme park and rode on all of the rides. I was proud of that trip because I paid for it all with money that I had earned on my job.

This is the second time that I have attended a developmental disability in-service at Oregon State University. It is really fun for me to stay in the college dorm. I like the speakers and workshops. I went to a wonderful 'Mother Lode' concert and am looking forward

to coming again next year.

I am an "Early Riser Kiwanian". That means that I belong to a Kiwanis Club that holds its meetings early in the morning. Kiwanis is an organization that raises money for good causes. One of the things we raise money for is to support the Mount Hood Kiwanis Camp. That is a camp for kids with disabilities.

I am 40 years old and when I think about life I want to continue to work here in Central Oregon.

I participate in Special Olympics. I am a skier. I have won first place medals in cross country skiing.

In 1984 I went to the International Special Olympics at Lake Tahoe and won second place in cross country skiing. I also got to see the "Charlie Daniels Band" perform.

By the time this article gets published I will have attended the Deschutes County Fair. I am looking forward to hearing a concert there by the group "Alabama."

### ***A Survivors' Story***

by Haley Greer  
Corvallis

My name is Haley Greer. I am a 22 year old head injury survivor. I attended Philomath High School and graduated in 1994.

After graduation I worked as a nanny in the state of Georgia for a year. I came back to Oregon and immediately moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico where I lived for another year. I came back to Oregon and lived with my cousin in Portland for six months.

Then I got the idea to move to Maui, Hawaii. For the first few weeks I lived in a youth hostel while I looked for work. I found a job working on an organic farm in exchange for rent. That job worked out nicely but I got "Island Fever" and decided to return to the mainland.

I did not have a ride so I decided to hitch hike to the airport. Obviously that turned out to be a very bad decision. I was very threatened by the driver who picked me up and rather than deal with him I decided to jump from the moving vehicle. Hitting the road at that speed put me in danger of death. After receiving emergency treatment I was transported by helicopter from the Maui Memorial Hospital to Queen's Medical Center in Honolulu. There I received extensive surgery including the placement of a shunt to relieve pressure in my head. I also went into a coma that lasted for five weeks.

When I awoke from the coma it was decided that I could be released and return to Oregon for therapy in Eugene. Upon completion of that I moved back to Philomath to live with my parents and little sister.

While I was living at home the State of Oregon paid to have someone come and take me to my outpatient therapy here in Corvallis. Then I had the opportunity to move to Corvallis and live with another young adult with a disability.

When I moved to Corvallis I was offered a place in the High School Transition program of an organization called Work Unlimited.

Since the beginning of my participation Work Unlimited has been helpful to me in many different aspects of my life. One of these has been many opportunities to participate in speaking engagements.

My friend Robin has helped me to develop some real life management/coping skills. Like when I was going through some particularly trying times with my alcoholic boyfriend. Robin helped me by suggesting that I go to Alanon and she also helped me by finding the location and schedule of the meetings.

In closing I would just like to say that being in the High School Transition Program at Work Unlimited has done way more than just helping me to get a job.

They have given me many reasons to be thankful that I am still alive.

If you would like Community Partnerships to put on a writer's workshop for your group call us at 1-800-292-4154 to arrange it.

The People First Connection is funded by the Oregon Developmental Disabilities Council

**Editorial Board:** Margaret Whipple, Charlie Hammett, Gayle Gardner, Dayna Davis, Cindy Helvington, Ruth Morris

**Staff:** Michael T. Bailey, editor, Jill Flynn, Judy Cunio

*Thanks to Charlotte Duncan for her support of self advocacy in Oregon.*

LET US HEAR  FROM YOU!!  
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