

# **The People First** **Connection**



**The Voice of Self-Advocacy in Oregon**  
**Published by Self Advocates As Leaders**

---

## **Coming Back**

**Cheryl Coonce  
Redmond**

My husband John and I are wheelchair users. I have cerebral palsy and he has Spinal Bifida and is a double amputee. On September 26, 2004 we celebrated our 13<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

In 1995 we moved from Kansas City to Central Oregon. We moved into an assisted living place. Living there was fine until we started working in a sheltered workshop. Our working hours did not coincide with meal hours at the assisted living facility. There we shared a one-bedroom apartment, which gets a little small when both people use wheelchairs. We really wanted to live on our own.

In 1998 I went to classes to get my GED. Transportation was a

problem. We saw an advertisement for a van with a lift. We went to look at it and made a down payment of \$5.00 to hold it. Our local newspaper did an article on us the following Saturday and an anonymous donor sent in the full amount for the van. Other people sent in donations too. So we had enough money to buy the van, license it and buy the insurance.

That's when we decided to start looking for a different place to live. We found a two bedroom, wheelchair accessible apartment. We lived there for five years. We applied for a Habitat for Humanity Home. We did not get it the first year, but we applied again the following year, and that time we succeeded.

I have worked on advocacy issues in the past and in 1998 Governor Kitzhaber appointed me to serve on the Public Utilities Commission with the telecommunications division. Those meetings required

## Coming Back

overnight trips. Finding someone to provide my supports got harder and harder. Finally I had to resign for lack of supports.

I had also been learning a lot about advocacy work while I was in Partners In Policy Making. Even there I had issues finding an aide who could come with me once a month to Salem. I did graduate in 2000 and I am very proud of that accomplishment.

In December of 2001 I developed severe acid reflux, and my doctor thought I should have a feeding tube. I developed peritonitis because the tube leaked and I became very ill. The doctor told my husband that I might not live through that illness.

I was in a coma for a month at the hospital and then went to a nursing home for two months. I finally got to come home and started rebuilding my strength. I was able to go back to work running a shredder at the sheltered workshop.

In November of 2003 my husband and I moved in our Habitat Home. We celebrated our first Christmas at our very own home. Our dream

of owning our own home had come true!

Due to funding cuts at the sheltered workshop site I was unable to do any work other than the shredder and I got very tired of that. I really wanted to get back into advocacy work.

In April of 2004 flexible funding gave me the opportunity to do the work I have always dreamed of. I was able to quit my sheltered workshop job. I hired someone from the Life Research Project to be my support person.

I am now a member of the Developmental Disabilities Council in Deschutes County and serve on the Quality Assurance Committee. I am on the editorial board of *The People First Connection*. I am also coordinating a forum in Bend and working on disability issues with the City of Redmond.

I do this work because I had a case manager who listened to what I wanted to do with my life. That gave me the opportunity to use my support dollars to make my dreams of advocacy work come true.

This can happen for everyone if you know what you want to do and work very hard to get it.

## Advocate's Corner

# GO! Project

**Judy Cunio,**  
**Self Advocacy Coordinator**  
**Oregon Council on**  
**Developmental Disabilities**  
**Salem**

By now, I bet a lot of you have heard something about the GO! Project and have wondered what it was all about. If not, I am going to write about it anyway. Ha!!

The "GO" stands for grassroots organizing. It is a project of the DD Coalition to keep everyone informed on legislative and other issues that relate to people with DD and their families. The first big task is to build a strong statewide network so that everyone will have the same information. They are also working on several fact sheets for people to have. Fact sheets are very important for a number of reasons. They are a great way to share facts and personal stories with legislators and to really give them something to think about before they make decisions. Fact sheets help legislators see how their decisions affect the people they represent.

Fact sheets also give people a chance to tell their story. If you have a story (and EVERYONE does), we want to hear from you. We would also like you to send a picture because pictures have a bigger impact than just words.

Now is the time for the GO! Project to really take off and get going because the legislative session has begun. And it is going to be a tough one.

We need all of the pictures and stories we can get. Not only for the legislators but the media and the people who do not know the issues that people with disabilities face.

Please send your stories and photos to:

Sharon Lewis  
2713 NE 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Portland, OR. 97212  
[slewis@easystreet.com](mailto:slewis@easystreet.com)

---

---

***The People First Connection*** wants your story. For supports in writing simply email [mtbclarion@comcast.net](mailto:mtbclarion@comcast.net) or call (503) 249-5316.

All stories appearing in ***The People First Connection*** are subject to editing for spelling, grammar and content.

# My Job

**Jessica Boyer**  
**Portland**

Every Thursday I work at my vet's clinic. I see lots of animals. I give them love and I play with them. Sometimes they just need to be held.

I wash the windows, fill the baskets with syringes, stick labels on Advantage medicine packages, give the animals kibbles and water, and fold towels neatly. I help hold the dogs and cats steady on the scale when they are being weighed and then help them into the lab so the doctors can examine them.

My boss, Bob the vet, has a parrot named Bruno. Bruno comes with Bob to the clinic to make the other animals happy. He loves to tease Bob's dog, Angus, and Bob's cats, Marty and Yoda. When I change the paper on the bottom of Bruno's cage, he sometimes goes outside the cage. While I clean up after him, he sits on top of his cage and ignores me. Sometimes Bruno makes a lot of noise and flaps his wings. Everyone gets annoyed until I spray him with cold water and he stops.

I love coming to the vet's every Thursday. Sometimes I go to the Marsee Bakery after I'm done working. I usually buy a butter croissant and an orange-glazed blackberry bun. Then I come home and watch cartoons and relax, and get lots of kisses from my own three dogs.

---

# Baseball

**Jim Frost**  
**McMinnville**

Back in 1955 I, Jim Frost, was a pitcher for Little League in my hometown. During that season I struck out 955 batters.

I was so good and my pitches were so fast that a scout from the Atlanta Braves came to watch me. Not long after that I signed a contract to pitch for the Atlanta Braves.

But during the training camp I threw so hard that I injured my throwing arm and had to be treated. It turned out to be a career ending injury for me.

But I have happy memories of my chance to play in the big leagues.

Now I live in McMinnville and am just a big baseball fan.

# Getting Out With Self Advocates

**There are many opportunities to learn about what's happening in Oregon and to make connections!**

## **TRY SOME OF THESE!**

**Advocacy Days:** Advocacy Days will meet at the State Capitol in Salem. Lunch will be provided so make sure to RSVP in advance.

**February 15<sup>th</sup> in Salem**

**March 17<sup>th</sup> in Salem**

**April 20<sup>th</sup> in Salem**

For more information and to RSVP call this toll free number  
1-877-581-2726

**Self-Advocacy Forum:** Learn what it means to be a self-advocate.

**March 8<sup>th</sup> in Bend**

Contact Bonnie at 1-541-322-7554, or email

[kdrew@co.deschutes.or.us](mailto:kdrew@co.deschutes.or.us) and let and let her know you are coming

**Accessible Voting Vendor Fair:**  
The Secretary of State is hosting a vendor fair for accessible voting machines. This is your chance to tell him what kind of voting machine works best for you.

**April 4<sup>th</sup> State Capitol Building in Salem.**

For more information call 1-503-725-9609 or 1-888-589-1664.

**The Arc Convention and the Direct Supports Conference:**

They will be held at the LaSelle Center in Corvallis.

**June 15 – 17 DS Conference**

**June 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Arc Convention**

Please call 1-541-753-1711, for more information.

**We hope to see YOU at all or some of these wonderful training, networking and advocacy opportunities!!**

# Fudge

**Jeff Deeks**  
**Portland**

I like the smell of fudge when it is cooking. When we make it, I have the most important job. While other people add the ingredients, I stir. It seems to take a long time because we have to keep the heat low so that all that sugar doesn't burn.

We wait until the very end, after the pan is off the burner, before adding the chocolate chips; chocolate burns so easily. It takes somebody as strong as me to stir the glop after we add the chocolate chips. And if somebody gets the bright idea of adding nuts, even I can barely stir it.

As soon as everything's mixed together, I quickly pour the fudge into a buttered cake tin, and, when it's cool, we cut it into squares, the bigger the better.

Fudge makes a good Christmas gift for somebody you love, somebody like Cynthia.

# I Wasn't Born in Oregon

**Asha Soiney**  
**McMinnville**

I was born in Calcutta, India. Now I live in McMinnville, Oregon. Before that I lived in Minnesota.

I was born premature and my mom didn't think I would survive. But I made it. When I was born I could wear doll clothes because I was so small.

We moved to McMinnville from Minnesota because my wheel chair would not work in the snow.

We came to Oregon on an airplane. I was the last person off the flight because they made the babies wait until the end.

I still have my basket and clothes I came with. My family adopted me, but I wasn't the first one to go to my mom. I was the second one because the first baby my mom adopted died at birth.

# I'm a Lucky Guy

**Bob Lee  
McMinnville**

I lived in Amity, Oregon most of my life but now I live in McMinnville. My dad bought a house here. When I was a small baby I lived with my mom and dad but my parents got a divorce and now I live with my dad. My parents got married when they were 18 years old. I think 18 is too young to get married.

I am 22 years old and I am not married.

I have an older brother named Brian. He has a fiancé named Stephanie. I am going to be a groomsman at their wedding. I am really excited about that. The wedding is going to be on my grandma's farm.

I have two sisters. Ashley is younger than me. My older sister is Kim. She is married and has two sons, Nicholas and Tyler and she has a stepdaughter named Meghan. So I am an uncle! My girlfriend's name is Andrea.

Andrea and I went to the prom together two years ago. It was fun. We took my friend's dad's old car.

Once for Halloween I was Shrek. I love Halloween because it is my birthday.

I work for a place called Mid-Valley where I make key chains. I have worked here for a while and I make some money! I get paid every Friday! I have lots of friends on my job and I really like working here.

Next to Halloween, Christmas is my favorite holiday because we have friends and family over and open gifts.

I really like old cars. My favorite car is a Mustang APT cruiser. My favorite colors for cars are red and black.

I also like houses. I especially like log cabins.

My life is full of good experiences. I have never picked a fight with anyone. In a few months I am going to get my own apartment. I look forward to that.

I am really lucky because I like my family and for the most part we get along.

## Lucky Guy

My life does not have too many bad experiences. But some of my experiences are too scary to talk about.

I went to McMinnville High School where we did lots of group projects. I was in the choir.

After High School I went to Post-High. During Post-High I had five girlfriends. They were always helping me. I liked one more than the others and that was Andrea. My life is pretty happy now!

## A Story About My Job

**Kara Romanaggi**  
**Portland**

In the spring of 2003 I graduated from a program at Portland State University. As part of that program I volunteered in the PSU day care center. They thought I did such a good job that they hired me back and now I am a teacher.

I remember the day I got paid for the first time. That was a happy day for me.

I love to work with children and help them learn. Sometimes we help solve their problems, but only if they really need our help.

Sometimes the children find it hard to listen when we tell them it's time for cleanup, and that can be frustrating for any teacher. It's the hardest part of my job. When that happens I get down at their eye level and look them right in the eye and say, "That's not okay. You need to listen." Then I help them pick up.

My job is important to me in lots of ways and I love it!

## Friends

**Ted Combs**  
**Grants Pass**

In the last issue of *The People First Connection* I read about the need for friends. Janet Smith of Mt. Angel talked about how she is lonely. Would she or anyone else like to be pen pals with me? If so, please contact *The People First Connection* and we can exchange addresses.

I will tell you something about myself. I need more friends too.

## Friends

I am dyslexic, which means I mix up letters and it is hard to write. But I get help.

I have worked in a nursery for twelve years. I am not paid very much and would like a better job, but I do not want to leave my friends. Friends are better than money.

I live in a house. I have my own kitchen, bedroom and bathroom and we are fixing a living room for me. My father lives in the other half of the house and takes me to work. Without rides from him I would be in trouble.

I have a friend who lives in Hawaii. I can visit. On one trip I caught two striped Marlin. I needed help to lift them. I also took Hula lessons.

I have played guitar for a long time. I also belong to a square dance club. We are called "The Charlie Browns." I am a good dancer. The club is going on a square dance cruise to Alaska and I am going with them.

I also belong to 4-H and Special Olympics. I have won awards for

swimming, rifle shooting and gardening.

I have gone to three different colleges. In the first one the teacher would not take me because he said he didn't have enough time to teach me. He said I could come if my dad did. He did come and I finished and got a certificate.

In another school I took a music class for two years by myself but the funds were cut for the school and they didn't offer it anymore. Now I have a private teacher.

In another state I took a class in welding and did okay. Some of the people in the class kept calling me a bad name and were mean. I was ashamed of being me. I never went back there.

Here in Grants Pass I go to band practice with a local club of musicians. I shoot archery and help out with our People First group. I also go to church.

I am in a program called Creative Supports and my personal assistant is Diane Pierce. I like her. She listens well.

I have three different teachers to teach and help me. I am looking forward to the cruise to Alaska.

# Sports

**Marty Fulcher**  
**McMinnville**

I play Special Olympics basketball. Ed Lee was my coach. Sometimes my mom comes to watch me and brings along her granddaughter.

By passing the ball back and forth to teammates forty times I learned how to do a chest pass.

We have a new coach now. His name is Brian. Brian is tall and he can reach the rim of the basket.

Zach Slayter is on my team. He works where I do so I have a teammate at my work site.

When we ride the bus to work we joke around and call each other names. We call each other “home dogs.” That’s what we are – we’re rock and roll kids.

We do drills. We run back and forth and side to side. I am the leader of that drill.

We are looking forward to our regional tournament in downtown Beaverton. The state tournament will be in Springfield. We will take a school bus to get there.

When I come home from work there is nothing to do and I get bored sitting around. So I shoot baskets in my driveway. I practice shooting to the right side, corner, and left side and in the front of the rim.

I run and grab the rim – slam-dunk!! I stick my tongue out like Michael Jordan. I call myself Air Jordan.

I have a friend with long hair. He is tall and has a cool sports car. He lets me wash his car and clean it out. I am a good car washer. Sometimes I find money underneath the driver’s seat. I put the money in the part in between the seats where the stick shift is.

My friend’s name is Dan and he lives in Independence. Sometimes he invites me over to do projects. Like one time when we were cutting boards and making a stairway in the backyard for his parents.

His mom makes homemade potato salad. Oh man, I love that stuff. His sister makes PowerAde for us.

I often play with his Nintendo game. By watching him I learned how to make it shoot. He and I call the radio station and make requests for songs we like. I like Dan a lot.

# I Am A Better Person

**Ashley Lee  
McMinnville**

I believe that my disability has made me a better person. That may sound funny to some of you but I know it is true.

I was born with a mild form of cerebral palsy. The disability affects the left side of my body. My arm is partly paralyzed and I wear an AFO on my leg to help me walk better. That is an orthopedic device.

Sometimes it was difficult to grow up with cerebral palsy. For instance I had a lot of frustration trying to learn to tie my shoe. I also had trouble carrying things. But by far the worst was being bullied in school.

But in spite of all that I think of my disability as a blessing in disguise. I use my life experiences to help others like me. By sharing my story and being open about my disability I have made a difference in other people's lives as well.

Sometimes all people need to get them through a hard time is a friendly smile.

I know that having cerebral palsy has made me a better person. I went to Chemeketa Community College and graduated with a certificate to be a teacher's assistant in special education.

---

## Writing

**Karl Gunderson  
McMinnville**

It all started when I began writing a book. Writing made me appreciate my faith in God and all that he gave to us. I write so that we all remember to thank him.

No matter how we see it he has given us life. God is the creator of all life and we should have faith in him. We can learn from him how to live a good life and sometimes a long life.

It is up to each of us to see the heavens in whatever way we can.

If you had been through all I have been through with my disability you would be able to appreciate the wisdom that experience has given to me. I am a man who can show you much about life.