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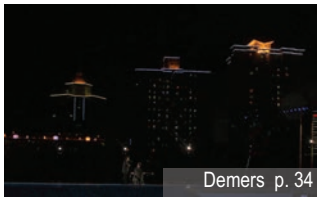
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Isaac Lidsky and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg p. 48


Demers p. 34


Letnes p. 26


Tangshan p. 16

Editorial pages have VOICEYE codes for a new level of content access - *Enjoy*

CONTENTS

6 ASHLEY FIOLEK — Three Weeks in Europe!

8 HUMOR — Chit Chat

10 GERI JEWELL — False Pride

12 LONG HAUL PAUL — Challenges, Choices and Chances

16 CHINA — The Great Tangshan Earthquake: Part 2

26 STEPHEN LETNES — Motifs & Melodies

30 OUCH! — BBC's Humor Podcast

34 DONNIE DEMERS — Music in an Old Soul

44 NEIL SQUIRE SOCIETY — Assistive Technology in Canada

48 ISAAC LIDSKY — *Eyes Wide Open!*

59 *JAN* — Should I or Shouldn't I?

62 *ABILITY'S* Crossword Puzzle

66 Events & Conferences

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- For High Contrast modes, under the "Setting" selection, press the button with four colored squares.
- To access the 58 Language Translator, press your phone's "Option" button, and select "Translate". To translate into another language, select the language button to the right, choose your language of preference, then hit the "Translate" button to the right of the selected language.





Hey everyone, I'm writing this from New York City because the legendary Carnegie Deli is my dad's favorite restaurant ever, and it's closing down in December after almost 80 years. So that's why we are here. Can you tell that my family loves to eat? Ha ha.

I'm just back from Europe with my friend Lindsey. It was one of the absolute best times of my life! We got to try a lot of different dishes in each country we went to, including Italy, Switzerland, France, Germany, Austria and London. We stayed for three weeks, and really enjoyed London a lot because it's a lot like New York City and they speak English.



At the beginning of our trip, Lindsey and I both got super sick for three days and were stuck in our room for two of them. It was awful, but fortunately we survived by taking a bunch of meds and sipping plenty of hot tea, so we could get back to exploring the world beyond our hotel.

Austria is one of my favorite countries; it's just gorgeous. We found this cute Irish pub there, which was a lot of fun because the bartender spoke English and came to talk to us. We were supposed to stay in Austria for two nights, but as we were driving the hour

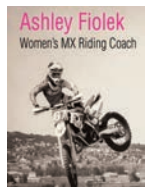


or so from Salzburg to Hallstatt that first morning, it started to snow.

We were panicked inching along in our rental car through the mountains. Afraid that we might get stuck in a blizzard, we kept heading south to Gemona, Italy, about 70 miles north of Venice. There we celebrated with a really good glass of red wine, so it was all good. Our last few days were spent in Italy and then London, before heading back to the states.

It's really nice to be back home, but I think we're ready to go back already. Maybe after the holiday season. Enjoy everyone and stay safe. ■ ABILITY

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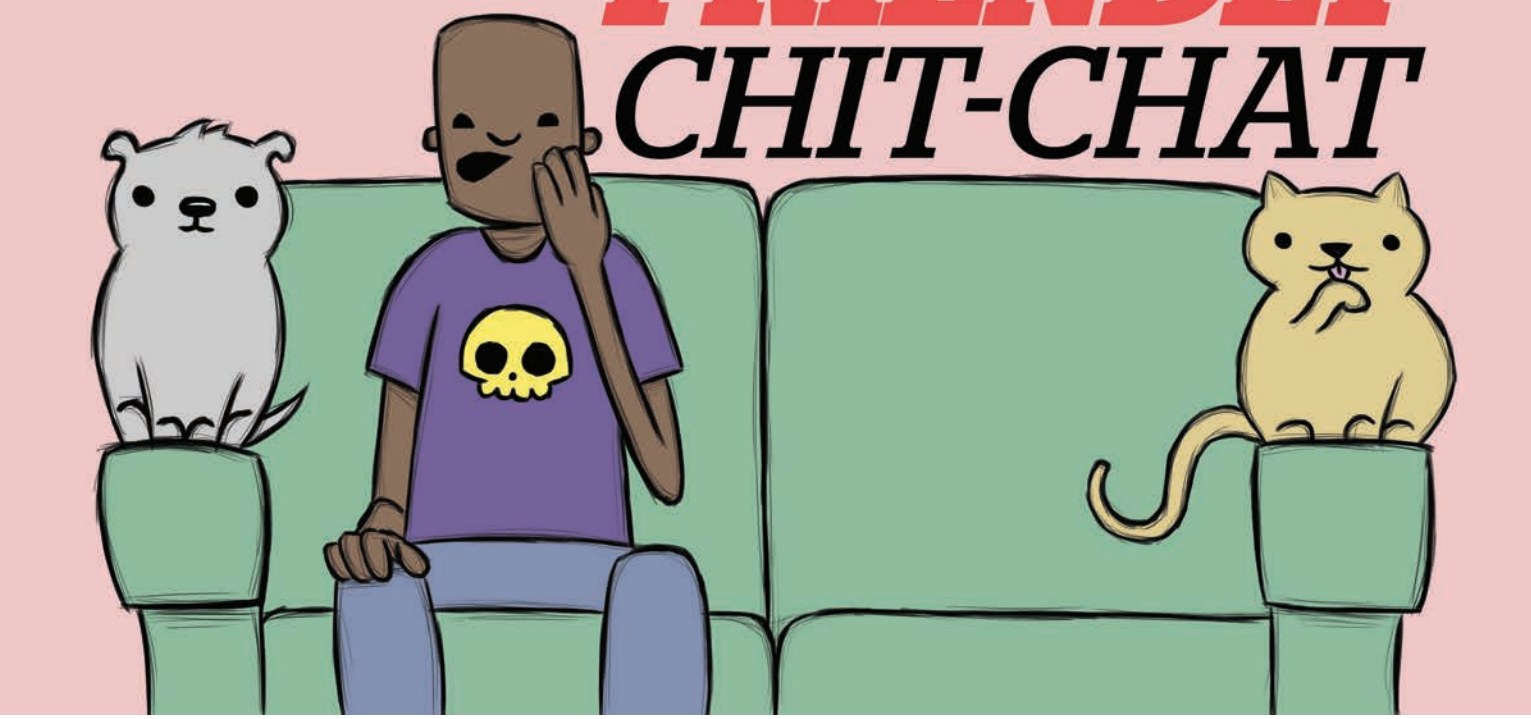
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FRIENDLY CHIT-CHAT



It's good to have friends in life. They say that when you're older, you can count all your friends on one hand. Where did all the friends in our lives go? One week you're doing everything with this friend, from dining out to talking on the phone and then, poof, they're out of your life. Many times, friendships just peter out. Each of you got what you needed from the other, at that specific time in your lives, and then you moved on. You look for a new friend who can offer a little more than the last one. Sometimes, the break up isn't mutual. The friend is calling and asking you what you want to do that night, and then you have no choice but to start lying, "I've got this thingy that I signed up for that I have to go to."

"What thingy?" they question. "You never told me about a thingy?"

"Yeah, well, it's one of those thingy's that's gonna take up a lot of my time. But I'll call you when the thingy gets over. We'll do the lunch thingy," you respond.

When you're younger, friends are easy to find. They're everywhere. Friends of friends eventually become your friend, and so on. You have some main friends, and then the fallback friends. When a main friend can't meet up with you, then you move to the fallback friend. The fallback friend is undoubtedly under the impression that he or she is a main friend, otherwise, they wouldn't do anything with you. Then, when the fallback friend doesn't hear from you in a while, it dawns on them, "Wait a second, son-of-a-bitch, I was just a fallback friend."

Now that I'm older, I'm finding my friends are dead, in rehab, jail, or simply missing. It's rare to have a friend remain with you throughout your life. Why is that? Well, it's because we're humans, and given enough time, we're either going to piss someone off or they're going to piss us off. Plus, friends can take a lot of energy, and as you get older you just don't have the energy that you once had.

"You want to meet up somewhere tonight?" they ask.

"No, that means I gotta find my car keys then walk out to my car. Don't you have any other friends you can call?" you reply.

Friends are important. The more friends you have, the more people to talk about to your other friends, behind their backs. That's the good thing about a friend, they're there so that you can unload all the things that annoy you about your closest mates. And they're in your corner, nodding and agreeing to every whiny complaint you spew, having no clue that they're next on the list. This may be the main purpose of a friend, to lend an ear to your bitching. Usually, people who don't have friends have pets and it's not unusual for them to tell their dog about all the cat's flaws and vice-versa. It's why many pets always want to go outside and why many become runaways. And, when the owner's gone, the cat and dog are bitching to each other about their master.

"The dude is weird," the dog remarks. "He never once licks himself."

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"Yeah I know," the cat responds. "He's disgusting."

Having a friend can be a good or bad thing. The friend who takes you to the airport or helps you move, priceless. The friend who always needs to borrow money, worthless. There always seems to be more worthless friends than priceless friends. Every so often, there's that friend who's kind of an in-between. This friend takes you to the airport, but then wants you to pay him for gas.

It's tough when you think you're someone's friend, but you're not. You find out that they were out to dinner with some other friends, and you run through a checklist in your mind of what you might've done that prevented you from being invited. You can't help but feel you're being cheated on. Friend adultery is brutal. Why didn't they ask you to come? Maybe somebody said something. Maybe they heard you said something. Or, worst of all, they just don't like you.

There's nothing worse than having to meet up with a friend that you just don't want to be with. They're still a friend, it's just that, well… you don't want to be around them. They're known as the "go-to chums." When you need someone just to hang out with, talk to, or unload your burdens and none of the good friends are available, these are the ones you call. They're usually the last resort, but they serve a useful purpose. They're usually very nice people. You're kind of the selfish one.

Now, having a best friend is a good thing, but you shouldn't let people know who that is. You can hurt someone's feelings. "Jim, you're a good friend, but Jack here, well, he's my best friend. By 'best' I mean he is better than you in every sense of the word. Don't get me wrong, you're good but, he is the best. Now if he can't help me move tomorrow, there's good possibility that you could slide into the 'best' slot."

These days, most of the friends that someone has are on Facebook. You know they are your friends because they must "friend" you. Sometimes you never even talk to one of them but, they're still listed as a friend. You can also "unfriend" them… for no reason (but, we all know it's because of all the cat videos that they post). Facebook is good, because it lets you know how many friends you have. "I got 432 friends! Damn. It's a shame I have no idea who half these people are."

They say that you can never have enough friends. That might be true, but three is good enough for me, more than that, complications set in. They call you. They want your time. Or, they want to go out and do something. When you get older you realize that's crazy talk. The couch is comfortable. Your favorite TV show is on. Besides, you got Facebook. Can't my friends just leave me alone? My God, I'll call 'em when I need 'em. ■ ABILITY



by Jeff Charlebois

FALSE PRIDE

Pride is pleasure arising from a man's thinking too highly of himself. ~Baruch Spinoza

I've had cerebral palsy since birth, which most people perceive as a disability, but which I believe it has put me on a path of monumental evolvement and understanding of the human condition.

From my initial diagnosis at 18 months, to being placed in special education, being bullied and ridiculed by other children, and ultimately being discriminated against in the job market, I have repeatedly bumped up against what others perceive as my disabilities.

I've also been exposed to other people's perceived disabilities. People who are blind, deaf, wheelchair users… Those who have muscular dystrophy, autism, Down syndrome, Bipolar Disorder, HIV, AIDS, or cancer are often viewed as diminished and worth less.

In truth, these conditions are only disabling if you see them as such. This applies to those who have them or live with them, as well as those who don't, and are looking in from the outside. However, on any given day, any one of us could cross over by acquiring a life-altering disability.

We live in a physical world of challenges, but the real crippling disabilities in life are disabilities of the spirit, which have the potential to threaten our survival as humankind.

They include but are not limited to:

- *Hatred*
- *Prejudice*
- *Bullying*
- *Deception*
- *Greed*
- *Envy*
- *Loss of faith*
- *Despair*
- *Hypocrisy*
- *False Pride*

Most of us can identify with one or more of these disabilities in one way or another, but the one not everyone fully understands is false pride.

We are more familiar with other false 'hoods like false security, false prophets, false alarms and false teeth. Each of these terms tells us that the thing being described is not the real deal.

So, what is not true about pride? Is not someone's pride and joy something to feel good about it? Our children can be our pride and joy. We can take pride in a hard-won victory, like graduating from college or finishing a grueling marathon.

Feeling proud of our accomplishments gives us a wonderful rush, but when we are prideful for the wrong reasons, then that is false pride and it carries serious consequences.

The reason I have singled out false pride is because we are seeing a lot of it in our recent elections—during the campaign and after.

We witnessed it during the campaign where millions of people arrogantly believed that one candidate would win the election hands down. Then in the aftermath, we've dealt with more false pride in what has felt like the "winners" gloating, and the "losers" scrambling to understand how they bungled an election that they should have had "in the bag."

Many of us have come to realize that we took false pride in our nation's seeming progress in such areas as race, gender equality, and religious tolerance. We thought we were well beyond the us-and-them polarity of bygone eras.

True pride is only attainable when we do not bring harm and pain to ourselves or others. Unfortunately this election has opened a Pandora's Box of rampant false pride from all sides.

America hasn't been so divided since Civil War broke out between the North and the South in 1861. After our most recent, bitter campaign season, however, we are once again charged with coming together as a nation, showing respect for one another, and reigning in such disabilities of the spirit as hatred, bigotry and despair.

I am all for peaceful demonstrations and movement towards a kinder, more tolerant society. I understand the power in admitting the error of our ways, and becoming more tolerant of ourselves and others. That said, I firmly believe that what is at the root of all false pride is fear: fear of what others will think, fear of failure, and fear of losing our faith.

No matter where we are headed and what transpires, the 2016 presidential election has proven to be a catalyst in bringing to the surface the bigotry and racism that has always been here, albeit hidden and smoldering. We have an opportunity to show the rest of the world that America will not tolerate hatred, bigotry or bullying of any kind. As a certain First Lady affirmed: "When they go low, we go high."

We must ponder the flight of the American eagle and soar higher, gaining strength and perspective in overcoming disabilities of the spirit. America was built upon the Constitutional rights and liberty of all Americans. We're not there yet, but if we learn to really to listen and accept one another, we can grow and evolve into better human beings. And that is something we would all be proud of. ■ ABILITY

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Challenges, Choices and Chances

As I sit here in the Salt Lake City airport waiting for an impromptu flight home, I cannot scrape together a single bad thought about the motorcycle I am leaving behind; possibly for good. Well, OK, maybe just one bad thought; I still have 18 payments to make on it!

The bike and I met three and a half years ago, and we soon became fast friends. Over this time, we rode 173,000 miles together through sun, wind, fog, rain, snow, sleet and hail. We have ridden from sunrise, through day and night, to see the sun rise again. We have ridden through every month of the year, in temperatures from -10 to 120 degrees. We rode through all the lower 48 states, across all of Canada and even Alaska. We rode every single mile as a team on a mission to raise money and awareness for multiple sclerosis (MS).

Although I always ride alone, our adventure would have gone nowhere without the support of my sponsors. Twisted Throttle, Aerostich, Yamaha, Bridgestone, BMS Saddles, Spectro Oil and EAZCycle all contributed gear and accessories to help make my journey a success.

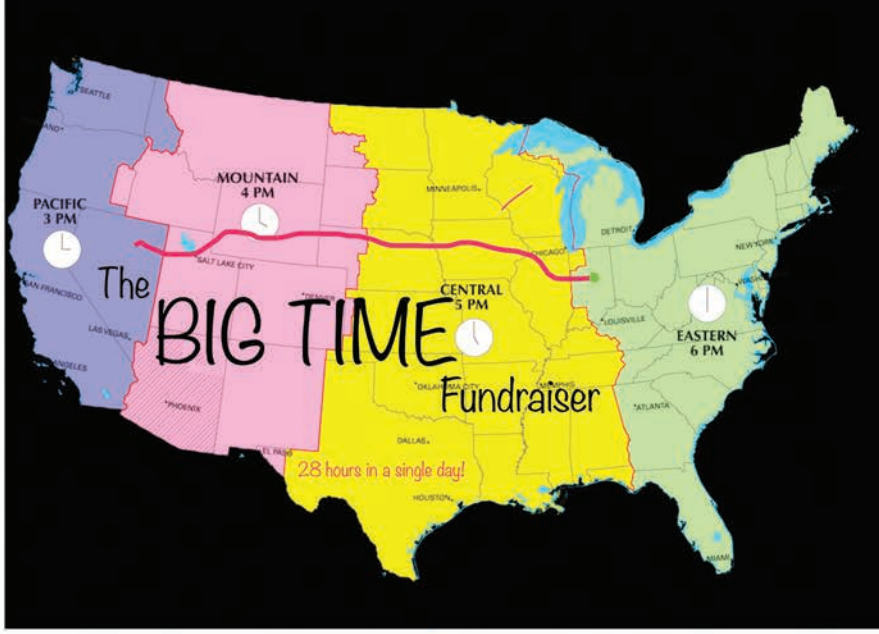
As I sit here in the terminal, with a 4-year old having a tantrum behind me and his older sister looking over my shoulder as I type every word, "yes, I'm writing about you", I can't help but grin, feeling thankful and proud. How could I feel anything else?

Yesterday was November 6th, and my trusty two-wheeled companion and I set a world record while raising $6,000 for the National MS Society. The Yamaha never complained as I pushed it way beyond any sense of normalcy, logging 2,000 miles in a single calendar day. Incredibly, that wasn't the world record! The record I set was for riding the most hours in one day. I am the first person to document riding a motorcycle 28 hours in a single calendar day.

By riding from Indiana to Nevada, across 4 time zones on the day we set our clocks back, I was able to gain 4 extra hours before midnight which allowed me to ride the 2,000 mile route all on the same day. I called this extreme and original challenge the "Big Time" ride, and by all accounts it was a success.

I did have serious hesitations heading out on such a difficult ride attempt on my old friend. The bike had been showing signs of wear and developing some odd behaviors and deficiencies over the past year. Fourth gear had worn away some time ago; accidentally engaging it would bring quite a loud clacking complaint. The piston rings had long stopped being efficient; I was adding a quart of oil every 1,000 miles. Sometimes the bike would be hard to start, and the corrosion in the wiring harness would often leave me with a weak or dead battery. The forks were leaking oil intermittently, and the epoxy repair I made to the side of the engine 80,000









miles ago was seeping quite a bit of oil as well. Seals were eroding, and the timing chain had long since stretched past its ability to self-adjust. Of course I never followed the service schedule!

On paper, my bike was not worth a dime, even as parts, as almost every bit of it was worn out. The high mileage and excessive wear and tear equal to 35 years of normal riding had reached every nook and cranny of the machine. To anyone else, taking this bike on such an extreme ride brought a high risk of failure. Looking past the wear and tear, leaking oil, rough running and barely starting issues, I believed my trusty companion had just enough life for one more big trip. Because of its devoted service to the cause, I also felt #1 had earned the chance to share in my historic world record ride.

I had a lot in common with this bike. Just because I have some symptoms and problems caused by MS doesn't mean I should stay home, take the easy road or stop taking risks. My disease and its effects on my brain and body will never define who I am. Some people tried to talk me out of this extreme attempt for fear it may exacerbate my MS, but having a progressive disease only made me more determined to attempt this ride. I never doubted my ability, so why would I doubt the bike's?

I do have a second Super Tenere donated by Yamaha that is completely set up with all the accessories and luggage, and this #2 bike would have been a safer choice for this record attempt. After all, if I were to encounter a problem with the bike for even a half hour, I would have risked losing the challenge. Finishing meant a lot. I had a few hundred people who had donated money in my name who believed I could make it. I had some press following my adventure as well as the folks at the National MS Society counting on my making it a successful fundraiser. A few thousand people would be following me live on my SPOT tracking page. A failed attempt might make it hard to raise money the next time. A lot was at stake, and I seriously considered taking the safer bet, the brand new bike.

My followers weighed in on Facebook about which bike to ride, most not knowing the extent of wear on the first bike, yet still urging me to be safe and ride the newer bike. It was my decision, so I put all my money on horse #1. After all we had been through together, I surely owed it a shot at completing this ride. We were a team, and I was not going to make my friend sit this one out. Just because a machine may not be as perfect or powerful as a new one, doesn't mean it shouldn't be given a chance.

The morning of the attempt and a thousand miles from home, the bike failed to start on its own and needed to be jumped. Three more times during the event, I had to jump it. I had to add three quarts of oil. By the time I reached 1,500 miles for the day, the bike would barely



idle and had lost power. Fuel mileage was way down, and the motor was getting louder. I knew I was pushing it way beyond anything this machine had been built to do, but I never doubted we would finish.

The last few hours were the hardest. My body began to show signs of fatigue; but I pressed on.

To document the ride's finish, I needed a witness. My friend Kerri Brooks had agreed to meet me at the Pacific Time Zone sign on the highway near Wells, Nevada. As I spotted her and pulled off the road, the extreme toll on my body became apparent. Reaching the fourth and final time zone and the finish of my world record attempt was proudly celebrated and documented live on social media by promptly dropping my motorcycle on its side!

It was only after the finish, when the witness form had been signed and I was safely asleep in a motel room did my trusty horse finally cry "uncle". Despite repeated attempts to revive it the next morning, the machine has begun a well-deserved retirement, in a lovely garage in Salt Lake City. With all its wear and tear and extreme mileage, the bike was still able to do its job and deliver me over the finish line. What an amazing way to end its career! I will never regret giving it the chance to be part of this historic fundraiser. Well done my friend, well done.

As I bid farewell to the nameless black bike, I smile at its accomplishments and the memories of adventures we shared together. I smile proudly because I know this machine will some day be displayed in a museum as a motorcycle that helped cure multiple sclerosis!

I also smile with excitement because I know bike #2, my white Yamaha Super Tenere is ready for it's tour of duty, equipped and eager to begin it's part of my million mile journey, Chasing the Cure. ■ ABILITY

by Longhaulpaul

More about this world record ride:
longhaulpaul/fundraisers/bigtime

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THE GREAT TANGSHAN EARTHQUAKE

part 2

In 1976, a powerful earthquake struck Tangshan in northeastern China, nearly destroying the entire city and taking the lives of 240,000. At the time, international experts estimated those wounded who became paraplegics would not live beyond 15 years. However, 40 years later, 817 out of 960 are still alive. Though they escaped the hand of death in the Great Tangshan Earthquake, they were unable to avoid the fate of most people who are paraplegics in China. After the disaster, they received urgent medical care and were sent to various parts of the country for treatment. After a few years, each returned and found a sense of home at Tangshan's Paraplegic Sanatorium, where they formed friendships and found love among those who had also suffered. Although they'd lost their homes in the rubble to establish new ones, these resilient citizens learned to survive and pursue happiness. They integrated into society through their rehabilitation villages and their newly established cities. Their fight against their destiny and their self-made Nirvana has served as inspirations and revelations to those around them. This article profiles a handful of the residents of Tangshan Rehabilitative Village and tells their remarkable stories of survival and triumph.

Restoring an Athlete's Dream

Since the quake, Li Dongmei has once again picked up her dream of being an athlete. "I wanted to exercise immediately, listen to the doctors and do all the various rehabilitative trainings." She adds, "I didn't have a clear goal, but I couldn't always be lying down or sitting in a wheelchair. I wanted to go out and look around outside."

In 1985, she heard over the radio the news that the National Games for the Disabled would launch in Hefei, Anhui. She immediately felt optimistic. "It would be wonderful if I could participate," she thought.

Surprisingly, the opportunity did come to her door. In early 1986, the recovery center received a notice that they could gather some athletes who were disabled to participate in the district preliminary competitions. Those who performed well could be selected for competitions at the municipal, provincial level, and perhaps even have the opportunity to participate in the 1987 Second National Games for the Disabled held in Tangshan.

"At that moment, I had a feeling my sports dreams would come true," she said, "even though I cannot become a female sports soldier, but being an athlete is still good." She signed up for four competitions: the 100- and 400-meter wheelchair races, the javelin and the shot put. But where could one find existing venues and equipment in the recovery center? There were no javelins, so she used a bamboo pole to practice. There were also no shot puts, so she entrusted others to gather some "big lumps of iron" from the steel plant.



Groups formed to empower each other in rehab exercises

She had no protective gear to practice wheelchair racing, so she increased the friction of the wheels by putting electrical tape on them. "The moment I started practicing, my palms became blistery. They hurt so much on the second day that they slowly morphed into calluses."

After throwing out the shot put, passersby would help retrieve it. She thought it was not good to always trouble these people, so she knitted a few nets to carry the shot puts. "After throwing the shot puts out, I could drag them back myself. It was the same principle with the discus."

While training during the dog days of summer, she remembers, "I thought no matter how hard it is, I am still happy. I want to become an athlete so bad. The foundation is good, the training is hard, and the dream is getting closer and closer." Li Dongmei has since received three gold medals: one for wheelchair racing, one for javelin, and one for shot put in the 1986 Hebei Province Sports Games. Later, she received a gold and a bronze in Canada, where she represented her country in the track and field invitational meet.

In the two Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (FESPIC) in 1994 and 1999, she earned two gold medals and one bronze medal in the first game and three gold in the following game. She received a first place in the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, but she regrettably missed the gold medal due to some complaints. Since the beginning of the new century, she began to practice wheelchair basketball and wheelchair badminton.

"Every time I participate in a competition, I would give my all," she says. Before going abroad and heading to Japan for a group training, she wrote a phrase to herself: "Since the earth has recreated another me, I will use this new self to stand tall in this world." As of today, she has won a total of 42 medals: 36 gold, 3 silver and 3 bronze. They are stuffed into her cabinets and barely fit properly.

Sometimes she would also train with a group of small, young athletes. "The coach says to run 50 laps, and my heart tells me I can do several more even when others had completed theirs. They would say to me, 'Auntie, you are truly solid.' I am 20 years older than the oldest athlete, would it be possible for me not to put in more effort?" she says, adding, "You cannot be lazy in athleticism. Whatever you have put into your training is yours. Although the quake has done irreparable harm to my body, I am still lucky. I am still alive, and I still have the opportunity to do the things I like."

The Strength Supported By Music

Like Li Dongmei, after returning from Shijiazhuang, Fu Pingsheng also became an athlete. He participated on a wheelchair basketball team. Playing once every four years, he played in seven of the Paralympic Games.



After just a month on the team, he and his teammates were offered the chance to participate in the six-city wheelchair basketball invitational tournament launched in Hong Kong. They played fearlessly and quickly defeated their host. In the end, they came in third: "Today, the wheelchair basketball team of Hebei Province's record is still third place," added Li Dongmei.

But in his heart, he believes his fate is with music. He likes the feeling of being immersed in his musical notes. Sometimes when he was sick, he would sigh: "If it were not for the earthquake, Fu Pingsheng might have been able to enter the Central Philharmonic Society."

Some musicians have seen him perform, and their comments are always similar: "Such a pity for little Fu, his sound is really very good; it is unfortunate he can't move his body."

He goes to the sunroom every day and plays for hours. Passersby would hear him play from a distance and walk over and wistfully stop for a moment. In no time at all, a group of music lovers from the recovery center would gather around him. "An idea suddenly sprouted in me to see if I can find a few people, talk about the basic theory of music and organize a small band?" The hospital administrators supported the idea, so they divided up the work to acquire the instruments for a dulcimer player, a flute player, and a roan player. When everyone practiced together, the interest quickly grew.

During that time, the recovery center would be receiving guests both domestically and from abroad. The little band shouldered the responsibility of putting on performances: "We could put on 25 performances each month," he said.

In his spare time, Fu Pingsheng is an autodidact who taught himself how to compose music and write his own songs. All of his materials were from the Central Music Society. He now has over 100 pieces of original compositions. Many of them are based on the initial reactions toward the quake. His favorite piece is called "My Friend, Don't Sigh." It is a beautiful, lyrical song with piano accompaniment that he uses to encourage himself and other patients. "Oh the stars, hung above the sky, what a serene night. Who is singing a sad song, lost confidence in all of life's beauty? Oh friend, pull yourself together; oh spring, bring your warmth; open up all the flowers on earth; oh friend, don't sigh, the future of our motherland is oh so beautiful…"

"In the '80s, Deng Pufang, a disabilities activist, would often come to Tangshan," explained Fu Pingsheng. "We performed two to three times for him. The first time was at a hotel in Tangshan. After the performance, he met with us. Everyone surrounded him, trying to chit-chat with him." He spoke with us and was very easygoing."

Deng Pufang gave them some suggestions: "After listening to your band, it is very good overall. But the band is a bit thin. More instruments need to be added." Fu Pingsheng said, "He really did understand the industry. We do not have a bass, so the sound is not even. Hence, we added a bass player later."

By the 1990s, Tangshan was in need of building a rehabilitation center. Pufang told the small band they could put on performances in the industrial enterprises to fundraise for the rehabilitation center. Fu Pingsheng took his small band and toured all the industrial enterprises and government departments for a year and raised nearly $30,000.

Every time they performed, the audience members' faces were covered in tears. They were all Tangshan people, playing with the same painful memories. The music allowed them to reflect and feel comforted in their thoughts.

The band also performed in prisons and labor camps. During the performances, the prisoners cried uncontrollably. Afterward, the audience and the band members talked very candidly about life and regrets. The prisoners said, "You are all like this already, and you're still trying to contribute to society. We need to learn from you and transform ourselves."

The band became more and more formal, and ushered in a golden opportunity. In 1986, they were invited to perform at Zhongnanhai, an imperial garden in Beijing, for central government officials. During the performance, they presented two songs. Part of the repertoire included a duet by one male and one female called "Husband and Wife Together Around the Home," and another repertoire was a song composed by Fu Pingsheng, "I am a Fortunate Disabled Girl."

The performance won high praises back home and the band's fame grew greatly. After merging with other Tangshan musicians who were blind, deaf and mute, the band evolved into Tangshan city's Disabled Art Troupe, and the lineup for the band reached 20-30 people. Fu Pingsheng became the group's manager. Every time they performed, he would personally tune the instruments. Fu Pingsheng proudly said, "This is what we single-handedly built-up; we have invested a lot of hard work into this group."

Barrier Free Rehabilitation Village

During the period when Fu Pingsheng brought music back into his life, there is one person who gave him the most confidence and encouragement: his wife Liu Yuhua. Liu Yuhua was being treated in the paraplegic nursing home as well. Fu Pingsheng's melodious Erhu tune attracted her. She was quite an introvert at that time, and Fu Pingsheng had no idea what was going on because he buried his head when playing. A student who often came to the recovery center to see Fu Pingsheng became the two individual's communication ambassador and "helped me realize what was going on," says Fu Pingsheng. What helped eliminate the obstacles in getting acquainted were their similarities in age and experience. They ate together, did laundry together, went to recovery trainings together and took walks where they had heart-to-heart talks. They mutually helped each other do whatever small things they could. The romance was interwoven into the little details of their daily lives.

It was not only these two who fell in love. The recovery center divided the women from men. Many couples met in the morning and then pushed themselves in their wheelchairs back to their various wards. Han Zhongquan summarized this stage in this way: "There was only dating, no marriage. They were like wild Mandarin ducks. They met up when the sun rose and parted when the sun set."

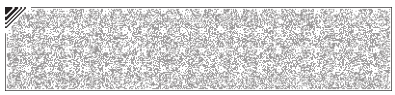
When Wang Baozhan, one of the recovery center's patients, was chosen as an athlete to go abroad to Japan to participate in a marathon competition, he was exposed to the concept of local, barrier-free neighborhoods. These neighborhoods had been uniformly designed and built to accommodate individuals with disabilities to help improve their mobility. The people who inhabited these neighborhoods in Japan were all families with disabilities.

After the patients heard Wang Baozhan's accounts, they all expressed their desire to start a family. People like Wang Baozhan, Hang Zhongquan and others then took the lead in gathering suggestions and sent an application to the government to build a "rehabilitation village."

This application was highly supported by the relevant governmental departments. What was also well known was the support received from the provincial daily newspaper and broadcast propaganda. Eventually, the total amount from the government's funding and the other funds raised came to almost $180,000. In 1991, construction for the rehabilitation village officially began. The location was to be behind the People's Hospital, and the housing designs were to come from the individuals with disabilities themselves.

There were no steps and no door bar. The front door read, "Tangshan Rehabilitation Village," inscribed by Deng Pufang. There were eight rows with a total of 26 residences organized side by side. Grapes and persimmon trees were planted. Among other flowers, roses were also planted in various corners of the residence.

The exits and entrances in the houses are all wheelchair accessible. The bed was the focal point of each room, locate near a wall with a folding table. The wheelchair could be placed next to the bed. The resident in a wheelchair could move directly and easily into the bathroom, kitchen and storage room. When bathing, they could move horizontally to the bathroom and pull down a folding bench. Even the stove and




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There is strength in sharing with each other

faucets were placed at the right height.

In June of 1991, at the time of the rehabilitation center's construction, ten pairs of lovers who were paraplegic from the nursing home held a group wedding. Among those in the group were Wang Baozhan and his spouse. This was a most romantic and happy moment for these couples. The medical personnel in the nursing homes put makeup on the couples very early in the morning. Tangshan Cultural Palace Hall was strewn with hanging banners and streamers. CCTV's famous host, Shen Li, served as the emcee. By then, the mayor of Tangshan and the chairman of the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) respectively served as officiators at the wedding. Applause and blessings came from the hundreds of wedding guests.

Embrace Like A Family To Keep Warm

When the rehabilitation village was built, the occupancy requirements were for Tangshan city permanent residences and for couples who were both paraplegic and from the earthquake only.

In the early 1990s, a period when there was still discrimination and prejudice towards individuals with disabilities in China, much courage was required to become truly independent and to take care of the basics of life. To leave the nursing home's professional medical care facility and take care of one's own eating, drinking and restroom matters were not easy tasks, especially in times of hardship when mutual help and support was needed.

It was precisely because the relationship between the neighborhoods here were different from elsewhere: the villagers held tightly together like a family to keep warm. The 26 families became one extended family. Whoever made something delicious would share it with everyone. Just this May 2016, a villager had a relapse and was hospitalized, but she was able to eat the many varieties of porridge brought to her by her fellow villagers.

Everyone spent a period of time getting use to the rehabilitation village's hardware. For instance, when cleaning the glass, it was difficult to reach the higher areas. Everyone then brainstormed together and decided to tie a cloth to a bamboo pole. In the rehabilitation village, the villagers themselves often created simple barrier-free gadgets, like handgrips or hooks.

Villagers would often come out to chat after tea and meals. They could even distinguish each other's coughing sounds. Qi Wei is the fifth village head. He had been living in the village for over 20 years. "Strength in unity and mutual help" is written in a prominent position in the village bulletin. "The people here have all experienced disasters," he says. "To be able to be alive has not been an easy matter. Our 26 households are one big

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艺悟仁生

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The erhu dates back 4000 years. Though it has only two strings, it can convey a wide range of emotions.

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recover after training for just a little while, but now my whole body aches after training. Last time, I fell while playing basketball. I was so afraid that the bones in my legs were broken that I rubbed them to make sure they were not swollen."

She also created her own set of wheelchair radio broadcast exercises. There are 26 segments of them, each about 20 minutes long. Every evening at 8 p.m., she would do these exercises with everyone at the small square in the village. "Whomever thinks it is beneficial could join," she says. All the wheelchairs formed a circle. She shouted out the rhythm, and the crowd would do the exercise routines. Once everyone had done the exercises until they were fully satisfied, everyone would cry out in jubilation together.

She would often be invited back by the nurses to lead exercise stretches. Whatever illness she had, she would go back to the nursing home to be treated. "I lived there for 35 years, so I feel sentimental about that place."

She also has a nickname "little shopper." If she saw something good at the supermarket while on her way to the nursing home, she would always ask if her friends at the nursing home needed her to pick up anything. This has already turned into a goodhearted habit.

The Relay and Transfer of Love

After 40 years, the individuals in wheelchairs have not locked themselves inside their homes because of their disabilities. They are aware of new changes happening in their city. They were all once carried by volunteers to the top of Tangshan's tallest mountain, called Phoenix Mountain, which overlooks the entire new city. With their wheelchairs, they each weighed about 200 pounds. The volunteers divided themselves into groups of eight and insisted on carrying the villagers up the 137 steps. "I did not even dare to dream that I would climb a mountain someday and be able to see the whole city of Tangshan on top of Phoenix Mountain," exclaimed a resident of the Rehabilitation Village.

In 2012, when the Museum of Tangshan was built, there was a villager who saw some information online. Out of curiosity, the person sent an email asking, "What is it like inside?" The volunteers who followed the Rehabilitation Center closely came to the village and pushed the villagers on a tour around the museum. The help of the volunteers made it possible for the villagers in wheelchairs to tour all kind of sites. The museum, the Phoenix Mountain, the Grand Theater, the parks and squares and the newly launched World Horticulture Exhibition in Tangshan. These were not the normal duties of a volunteer. Normally, the volunteers and their counterparts would set a regular time to come to the village and help them clean, deliver rice and noodles, repair electronic appliances and come for social occasions.

The former village head, Han Zhongquan, was once riding a scooter, and it broke down in the middle of the road. He was only ten kilometers from the Rehabilitation Village. During a moment of helplessness, he pulled out his party member service card and made a call. Before long, an assistance soldier arrived on the scene. He pushed Han Zhongquan and his heavy electric scooter back under the scorching sun.

Another time, Fu Pingsheng suddenly had a recurrence of calcium calculi, a type of kidney stones. The helpline call was made to the paraplegia nursing home. The nursing home staff urgently transferred him to the hospital for surgery. The staff member of the nursing home personally forked out the money to pay for the prepayments of the surgery, and they established a care group to watch over him. No one was able to take a deep breath until the surgery was successfully completed.

The head at the Rehabilitation Village changes each term. The volunteers and philanthropic organizations also change from one time period to the next. But these groups are still the most welcomed by the people of the Rehabilitation Village.

The villagers have their own ways to express gratitude for all the goodwill they received from the outside. Lu Dechang, who was a police officer before the earthquake believes, "If your health is good, then you are truly well. If we can live a colorful life, then that is the best way to repay those who have helped us."

Watching from the village entrance, whenever Lu Dechang sees a passersby's bike break down, he quickly returns home to get a screwdriver and a wrench to help repair it. Like many people who became paraplegic from the earthquake, he also adopted an orphan. This child is now all grown and works in Beijing.

Year after year, the elderly people at the Rehabilitation Village have gradually passed away. The remaining villagers are philosophical about this change of circumstances. Perhaps the city and its owner will always have something in common. After the earthquake, the western media once described this suffering city as "permanently erased from the earth." But in only a decade's time an enjoyable new city has regrown. These particular residents in wheelchairs have used their tenacity in life to challenge the medical bias, to seal their wounds, relearn how to live independently and seek and find new goals. They have never stopped moving forward, but have merely moved forth in another way and they continue to pass on love and hope. ■ ABILITY

by Qu Hui and Bai Fan

This story is part of a series of articles published as an exclusive editorial exchange between *China Press for People with Disabilities & Spring Breeze* and *ABILITY Magazine*



STEPHEN LETNES
MOTIFS AND MELODIES

Stephen Letnes is a modern-day composer with a classical twist. Dig into his SoundCloud, and you will find a colorful bag of audible candy: instrumentals, orchestral pieces, film scores. At a young age Letnes began his musical journey with the violin, and as it kept getting stolen, his parents switched him over to the piano—a much heavier instrument. The piano is where his passion grew and evolved into composing.

A Russian Romance guy, he felt a deep connection with music by Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. So he took them on, his way. Born legally blind, he felt at ease learning the language of music using the Suzuki method. Letnes is a hardworking, talented and determined musician with a mission: keep creating in this competitive industry he's chosen to embark on, and show everyone it can be done.

The Taste of Musical Freedom

Letnes wants to pluck that one kid who's great at beatboxing, living at home with his family in Bemidji, Minnesota. Get him into the studio, surround him with musicians, and make sure the kid is a part of the entire creative process. He wants to help people build confidence, provide ways to express and establish themselves and find purpose. And once they feel good about themselves, they can then try to help others.

Letnes recalls that exhilarating moment when the musical light switched on for him.

I was 15, going to play at my senior high school talent show a Rachmaninoff piece. Before that show, I had never played in public. I would always play for church or for recitals or competition, for medals—never in front of my peers, the people who were my friends or who hated me.

I got up and played this Rachmaninoff piece and barely remember myself playing. It was almost an out-of-body experience. I was playing in front of everybody, and the whole place went silent. At the end, I had a big rush of emotion and energy. I'm like, "This is what I want to do." I was punching the air. I had played this nice, Romantic piece, and didn't get up and bow. I started kicking stuff, punching in the air like a World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler. "Rrrrar!" I was yelling. I was just having a great time because I had finally let it out. I had it all on display for all 600 to 700 people to witness and yell and scream back at me. It was a fantastic experience.

From Piano to Film Scoring

A lot of parents put their children in music lessons and sports classes, but what sticks with a child depends on that individual spark of connection. Where it goes after that is the exciting part.

When I was really young, I wanted to be a concert pianist. But I always loved film music. I saw Braveheart when I was real young, and it flipped my lid. I was blown away by the music. I'd always been blown away by film. Who doesn't love John Wayne? Who can't hum the theme to Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark or Star Wars? John Williams is the top, but the one that really spoke to me was Braveheart, and that composer was James Horner. I remember going to see that movie three times that week at a theater two miles away from my house. I would find my way there, and I would watch it and listen to the score. It really turned me on to doing film scores. So yeah, I would dare say James Horner and some creative keyboardists from the band Dream Theater, a progressive metal band, got me interested in thinking, "Hey, I can do this. I don't have to just do piano. How are these people making all these different sounds? How are they putting them together and making multiple sounds? I want to do that!"

That started me on my journey of figuring out, through ins and outs of music and school and life and relationships. I fell in and out of it, but it was only in the last few years I dove into it wholeheartedly and got to at least where I am today. Hopefully, it keeps going.

College, A Life Experience

Some students aren't aware or don't have the confidence to voice their opinions on reasonable accommodations. And some educators have yet to experience how the slightest tweak to a learning technique can impact a student's life. Letnes feels he had a wonderful college experience, but he does admit a moment could have steered him away from music, if he allowed it to.

I went to a private college, where I graduated with a degree in social studies education. I sang in choirs. I played a lot of piano for different events and stuff, but I didn't get a degree in music. Actually, ironically, I got kicked out of music composition.

In music, they're teaching literally music composition on the written page. Since I'm mostly blind, I learned all of my Russian Romantic stuff, and I composed stuff in my head. The professor took me aside and said, "Look, this is a class to teach you how to write a page, how to write music, but it's on the page." Pretty much they said, "Hey, you can audit the class if you want and sit in on it, but this doesn't seem to be the right class for you." And I was super young; it was my first year of college. I was very insecure, unsure of what to do about it. I was annoyed that something must be wrong with me, and I didn't do anything about it. I just stayed away from the music program from there on.

But that was an anomaly. I got a great education, a great degree, and met a ton of great people. The professors on the whole were amazing. They cared so much. It was just this particular one where it didn't work. But I am grateful I went there.

Film Scoring: Letting Go of Ego!

Creating music for yourself is one thing, but when you want to sell your product, other personalities and opinions come into play. Letnes has learned an important lesson that has helped build character as well as the character of the film he's scoring.

Usually the way it works is, you meet or talk with the director, producer or editors and they send you the film, and you have what's called a spotting session. "OK, in this scene, I want music here, I want music there, and I want it to start there, end there." As you watch the film and learn the story arc of each character and the main arc of the film, you go back and forth and share notes about it. Then you discuss where music should go, and you debate a little bit and you figure out where music would best support telling the story within the film. Then I go to work after the spotting session, compose the music, and send it to the director and ask, "How is this? Here's what I'm thinking."

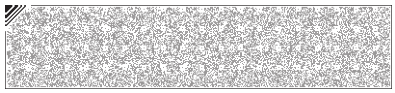
Either they love it or they say, "No, this is not what I'm looking for, please do it again." You go back and forth a few times, and you find out what works. You have to take your ego out of it. It has nothing to do with ego. You can't take it personally. This is the wrong business to have a huge ego, at least on the post-production side. So there's a lot of back-and-forth, but it's for the greater good. Write, rewrite and then rewrite again, but it's all to serve the greater story of the film. As long as your ego stays out of it, everybody can come out ahead. But if the ego gets in your way, if you take things personally, you'll get steamrolled, hurt and burned pretty quickly.

Personal Techniques and Technology of Creating Music, My Way

Human beings have an innate ability to adapt and develop learning techniques unique to evolving situations. We create artificial limbs where they've been amputated, devices to hear when losses of sound, a mono-ski when two skis are too many, strum the guitar with our toes when fingers aren't an option. The dynamic examples go on. Letnes found his own way to create and communicate his music.

A benefit of growing up and being forced to learn things through the Suzuki method trained the brain to remember more. The techniques by which I was taught music helped me practice memory retention, practice music development and how I keep that in my brain. I am able to write and compose a lot of music in my head.

Technology assists us, but just like it says, we still have to find a way to make it work for us because it wasn't







designed specifically for us. This great technology called ZoomText by Ai Squared allows me to zoom way in so I can record what's in my head on the keys and put it into the machine and write in layers, melodies, counter-melodies, different motifs, percussive patterns, and all that.

Nothing's perfect, but for those of us who are blind or who have any kind of sight challenge or disability, we're natural problem-solvers. No matter what is put in front of us, generally speaking, we will find a way to make it work if we want it bad enough. So even though I have this great assistive technology, ZoomText, which helps me record stuff, I still have to adapt how I use it to be able to write film scores in order to make it work for me. That's what I like about persons with different challenges. We are forced to adapt and adjust and move so we can not only survive but also hopefully thrive in a world that can become hard on us. That's kind of the fun, the hard fun, of making things work, the satisfaction of finding a way through to have that nice feeling afterward of, "Hey, this wasn't meant to work exactly the way I hoped it would, but I found a way to make it work for me. This feels good. Now I can move on and be productive." That's what all technology does.

Forte and Current Focus

If you send Letnes a piece by Kabalevsky or Chopin and would like him to write just a portion of it for your wedding, he will, but make sure there's no mistakes in the recording, his ear is that good! He can flawlessly create his own version of a song you like from scratch, but his original pieces have the flair of taking your imagination outside your four walls.

I would say more "traditional" film score music is my forte. I really like themes, and there aren't a lot of themes in most movies and TV shows nowadays. If directors like orchestrated film scores with themes, motifs and melodies, that's my forte. I did a World War II documentary about the Battle of the Bulge in Benelux, and the director asked me to write a theme. He said, "Can you write me a theme to start us out here?" Instead of just writing him a theme on the piano, I did a full MIDI mockup with solo trumpets and full brass and strings, so I could help the director envision and hear it in the film.

Blind Ambition Project, the working title for my documentary, is an idea to find a way to help other persons who are blind or sight-challenged, whether they're kids or adults. When you have a challenge in your life and you find something that works for you, the hope is that you want to share it with the world and say, "I found a solution for me. Yes, the cards were stacked against me. I got some bad luck my way by not being able to see, but here's a solution I found to help lead a more fulfilling life. How can I share it with others who have a similar challenge to help them also lead more fulfilling lives?" Most of us who are blind don't work. It's hard to find gainful employment, so a lot of persons who are blind or sight-challenged are on disability. When you're on disability, you don't have a lot of money to invest in studio time to hire other musicians, professional producers and





With Ken Feinberg (L) and Aleshia Mueller (R)



Eric Roberts and Letnes hanging around



Love International Film Festival Awards

people who know what they're doing, because it costs money to have access to their knowledge. For me, art is a great vehicle for self-discovery.

This holiday season, I wrote the score to a movie called Santa's Boot Camp. It's a family-fun, family-friendly movie distributed by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. It's a real boon for us, because it was an independent film with a director, Ken Feinberg. He and our producer and editor Craig Tollis were working on this film, and I was brought on to write all the music.

Message to the Universe

With such a desire to quench his musical thirst, Letnes is constantly creating and working without hesitation around any obstacles thrust toward him. He gets a thrill out of networking, collaborating and connecting people for the bigger picture.

The only way you're going to make it in this world is if you get out of your apartment, get out of your basement, and you network and communicate and talk and solve problems and ask how you can help, how you can assist others. Can you help produce or be a production assistant? Can you add something to the table? Are you friendly? Are you a good person? Do you like people being around you? You've got to get out of your house, get out of your cave and commune with humanity so people know you're there, that you're available, that you're willing to help push a story. You've got to get out. Like I tell people, it's kind of scary sometimes getting out there. I've had plenty of accidents leaving my apartment. I go running a lot along the river. I will say I have not always been completely successful running because I'll fall off a cliff. I am not kidding. Or I will run into a flock of geese and be chased by them. I have been hit by traffic, yelled at by drivers I almost get hit by. It is scary. But there's no way in Hades I'm going to be in my apartment and wait for opportunity to come to me, no way in hell. I've got a life to live. I've got love to give. I've got music to produce, and I've got the willingness and patience to go get work. And that's what I want to help others find, too—to find work and a purpose. You've got to get out. You've got to reach out. You've got to shake hands with people, have conversations. This is what I want to do!

Letnes finds meaning in art when he is writing music for film or the piano, and he's helping tell a story. It makes no difference that he has a sight challenge, thus feels equal to the task as anyone. He's an advocate for the arts and through it wants to help others find purpose. As he grows in his career, Letnes is eager to share the answers he finds with those who are still looking. We hope he continues to produce works of art, and along the way meets Viola, the six-foot auburn beauty who enjoys a velvety glass of scotch. ■ ABILITY

by Lia Martirosyan

soundcloud.com/stephenletnes
zoomtext.com
aisquared.com



CALLING ON LONDON

Meeting the Minds Behind BBC's Popular Podcast, *Ouch!*

ABILITY stopped by the media giant, BBC, in London, where *Ouch!: Disability Talk* is making sound waves. We had a great chat with Damon Rose, who launched *Ouch!* disability website 14 years ago and the award-winning *Ouch* podcast a few years later. He and his colleague Beth Rose, news journalist for digital current affairs, treated us to tea on a lovely afternoon.

ABILITY Magazine: How did you get involved with Ouch!*?*

Damon Rose: I was the launch editor, but it's changed a lot since then. We started off in another department in quite a different BBC back in 2002. At the time we were quite humorous—a sharp, caustic wit—and I think we've kept some of that. We started as a kind of online magazine including photos, stories, and videos.

It was quite cutting-edge, quite different. We're now part of BBC News. We don't have a message board. That's one of the big things that has changed about us. But then, who does any more with social media? We do news stories and podcasts and use Facebook Live, and we're really excited to be doing a live storytelling event in a couple of months. We'll be hiring out a comedy venue where we'll film it.

AM: As a one-off?

Damon: It'll be our first one; it'll come out in March on the theme of love and sex 'cause everybody likes talking about that in the disabilities world, I've noticed. So we're hoping that'll do well.

AM: It should be called, "Love, Sex, and Trump."

Damon: Oh, dear! (*laughs*)

It's car-crash TV for us British who went and voted ourselves out of Europe, which was ridiculous. But we knew if Brexit could happen, then Trump could happen.

AM: There are tremendous challenges facing us all. While staying in our lane, we're always asking ourselves: "How do you change society's attitudes?" Daniel Biddle, who was on a plenary alongside ABILITY Corps during the RI World Congress in Edinburgh, acquired a disability during 7/7 (July 7, 2005 terrorist bombings in London). He tells his story to raise awareness for things like creating access into buildings. We saw your correspondent Emma Tracy interview him live on Ouch! Facebook.

Damon: It's interesting that he's doing something. We've spoken to other 7/7 survivors like Jill Hicks. She lost her legs in the attack. What I find interesting is she had a high-powered job in the city, but decided after the bombings that she had better things to do with her life. She got a new perspective and wanted to do peace campaigning, so they portray her as this great peace campaigner. But what they never show, other than this amazing hero, is how she struggles. If you talk to her off mic, she'll say: "I've got no money. How can I survive? I don't have a job. I don't have anything."

AM: There's no money in peace.

Damon: But coverage is driven by that sort of mainstream interest, I suppose.

AM: In the States, we had 9/11, but we don't follow other people's issues too much. We're self-centered like that.

Beth Rose: We can't get away from the US news at the moment. It's dominating everything over here.

AM: That's the way we like it!

(*laughter*)

So you had a publication at one time, or was it always an online publication?

Damon: Just online. I launched *Ouch!* in 2002, but I originally came from the BBC's Disabilities Programs Unit, where somebody made a couple of TV shows regularly. So *Ouch!* was born out of that.

AM: Did you come up with the name?

Damon: I did, in the shower one morning, after flippin' months of trying to find something that would work. It's tough to come up with a disability name that works!

AM: We would love to unite all of ABILITY publications under one umbrella, to see if we can't create an even bigger voice. Chats are initiated, but go silent after a while.

Beth: It would be interesting to collaborate.

Damon: And we're hooking up with Australian ABC.

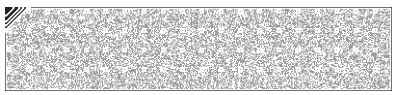
AM: In New Zealand there's a really good one worth talking to called AttitudeLive. *They have a lot of video content around disability. Partly funded by the government.*

Damon: One of my ambitions is to make an international network of our podcast. As you're also hinting at, there's a lot of shared international stuff around disabilities, garnering a bigger audience and getting some very similar messages out there.

AM: It would help a lot if we looked beyond our own borders, such as ABILITY's partnership with China, for example. Meeting with a counterpart publication in Beijing and doing a content exchange. Perhaps podcasts are next. Let's talk.

Damon: Would you like us to come to California and do your podcast?

Beth: For three months, during winter?







AM: We should coordinate your coming in March for the International Conference on Assistive Technology (CSUN).

Damon: Oh, CSUN! We could do something and get you on our podcast. When the presenters are here, not us. We're nobodies.

AM: So you started Ouch! *and since then you've become a nobody?*

Beth: There are only three and a half of us, normally.

AM: Are you the half?

Beth: I'm not. Our person in Scotland is three-quarters, and then there are our presenters. They just come for a day in December when we record.

AM: What is your agenda?

Damon: We have so many different agendas. Our aim is to make everything we produce mainstream enough to get it onto the front page of the BBC News. The more niche, the less likely anyone will read it, because it's not going to get promoted.

AM: Do you try to figure out what the market wants?

Damon: We know personal stories go down really well. We ran an article the last year, for instance, about a woman who'd gone blind because she got diabetes as a young person and didn't look after herself. That went down really well.

Beth: There was my story about a boy who they thought didn't have any cognitive abilities, but he managed to speak to his parents for the first time when he was 17. That was a real emotional one and got about a million hits. We did one about a professional footballer, a girl, who had to give up her career a day before she turned 20 when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Damon: Emma's just finished her piece on quick-packs that she's been putting together.

Beth: It's about the things that people carry in their bags. For example, there's a guy who uses tennis balls for a muscular problem. A woman with cerebral palsy uses a wooden spoon, I think, to help keep her ankles straight.

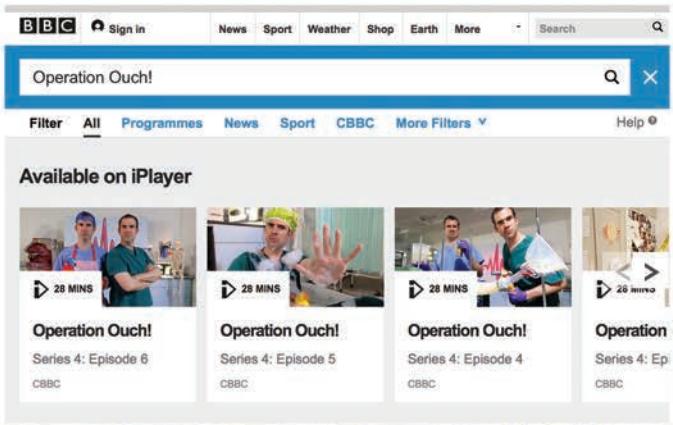
Damon: What's so wrong with a shoehorn? We'll see how that goes down.

Beth: There's an American charity called Magic Wheelchair, and they create amazing 3D costumes for children in wheelchairs. It was a Halloween story.

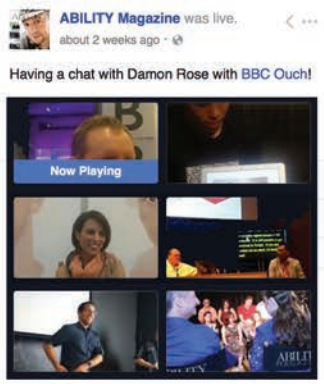
AM: Too scary for us. (laughter)

Is it more difficult to figure out how to do the stories with humor? Are the two hosts funny enough to pull it off?

Beth: Oh, yeah, they're genuinely very funny. I think









probably in years gone by it was a bit more—

Damon: —raucous.

Rose: Yeah, close to the bone.

Damon: Our presenters are very funny, very grassroots. Liz Carr is a stand-up comedian and an actress on a prime-time TV drama here called *Silent Witness*. And Matt Fraser was in *American Horror Story* last year.

The TV show *Speechless* is the new thing, isn't it, on NBC?

AM: Yes, and so far it's good. Do you have any ideas of where you might be going in the next phase?

Beth: We're going into more video and hopefully into more collaborations with other big departments. One project is geared towards working with 16- to 30-year-olds, maybe for videos or audio on a story like "The Seven Things You Should Never Say to Someone With Autism."

And then we've got heavier subjects like BBC Panorama from our premier investigation team. We're all involved in this one big team. The idea is there will be much more collaboration. And certainly there's a willingness to generate more mainstream ideas. That's the way it's moving at the moment. There have been quite a few changes in the last year. It's a very new, mixed department called Digital Current Affairs. They do quirky documentaries.

Damon: Aimed at a young audience.

Beth: It's just online. That's where the audience must be, which is quite interesting. You have to create a big enough stir about it.

AM: So the videos you're looking at might only be online?

Beth: Most of them. Some of the top stuff, the longer documentaries, we'll work with BBC One, but most of them just live online.

Damon: Some of the videos we produce make it onto TV as well, like on the breakfast news or the BBC World News channel. We're in an usually privileged position for a disability station where we can be very mainstream if we commission the right thing.

AM: Looking forward to collaborating and helping push the message.

Beth: It would be nice if we could do something.

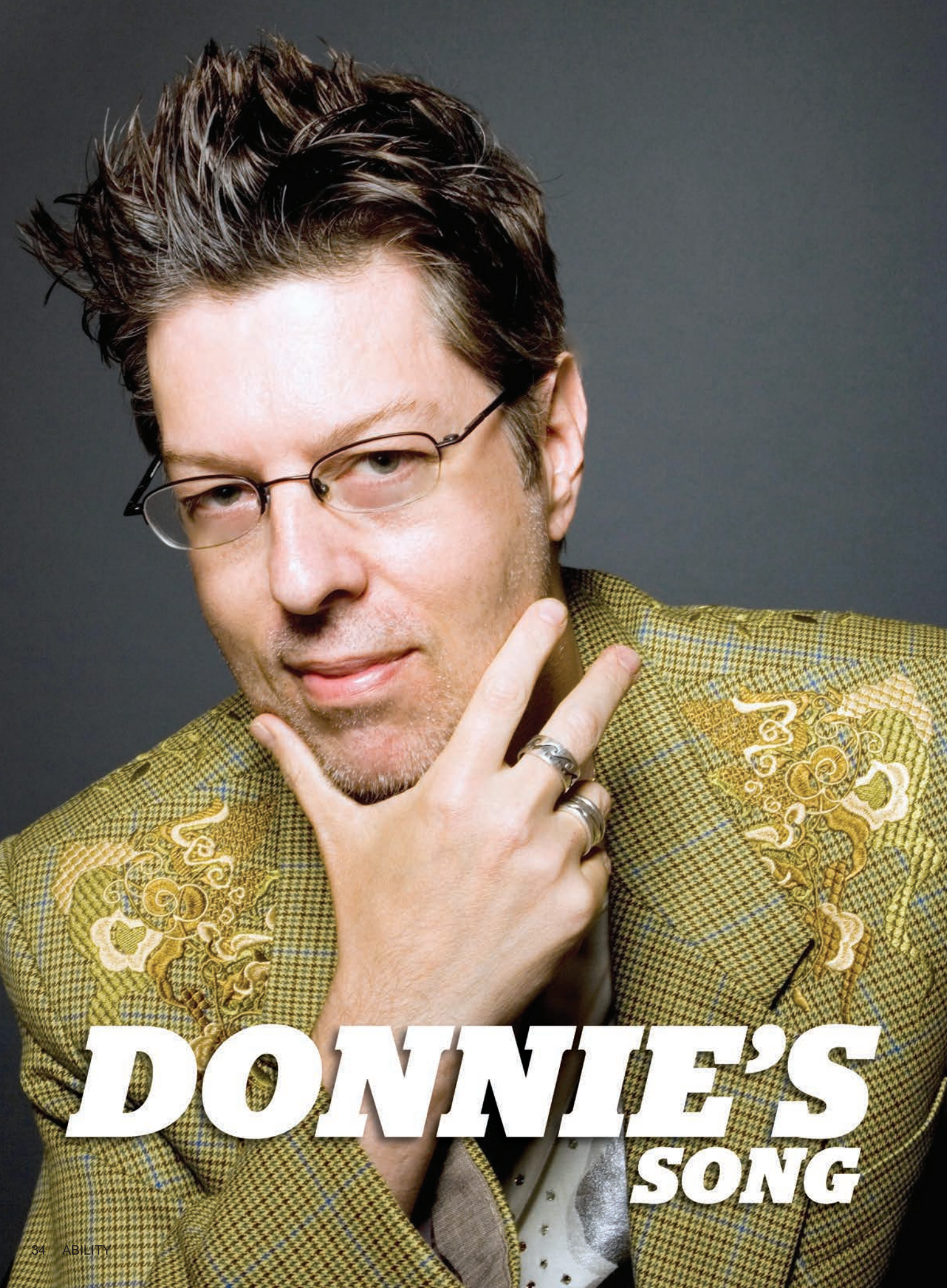
AM: Have you heard of Andrea Tyrimos? She has an art exhibit called "Bipolar Picasso." ABILITY is featuring her story.

Beth: That sounds good! She's in London?

AM: Yes.

Beth: You beat us to it! ■ ABILITY

bbc.co.uk/ouch



DONNIE'S SONG

Songwriter, pianist and record producer Donnie Demers has traveled the world wowing crowds with his music. After he and brother Jimmy performed to a standing ovation on Jerry Lewis' long-running muscular dystrophy telethon in the 1980's, the legendary comedian encouraged Donnie to move to LA to pursue his craft. Both brothers ended up following that advice, staked out successful careers, and played their biggest venue ever together: the 2007 Special Olympics in Shanghai, China, where more than 65,000 swayed to the melody of Donnie's song, "Benediction (Let The Best of You Go Free)." *ABILITY*'s Geri Jewell and David Zimmerman met up with Donnie recently and the three of them enjoyed a freewheeling conversation.

David Zimmerman: Where did you meet Geri?

Donnie Demers: At Norman Lear's. Wait a minute—

Geri Jewell: —It was a book signing at that big mansion on Sunset Boulevard owned by the Reznick's.

Demers: Yes, good memory!

Zimmerman: Who was the book signing for?

Demers: Norman Lear!

Jewell: It was a huge party, a lot of fun.

Demers: Norman is a rare gift. Every word that comes out of his mouth you just feel like he spent hours thinking about, yet you know it's not possible, because he just blurts out these amazing sentences on the spot. I always find myself thinking, "Wow, I wish I had said that!" He's one of my favorite people.

Zimmerman: I was blessed to be introduced to him by Geri, and then we did an interview with him. It brought tears to my eyes because I felt like I was visiting with my dad.

Jewell: That's his energy.

Zimmerman: I saw that article you wrote for the Huffington Post where you said, "When you listen to Norman Lear speak, it's like a master class in humanities."

Demers: Absolutely.

Jewell: He discovered me and launched my career on The Facts of Life; how did you and Norman meet?

Demers: In 2003, my brother Jimmy sang at the funeral of our friend Christopher Hemmeter, a real estate developer who designed the Jimmy Carter Library. Hal Gaba, who co-owned Concord Records with Norman Lear, was at the funeral and came up to Jimmy and me right afterwards. He asked if we were signed to a record label. When we told him we weren't, he said, "You are now!"

I'd wanted to meet Norman ever since I found out that he co-owned Concord. Jimmy had already known him for some time, and then one night we were at a dinner party and Norman was there. I asked Jimmy to introduce me to him. But Norman must've already known about me because later that evening he came up to me and Jimmy and asked, "Would you two gentlemen come to my office tomorrow? I'd like to speak with you." When we got there, Norman said, "What's keeping you from moving forward?" I wondered if it was because our album was not doing as well as everyone had hoped.

Jewell: Is that what it was about?

Demers: No. He looked at me and said, "You're both so talented, but I wonder if you are holding Jimmy back." Norman thought that, because of my disability, perhaps Jimmy was spending too much time taking care of me, and not enough focused on his own career. At first I laughed because anyone who knew us knew that, if anything, the reverse was true. Jimmy is the youngest of four boys and a girl, and has always been coddled and pampered. I said, "Norman, I love you, but you've got it flip-flopped."

*Zimmerman: (*laughs*) You told him right away?*

Demers: Right away. I said, "If anything, Jimmy has [indirectly] held me back because I've spent my entire life waiting for him to make it big, so that we could do our "brother act." I always believed that we were born into the same family for a reason, and that the two of us would share our different, but complementary talents as a team, like the Carpenters. I mean, it was the perfect scenario: He was a great-looking singer with songs written by my, his brother, who just happened to play them on the piano while seated in his wheelchair. It was perfect. Our story was made for Oprah!

Zimmerman: How did Jimmy react to that?

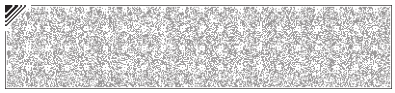
Demers: Deep down, Jimmy knew it was true that I wasn't holding him back. I think he was just as dumbfounded as I was by what Norman said.

Zimmerman: Wow!

Demers: So that was my first interaction with Norman Lear. I was struck by his candor and by his willingness to help us with a situation that he thought could have become a distraction. Since then, Norman has become one of my all time favorite mentors. And he has the most loving wife and children, all of them brilliant in their own right.

Jewell: They are.

Demers: And then there are all the magical things that





L to R: Donnie with Norman Lear and Cheryl Tiegs, and sitting pretty with Paula Abdul



Norman has done for the world of television. I remember watching all of those great shows. I was a kid in the '70s, and that is when Norman Lear owned television! I loved *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. That was probably my favorite. I couldn't wait for the next episode.

Zimmerman: Every week!

Demers: Exactly, but not a lot of people know about that one today. It wasn't as popular as *All in the Family*.

Zimmerman: It's a cult classic.

Demers: Louise Lasser was so brilliant as Mary Hartman. Initially I was stoked to meet Norman because he created *Mary Hartman*.

Zimmerman: Do you remember the first time your fingers touched the piano keys?

Demers: Yes. Our neighbor Janet Hilton would often watch me when my mom and dad were unable to. Well, she had this piano at her house, and the first time I heard her play "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," I was profoundly moved. I remember it vividly because even at four years old, I didn't want her to see that I had tears in my eyes. It was a gift to be able to stir that kind of emotion in someone. So that Christmas I asked for a piano and got a toy version that I played incessantly.

Another Christmas I received a cassette player. Mom showed me how to use it by singing, "Dream a Little Dream" into the mic and then playing it back. I remember thinking, "Wow, what a great voice!" But she never thought of doing anything with it. She died of non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2006.

Zimmerman: How old was she?

Demers: 69.

Jewell: My mom died at 69, too.

Demers: Really? Wow!

Jewell: Of cancer. And I watched that whole thing, too.

Zimmerman: That's tough.

Demers: Yes. She was my world. Fortunately, my dad's still around. He's 84 and doing well. He was just here from Boston for three weeks. We had a great time.

Jewell: That's great.

Demers: As I was saying, a couple of months after Mom died, we began working on Jimmy's record for Concord. One day, he found the cassette with Mom singing on it. We decided that it would be a really special moment if





L to R: Donnie and his brother Jimmy with Patrick Swayze

we used Mom's voice, singing, as it opens. And then I asked my friend Owen Elliott if she would consider singing on the track. Her mom, Mama Cass, made the song famous in the early 1970's, but because Owen had never sung her mom's song before, she initially said no. I asked her to come to the studio and listen to the arrangement, nonetheless. Once she heard the track, she was all in and ended up doing background vocals, too. The song was deeply personal song to all of us, so we decided to call the album *Dream a Little*.

So getting back to your question, our whole family can sing, but not like Jimmy. He was the baby, and I taught him how to sing the songs I was already writing. He and I used to pretend that we were performing in Las Vegas.

Jewell: I love it!

Demers: By the time he was six years old, we took our middle names—my middle name is George, his is Francis—and became Geo and Fran.

*Zimmerman: (*laughs*) I love it!*

Demers: After I graduated high school, I went to the University of Arizona, which had a state of the art recording studio. I learned so much there and ended up recording an entire album, financed mostly by my dad. Then I invited Jimmy to come out and sing on it. He ended up taking it to another level, and a few years later he followed me to Los Angeles and ended up singing with artists like Cher, Garth Brooks and Patti LaBelle.

Zimmerman: Backup? Duets?

Demers: Backup. He also became the voice of the "Always Coca-Cola" ad campaign. He's experienced some amazing luck in music. But it all began as Geo & Fran in Worcester, Massachusetts!

Zimmerman: How did you meet Paula Abdul?

Demers: Through Jimmy. He knows everybody. My dad calls Jimmy the "most famous unfamous person in the world." Jimmy introduced me to Paula about 30 years ago. I loved her right away; she's like a sister to me. This was before her enormous success. She was a Lakers cheerleader at the time. We watched her blow up, and it was like, "Wow!" Her career is remarkable. And now, to see after all these years that she's still at it is a source of inspiration.

Jewell: So are you! I've only known you a relatively short time. But I'm amazed at how you travel the world.

Demers: We've traveled a lot in our work with various charities. One of our favorites is Special Olympics. Timmy Shriver is a good friend of ours and, as you know,



1982: National television debut of Donnie & Jimmy Demers on MDA's Jerry Lewis telethon

he took over Special Olympics from his mother, Eunice.

Zimmerman: I heard the song you did for the Special Olympics on YouTube.

Demers: That was the theme song for the 2009 World Winter Games opening ceremonies. They had this giant orchestra with a huge chorale, and it was pretty amazing to have them accompany me and Jimmy on a song that I had written.

Zimmerman: How did that come about?

Demers: We'd been involved with Special Olympics on the local level, and then we were invited to perform it in Idaho for the opening of the Winter Games. We also had a chance to perform the song at the Closing Ceremonies of the 2007 World Summer Games in front of 65,000 people. It was so cool. We were like little dots on the stage… It was massive, impressive and brilliant. Shanghai spared no expense.

Zimmerman: I need to travel more.

Demers: The upside of traveling with a wheelchair is that you sort of get the same kind of treatment that a celebrity does. You get to cut in front of all the lines and there's no waiting at security, although they definitely do frisk you. So having Muscular Dystrophy comes with its pros as well.

Jewell: I went to school with a lot of kids with muscular dystrophy.

Demers: Unlike cerebral palsy, there are many different kinds of muscular dystrophy.

Jewell: That's what I wondered.

Demers: Muscular Dystrophy encompasses several varying disabilities all involving the weakening of muscles. ALS is under that "umbrella." I have a form of MD that's called Myasthenia Gravis.

Zimmerman: When did you know?

Demers: Early on. I was around three when my parents took me to the doctor because I was falling a lot. Ironically though, having people stare at me made me feel as though it was kind of cool to be different. One of the most common questions I get asked is, "Do you find it difficult to be the center of attention?" And it's an ironic because anyone in show business kills to be the center of attention. But of course no one wants to be the center of that kind of attention.

My friends would get way more uptight over it than me, saying things like, "Why don't you take a picture, it will

last longer!" And if a child was pointing at me because I was in a wheelchair, the parent would almost always reprimand them for doing so and I'd end up feeling bad. When I was little I'd ask my mother, "Mom, they're pointing at me, how come?" And her reply was the best, "Because you're special." That worked for me because one of my heroes was Mr. Rogers. He would look into the camera with such sincerity and say in his gentle voice, "You are special just by being you." I always believed that he was talking to me. In many ways he was my savior growing up.

Jewell: Interesting!

Demers: He validated me. I always said that if I ever was fortunate enough to be in a situation where I could speak directly to the world, whether it was because I received an award or some scenario like that, I would thank Mr. Rogers before anyone else. And while I have met so many amazing people over the years, I'm sad to say that I never got to meet Mr. Rogers.

Jewell: When did you come to California?

Demers: In 1983. A year earlier, I was a guest on The Jerry Lewis Telethon. I was 22 and performed my song, "If We Fell In Love Again." It was off the album I recorded in college. We got to do it with the orchestra, and the audience gave us a standing ovation that lasted nearly three minutes! That's a hell of a long time on national television. Afterwards, Jerry said, "If you want to do music, you should probably think about Nashville or New York or Los Angeles." That was all the encouragement I needed. I moved to Los Angeles within four months.

Zimmerman: With your brother?

Demers: No. Jimmy was in high school at that time, but he followed me out here after he graduated.

Zimmerman: How many years are you apart?

Demers: Four and a half.

Jewell: And your parents were supportive of this?

Demers: One hundred percent. They said: "Find your purpose, be a good person, and do whatever makes the greatest contribution in life."

Jewell: Wow!

Zimmerman: What is your biggest joy?

Demers: I feel the greatest sense of joy when I finish a song, because I truly feel like I've been a vessel. And I love to cook.

Zimmerman: What's your best dish?

Demers: I don't really have a best dish. I just love to open the refrigerator and cupboards, take whatever is available, and create something delicious! That gives me profound joy.

Zimmerman: We're coming for dinner.

Demers: I've got a tiny apartment, but I'm happy to cook anywhere there's a sizable kitchen. Paula has a great kitchen. I love cooking there.

Jewell: When Norman introduced us, he was excited because you were having success on a new medication—

Demers: —Albuterol. My Muscular Dystrophy had taken a toll on me. I was getting worse and worse, and Paula invited me to stay with her in Australia while she was working on *So You Think You Can Dance Australia*. At that time I really didn't think that I'd be able to go because my health had gotten so bad that I could barely lift a glass. But I couldn't pass up the opportunity to go to a country I'd always dreamed of. I was there about 5 weeks, and the week before I was leaving to come home, I was in the bathroom at Paula's apartment in Sydney and a towel had fallen off the sink. I leaned over to pick it up, and couldn't pull myself back up.

Zimmerman: Oh, no!

Demers: And to make matters worse, my wheelchair was blocking the door. I was in a bad situation because I was headed face first into the toilet. I started to freak out. I remember telling myself, "Don't panic. Don't panic."

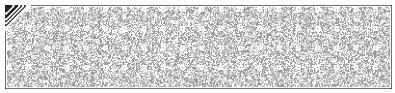
Jewell: That's funny: You were leaning into the toilet bowl!

(laughter)

Demers: Exactly! I didn't even have the strength to yell, but I tried to call out to Paula's assistant. At first she didn't hear me, and Paula was in the living room, in the middle of an interview with the press. Finally, after a few harrowing moments, her assistant just happened to walk by and heard me calling her name. She said, "Donnie, are you all right?" I was on the verge of tears. I said, "No, I've fallen and I can't get up." But the door would only open just a little, and she couldn't get in. This chair weighs about 400 pounds, and wouldn't budge. I felt like I was losing consciousness, I had no strength, and my arms felt dead.

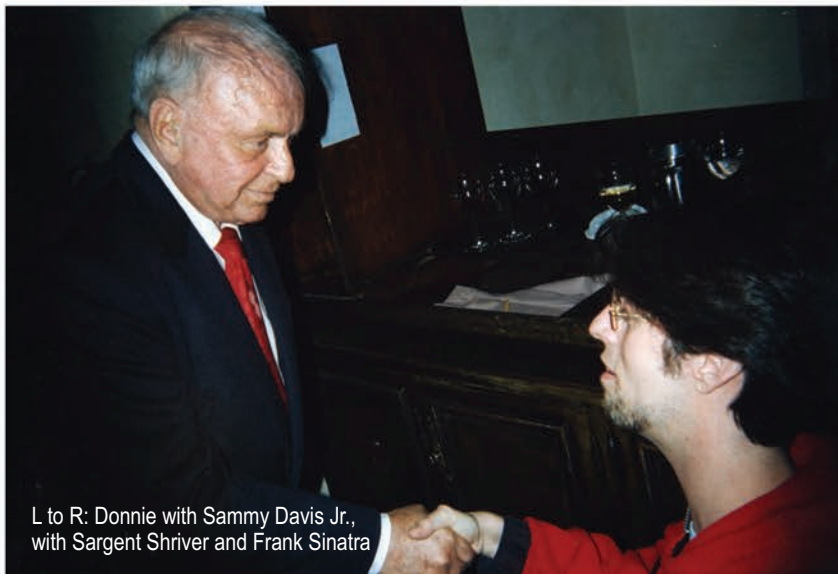
She went and got a hanger, hooked it into the back of my shirt somehow, and managed to pull me up. Then I was able to regain some control and move the wheelchair so she could open the door. When the press left, I fell apart into Paula's arms. She made me promise that I'd go to a doctor when I got back to the States.

Zimmerman: Wow!









L to R: Donnie with Sammy Davis Jr., with Sargent Shriver and Frank Sinatra

Demers: A lot of this was my own fault. I've always been anti doctor because I've just seen too many bad things happen to too many good people as the result of false diagnoses. I was actually improperly diagnosed three times. The first time they told my parents that I had Duchene Muscular Dystrophy and wouldn't live to be 17. My parents tried to prepare my siblings so they wouldn't be shocked when that time came. Another time, I went to a doctor for insurance purposes. He said I clearly didn't have Duchene. It was of his opinion that I had some other form of MD. Then, after I got back from Sydney, I went to a doctor at UCLA who specializes in treating people with Muscular Dystrophy. He looked at me and said, "I can tell just by looking at you that you don't have what's on your chart." He asked me if it would be okay to re-diagnose me. I said, "Absolutely!"

When the results came back, he told me I had myasthenia gravis, a rare form of MD. My doctor had apparently read an article and found out about Albuterol (a bronchodilator that relaxes muscles in the airways and increases air flow to the lungs), and what it was doing for people with my condition. He wanted to see if it would work for me. I said, "I don't want to take any drugs." He said, "It's completely up to you." So I didn't take it.

Jewell: Wow.

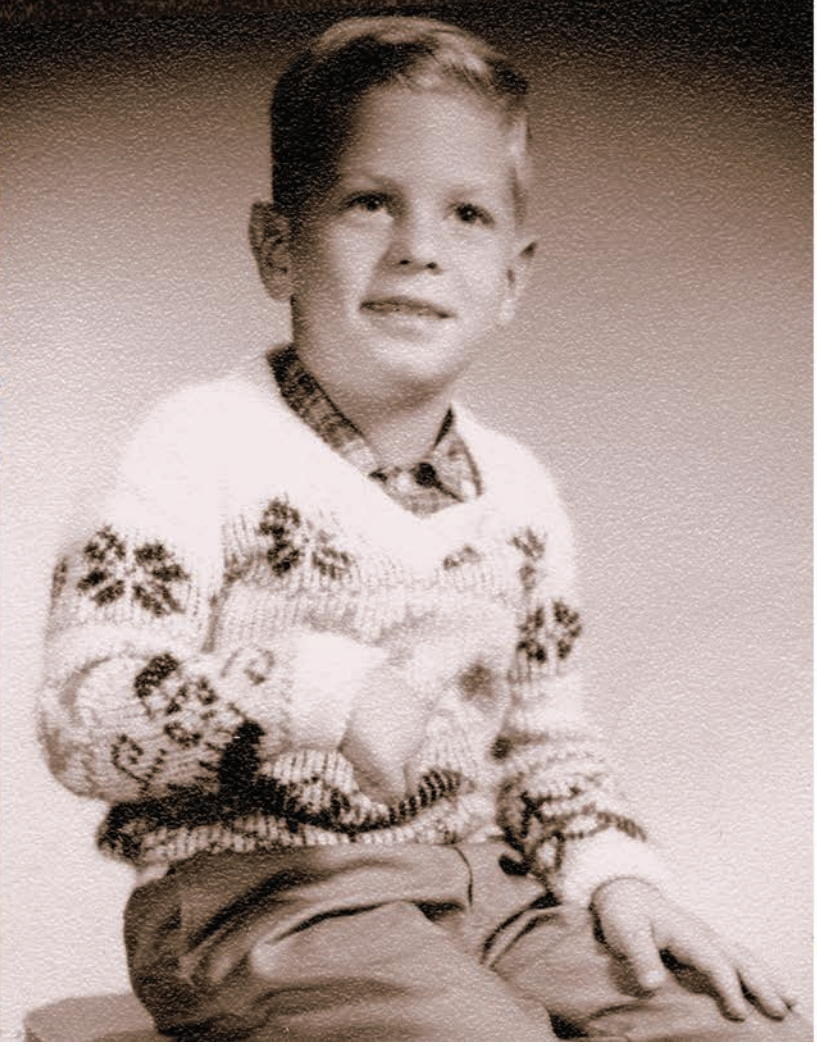
Demers: But I kept getting worse, and when I found out that Albuterol is not invasive, and wouldn't make my kidneys fail (or other terrible side effects), I ended up taking the medication. I took the first pill right there in the CVS parking lot in Montecito, where Jimmy lives. I woke up around 2 a.m. to go to the bathroom. Normally, it was a grueling process that took 10 to 15 minutes of getting out of bed and into my wheelchair. But this time I walked to the bathroom without even realizing it.

Zimmerman: You just got up and did it?

Demers: Yes, and when I realized what had happened, I started crying. My tears splashed the floor because I hadn't walked in nearly 30 years. I was able to because of the new medication, and because I had always stretched my legs, even as a kid. I knew another kid who was also in a wheelchair and had to have his legs surgically straightened because they had become permanently set in the sitting-down position.

So that moment changed everything for me. Everything! My doctor became my hero. The next time I went to see him, I walked down the corridor to his office, when the time before I couldn't get out of my wheelchair. Whoda thunk it? His team was blown away. They had no idea that I would respond to the Albuterol so quickly and so well.

Zimmerman: And this was after one dose?







Top: Donnie and Karen Carpenter
Bottom: Jimmy and Donnie performing

Demers: Yes. They still have no idea why it works, but because somebody had my rare form of muscular dystrophy and also had asthma, [pharmaceutical] worlds collided, and they discovered the "miracle" medication that works for my condition.

I hesitated at first because drugs scare me. Especially the misuse of drugs in America, which is at epidemic proportions. I never wanted to become a statistic.

Zimmerman: What are you doing now with your music?

Demers: I'm working on a little "hush-hush" musical. The idea for it was born in London around 2010, when I was having dinner with my actress friend Joan Collins. I don't know if you remember that time when a lot of flights in and out of Europe were cancelled over about two weeks' time because ash from an Icelandic volcano filled the skies? So Joan says, "Have you heard about all of these people who are stuck in London?" I was like, "Wait a minute, stop! That's a musical! I can already see it on Broadway!" To which Joanie quipped, "Well then, I hope there's a part in it for me!"

Zimmerman: That sounds amazing! Are you writing the lyrics and the music?

Demers: I am. But I won't be writing the play. Someone else will do that. I'm just setting up the workspace so that we can do a presentation for investors. I already see it on Broadway, can't you? Stuck!

Zimmerman: I just pictured the ash coming down on the stage.

Demers: Yes! I'm also working with this talented singer from France named, Amir. I have a song on his debut album that's been getting a lot of attention over there. It hit the top of the charts and he won Best New Artist. I hope he makes his way to the US.

Zimmerman: Is that out now?

Demers: Yes. The song is called, "Broken Heart." Google "Amir" and "Donnie Demers."

Zimmerman: Are there certain moments in your life when you were like, "Oh, my God, that's the moment that just—"

Demers: I've had a lot of those. Every moment with Norman Lear. China was one of those moments. Being on that stage and realizing: Wow, I'm a kid from Boston with a disability, and here I am, entertaining 65,000-plus human beings who are applauding something I've written.

Zimmerman: What do you want most at this moment in your life?



Photo by Michael Hansel

Donnie with David Zimmerman and Geri Jewell

Demers: To find that place where I'm content, and don't feel pressured by this circus of mediocrity that has taken over the music industry. My songs hitting the top of the charts is not my goal. As long as I'm able to inspire one person, I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. It all goes back to that four-year-old who welled up hearing, "Somewhere Over The Rainbow." But you certainly don't need to write songs to make that happen. Look at Norman, he can do it just by speaking.

Jewell: Exactly.

Demers: But I do wish Karen Carpenter would've recorded one of my songs before she passed away. To me, she was the most gifted and magical singers of all time. The perfect complement to any songwriter.

Jewell: Did you know her?

Demers: I got to meet her several times when I was a kid. I loved her. She was my focus. She was why I wanted to do music. I wanted her to interpret something that I'd written and share it with the world. One of my songwriting partners wrote the Carpenters' hit, "All You Get from Love Is a Long Song." I always tell him how envious I am of that supreme honor.

Jewell: Do you believe that Karen is working with you in spirit?

Demers: 100 percent. And the great thing about my

affection for her is that I've dreamed that she has sung my songs so, in many ways, I've actually gotten a facsimile of my dream. My mother comes to visit me in my dreams, as well. Sometimes I don't want to wake up. Have you guys ever had an experience like that?

Zimmerman: Signs from the other side.

Demers: Yeah.

Jewell: You and I are a lot alike.

Demers: Of course we are. We have a lot of the same experiences, too. You probably more so because you actually were in the mix, big-time.

Jewell: That one time.

Demers: That's all you need. Think of all the people you inspired. Did you even realize the magnitude of what was happening with *The Facts of Life*?

Jewell: Today I do. Not then.

Demers: It wasn't about this young actress; it was about this human being who had the power to transcend somebody's vision of what a person with a disability is supposed to do. I've never really felt like I was that different from anybody else. Yes, physically I'm different, but emotionally I never felt disconnected. That might have been because of the way I was raised. No one ever picked on me in high school or junior high school either—although my brother being the toughest kid in the neighborhood probably had a lot to do with that. Still, I have deep compassion for anyone who's been bullied. I've seen the repercussions and it's a million times worse than my condition because of what it does to your self-esteem. If you're in this and you've got great self-esteem, you're golden. It doesn't matter. You know your limitations and you move on.

Zimmerman: Have you written a book?

Demers: I'm too young to write a book!

Jewell: Hey, I wrote a book!

Zimmerman: But you're an old soul.

Demers: My mother always said, "You're an old soul." Anyone who's in our position has lived another life or 20 or 100, and we're born this way to make a difference to those who haven't lived the other lives. We have the power to be teachers and show people that none of this matters. It's about being kind. Living in gratitude. Making a difference. Helping someone out when they least expect it. Those kinds of things are powerful. And they change the world. I think people who are challenged come from different lifetimes of experience and learning. That's why I think we're more inclined to help people. Which is ironic, because you would think we're the ones who need the help.

Zimmerman: Two years ago I had a massive heart attack, and one of the main reasons I'm still around is because of my extended family.

Demers: Did you know that it was happening as it happened?

Zimmerman: I woke up and I felt pressure in my chest and I said, "This is not acid reflux."

Demers: Good for you!

Zimmerman: I told my housemates, "Take me to Cedars-Sinai." They said, "No, no, there's a closer hospital." When I got there, they gave me some tests, sent me home three hours later, and said, "You'll be fine."

Eight hours later I was throwing up and I called my doctor. He said, "We're going to put you in Cedars until we find out what's wrong." I went there, took the same tests, and then 11 people rushed into the room. They said, "Mr. Zimmerman, you've had a heart attack."

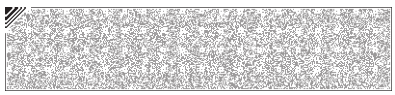
Demers: That's unbelievable! How damaged did your heart get from that? It sounds to me like that first hospital is responsible in some way.

Zimmerman: I know there's some damage. That being said, at my last appointment, they said, "Your heart is beautiful. I'll see you in six months. Yes, I can hear that you had a heart attack, because it sounds different. But you probably won't have any problems with your heart until you're 100-something." And I said, "It's the bus that's going to get me as I walk across the street after I see you!" Bottom line, though, you have to listen to your gut.

Demers: That's what I've always done. It's like that story I told you about stretching my legs. A doctor had encouraged me to do it, and in my gut I knew that it was the right thing to do. Had I not been doing that, I would never have been able to just walk to the bathroom, no matter how successful the Albuterol was. I'd been in a wheelchair since I was in my twenties. It had been a long time since I was able to just freely get up without difficulty. Putting clothes on was a nightmare that took forever. I would get on the bed and slide into them. Now I can stand up and pull my pants up. Are you kidding me? Now I can drive.

This whole experience has rekindled my mindset, while strengthening my muscles enough so that now I can physically be 100% independent, which includes driving without any special car controls. I just guide my wheelchair into my van, transfer to the driver's seat, and go! My future is a lot brighter than it was in 2013. ■ ABILITY

donniedemers.com





CONNECTING CANADA

FIRM OFFERS HIGH TECH, LOW BARRIERS

Chad Leaman is director of development at Neil Squire Society, which uses technology, knowledge and passion to empower Canadians with disabilities. Their programs offer an opportunity for people with disabilities to develop computer and employment skills and to provide solutions to removing technological barriers as they prepare to enter or re-enter the workforce. Leaman introduced LipSync, a mouth controlled input device, which was created to enable people with little or no hand movement to operate a touchscreen device. *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper spoke with Leaman recently about his vision going forward.

Chet Cooper: How did you get started with Neil Squire?

Chad Leaman: I got started here because of Neil Squire himself. In the early '80s, he was a university student who got into a car accident and broke his neck at the C1-C2 vertebrae level. After that he couldn't move his legs or arms, and his speech was impacted. He could barely move his tongue, and only spoke in a whisper, which made him hard to understand.

His cousin, Bill Cameron, invented a system, now known as Sip-and-Puff, where Neil's inhalations and exhalations on a tube in a machine were translated into the dots and dashes of Morse code. That was connected to a state-of-the-art computer and converted into type on the screen. It might say, "I'm thirsty." Or "It's a lot warmer in LA than it is in Vancouver today." That opened the door for emerging technology to increase his accessibility and improve his life.

Cooper: That's great.

Leaman: It was a great solution for Neil, but there were all these other people at Vancouver's GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre who needed a solution that worked for them. So over the 35 years of the organization, we have developed a lot of commercially available technologies. We run a program for the province of British Columbia, which helps employers cover the cost of accommodations needed by the people with disabilities that they hire.

A lot of our employment-related programming is funded by our government. So by helping people get back to work and improve their quality of life, it in turn allows them to become taxpayers.

Cooper: It restores dignity, too.

Leaman: Yes. The area we've had a tougher time in, however, is funding research and development. Through our R&D office, we invented the Jouse 3 Joystick product back in the '90s, which is a joystick-operated mouse; it's mounted to a computer and the user controls it by mouth and chin, moving the mouse cursor up, down, left, or right, while using the Sip-and-Puff to type.

Cooper: A hands-free solution.

Leaman: Jouse is great with a desktop or laptop, but it's not a super-mobile solution because it needs a control box, and it's got to be plugged into a wall. It doesn't allow access to what's changed the world in the last few years: mobile devices. So we built a prototype update called LipSync, which has all the controls on the head of the device and runs on little power, such as a cell phone or battery pack. But after it was sent to manufacturing a few years ago, that company went bankrupt.

About a year and a half ago, Google had an impact challenge for companies to propose different ideas and solutions on how technology impacts quality of life for people with disabilities. So we submitted a LipSync proposal and, working through Google, came to the point where we were like: "We want to release this open source." It was not another $2,000 or $3,000 or $4,000 medical device. It's something that can be made locally by a maker or hacker.

Cooper: I didn't know that. So you couldn't take the battery out of the Note 7?

Leaman: You couldn't. You could put an SD card in so you could expand your memory. I like my Note 4, and apparently I've got to learn to love it for a while.

(laughter)

[Leaman pointing to his mobile phone] Here's a picture of Don; he's on our board of directors. He was in rehab with Neil, who passed away in '84. That's when they basically started a nonprofit and gave it Neil's name.

Cooper: Looks like Neil was fairly young when he died

Leaman: He wasn't yet 30. So this is a picture of Don using the LipSync program on a tablet. This is a hollow tube, which goes into the switch there, and it gives you the ability to click and move the joystick around. The guts of it are on the device there.

We're just starting some user testing now and looking at how we're going to engage makers to create this; there's a whole boom in this area. There's this huge hacking contest. They apparently had over 200 different openings for these sorts of things. We entered the LipSync along the way. We didn't get to the finals, but the fact that Google already gave us $1 million, we don't really need the money to do this. These sorts of spaces are great, but they're filled with hackers and makers, and people with disabilities aren't aware of what's going on. Fortunately, that gap is being bridged. That's the work I'm starting with—a pilot in Vancouver we'll roll out across Canada in early 2017 during an "access megathon." We're also in the early phase of trying to start a community of makers with disabilities.

Cooper: What's the level of invention that comes out of the hackathons?

Leaman: They're very much like rudimentary prototypes. They're not going to be around. What we want to try to do is a little more work in curating to make sure the quote-unquote "ready for prime time" is actually ready to be used and offers users more support. So a little less around prototyping something new, and more towards refining what we have to the point where it's actually ready.

Cooper: What drew you to this field?

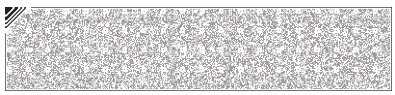
Leaman: When I was in university, I was in computer science and had a summer job at Neil Squire. Along the way it just kind of clicked. They didn't have me in a cubicle punching code. Instead, I was applying some of my knowledge to help people, which really resonated with me.

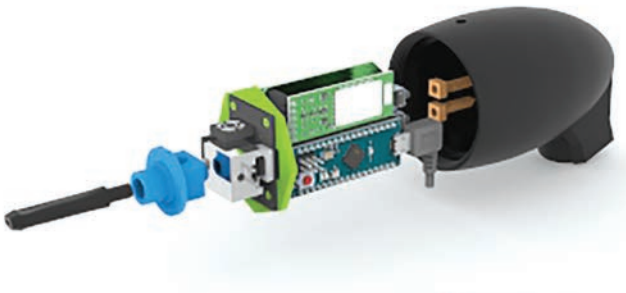
At Neil Squire, you have a fair amount of creative freedom; you're given a lot of rope. So far I've managed not to hang myself. I've tried things along the way. In the last few years I've moved more into a fundraising/development role, also known as "Chad has started all these programs—like eight of them—along the way." And for the last two years, I've been more involved with fundraising and development.

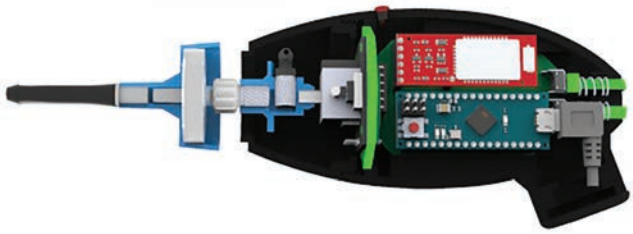
Cooper: What's your level of involvement with research and development?

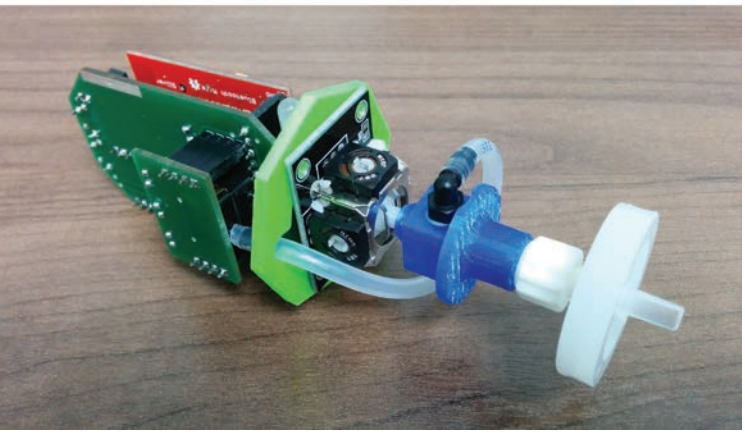
Leaman: I've worked with our R&D manager on opportunities within that department. It's funny because we had to complete lots of grant applications. One had only five questions, each requiring an answer of 500 words or less: "What's your big idea? Who will it impact? How will it be scaled?" They did the vetting, and then we had some ongoing conversations with them on a few things to get the funding. Google's been great. They've helped us like an ambassador. It's a great relationship, and it's helpful that Google makes Android. We've worked on the accessibility part to make sure that what we create is compatible with them.

Cooper: I keep hearing good things about Google, and keep meeting them around the world. They do things quickly, putting their money where their mouth is.









Leaman: Yes. Now I've got two things I'm trying to accomplish. To connect with makers and bring them in, and to get LipSync into people's lives. The Christopher Reeve Foundation says that in Canada and the US, there are over a million people who have no use of their hands. For someone like that to have a way to use a smartphone, to do anything that you and I can do, to have that independence of access, would be transformative. I'm trying to bring that to people.

Going forward, I'd really like to raise the profile of the LipSync as a solution, because things like the Jouse cost a few thousand dollars, and it does well as long as it's plugged into the wall. We want to raise awareness that we have a solution, and that we're at a point where we're going to release all the schematics and diagrams on assemble. We're doing some user testing right now. For us it's not a revenue generator, but a mission to help people with disabilities use smartphones like everybody else.

Cooper: That's why some people like the stylus, because it helps them compensate for some of the control they've lost. They can point with their fingers and speak into it.

Leaman: Speech recognition; it's easier to edit it than to type it all out.

Cooper: When you mention people who can't use their hands, is that finger grip or the whole hand?

Leaman: On the Canadian disability survey they have a four-point scale from no use at all, to some problems, to great difficulty. It's hard to know the exact number of people who fall into each category, but there's certainly an unmet need.

I've been working with a couple of local universities. The idea is very similar to the access make-a-thon model, which is a multi-based event, where you'll have a person with a disability at the center of a team, and then have students who are working in electronics or engineering or design who help that person create a solution. I want to position the event as less prototyping new things—although I think some of that will happen anyway—but more like: "Here are four or five things we know are vetted and that have helped people, let's help bring it into this person's life." We're hosting it at the Centre for Digital Media in Vancouver, which is a partnership between the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

We'll have lots of smart young people coming together to try to help people. We're doing the first one of those in January 2017, and we'll replicate it in the Vancouver area. From there, we'll start scaling it out across Canada over the course of the next couple of years.

Cooper: Sounds promising.

Leaman: We have many smart young people who are going to change the world. And on the disability side I'm working with the Rick Hansen Foundation. In the '80s, he went around the whole world in his wheelchair.

Cooper: Was there a documentary?

Leaman: Yes—the *Man in Motion World Tour*. It's pretty famous in Canada, and it started with Terry Fox; he had cancer and lost one of his legs below the knee. Two years later, he started what he called the Marathon of Hope, where he did a cross-country run with one prosthetic leg; he was out there every day for 143 days, until he died of cancer at 22.

We're also looking at different learning styles. We built something similar to ReadSpeaker, a learning platform where basically you take snippets of text and send them to Google Translate from English to English, and it gives you an mp3 file. We sync that up so you can play it on our site. It allows a lot of people who learn differently to get support by hitting a play button.

Cooper: Keep up the good work. ■ ABILITY

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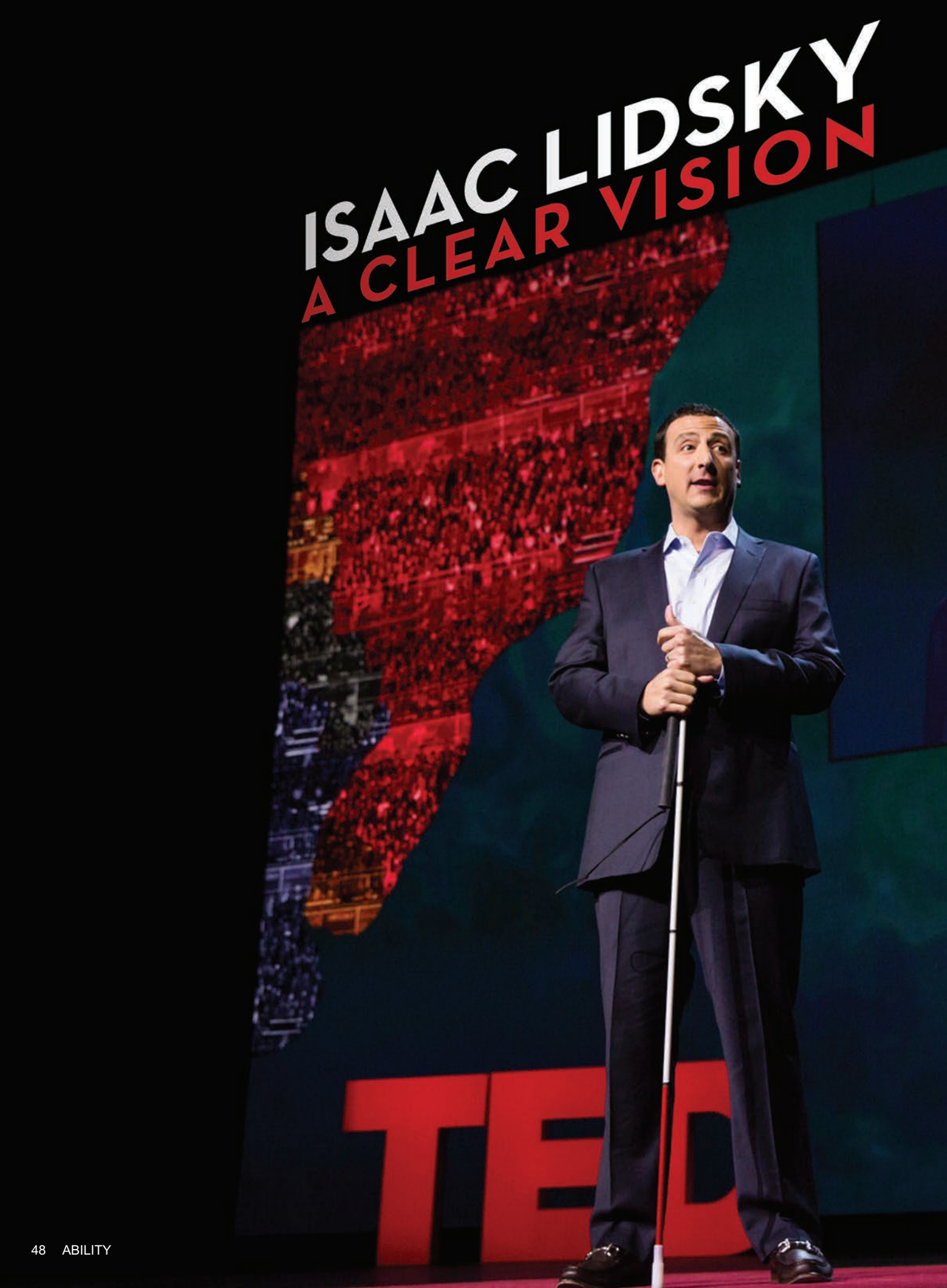
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ISAAC LIDSKY
A CLEAR VISION





Back in the day, entrepreneur and speaker, Isaac Lidsky played Weasel on NBC's *Saved By The Bell: The New Class*. He finished Harvard at only 19, doubling back to attend law school there and became the only person who's blind to serve as a law clerk for the US Supreme Court. (His bosses were Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.) The current CEO of ODC Construction in Florida sat down with *ABILITY Magazine*'s Chet Cooper and Lia Martirosyan to talk about his powerful TED Talk and his forthcoming book, *Eyes Wide Open: Overcoming Obstacles and Recognizing Opportunities in a World That Can't See Clearly*.

Lia Martirosyan: I just watched your TED Talk, which was really wonderful. Had you done anything like that before?

Isaac Lidsky: Thank you! No! I started doing some speaking on what I call my *Eyes Wide Open* vision maybe a year and a half ago. One thing led to another, and they asked me to do the TED Talk; I've long been a big fan of TED.

*Chet Cooper: Ted's a nice guy. (*laughter*)*

Lidsky: Yeah, exactly! (*laughs*)

[Editor's note: The "TED" in TED Talks stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design]

Martirosyan: What difference do you see between acting and speaking in front of a live audience?



Dorothy Lidsky in audience during Isaac's TED Talk



Isaac has Retinitis Pigmentosa—a degenerative, blinding disease

Lidsky: This is something I do because I'm passionate about it. It's a labor of love. In my day job I run a construction-services company that I founded with some partners two years ago, I felt almost a calling to share with others some of the ideas I formed along the way as I lost my sight and thereafter.

We are the sum of our experiences, and of course as an actor and litigator, to some extent, I had to perform on my feet and be persuasive. I hesitate to say those experiences were directly relevant because this is really from the heart, so I hesitate to view it as performance. But obviously, I am who I am. I find myself doing more speaking now as I wait for my book to come out. It took me about a year to write it, and it was an amazing experience.

Cooper: Before I watched it, I felt like I was swimming backwards wagging my head…

(*laughter*)

Lidsky: Yeah. I like that metaphor.

Cooper: I liked that analogy from your talk. I give a talk sometimes about the same subject that you dealt with, but I use a different method. I engage the audience to basically say the wrong thing, and then I explain to them afterwards how the mind can be told one thing, when the reality is something absolutely different.

The way that you approached the subject of your TED Talk was great. It really resonated. Your intelligence, your education, your finishing Harvard at 19… the audience really absorbed it. You got a standing ovation.

Lidsky: Yeah, that was awesome. It's funny, I do an hour-long keynote, and I'm definitely very neurotic, and spend a ton of time thinking about this stuff, so I kind of joke with folks—although I guess it's not really much of a joke—that "My talk's not going to be all light and fun and games." I do sometimes get a little heavy with folks; I share what I think is important to share.

Cooper: It's really good material you've put out there. I didn't know you were a litigator. I knew you went to law school and did some really interesting things with your clerking career. Can you explain more about it?

Lidsky: Sure. For about a little more than three years, I served as a member of the Appellate Staff of the Civil Division of the Justice Department, which is a long and boring-sounding name, but it's a really cool office within the Justice Department that represents the US and its agencies in the intermediate federal appellate courts… I won the lottery with that gig through the honors program at the Justice Department. A year out of law school I was briefing and arguing my own appeals, flying around the country, representing the government. It was just awesome. I loved it.

Martirosyan: That's amazing.

Lidsky: Yeah, but it ruined me for the practice of law. Later I found myself in private tax practice... but I did not enjoy that at all.

Cooper: You felt you were going backwards rather than going forward?

Lidsky: Yeah. As is often the case with public service, it's a trade-off of money and prestige and whatnot for responsibility and experience. In the government, I was briefing and arguing my own cases. In private practice, I was low man on a team of design lawyers, and by the way the cases and the work were a lot more interesting working for the government.

Cooper: In law school you did well in constitutional law?

Lidsky: I did! I took it from Charles Fried at Harvard, which was one of my favorite classes.

Cooper: A lot of people struggle with that in law school.

Lidsky: I loved law school! I was the proverbial kid in the candy store because between college and law school I spent two years working at an Internet advertising technology business I founded with my brother-in-law. Those were some tough years. If we were awake we were working.

We were constantly trying to scrape together the money to make payroll and yadayada. When we raised venture capital funding and it became a real job, I went off to law school, where my only responsibility was to go to class and think. It was like a three-year vacation.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*)*

Cooper: And the name of the tech company you started was Yadayada?

(*laughter*)

Lidsky: The company most recently was called [x+1]. It was acquired a few years ago.

Cooper: Did you still have ownership when it was sold?

Lidsky: Alas, we did not. In the intervening years I sold my ownership.

Martirosyan: When did you begin losing your sight?

Lidsky: I was diagnosed when I was 13. At the time, I would have said I didn't see any worse than any of my peers. In retrospect, it's clear I was probably already starting to lose some vision—or some sight, excuse me. That's an important distinction. I started to lose sight. In my late teens and throughout college and thereafter, it went relatively quickly, so that by the time I was 25, I had no useful vision to speak of.

Cooper: At what point did you have to stop driving?

Lidsky: Oh, that I remember well. I loved driving. I was the classic teenager, couldn't wait to get my license the second I turned 16. And then I didn't have occasion to drive much when I was in college, and certainly not while living in Manhattan and working for the start-up. But my now-wife Dorothy and I moved in together my second year of law school. We got a car because we needed it to make our life work in Boston, and I drove it off the lot and it was like, "We're just going to drive home." It was a sunny day, not too much traffic, and we thought it would be fine. We hadn't gotten very far before I pulled over and said, "I can't drive anymore." That was a tough day.

Cooper: Right off the lot?

Lidsky: Yes. That was the last time I drove.

Cooper: Did you know Mark Riccobono drove on the Daytona International Speedway and Dan Parker rode a motorcycle on the Bonneville Salt Flats, and both of them are blind?

Lidsky: I truly believe we're capable of accomplishing anything we set our minds to, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're all good ideas.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*) I like that caveat. Speaking of driving, you're fairly young; you'll probably be around when they get the driverless cars up and running.*

Lidsky: I can't wait! I have a buddy who works for Google, and I tell him "I've gotta be first on the list, man!" I want one of those bad.

Martirosyan: May I be second, please?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) I'll put in a good word for you! You know, *going* blind is profoundly more difficult than *being* blind.

Martirosyan: Mm-hmm.

Lidsky: It went from a nuisance to a disability. It was like, "If it would just stay the way it is *now*, that would be fine. I've got it figured out, but what'll it be like tomorrow?" All these dark imaginings. I feel for you, Lia. The nature of a progressive condition is a real challenge.

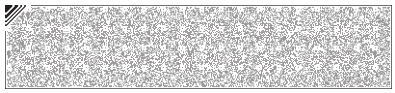
Martirosyan: Yes it is. There are so many similarities between us in that way. But let's get to your book.

Lidsky: The first chapter, the conceptual framework, is about the experience of losing my sight over a dozen years; it offers a peek behind the curtains into how the mind works and how we create our own reality. I got a backstage tour of this amazing, miraculous experience that our brain creates and an understanding that sight fools us into thinking that there are objective truths and objective realities. It made me wonder whether that might apply to other aspects of life and perception.

The second chapter is the *Eyes Wide Open* view of fear. I talk a lot about fear in that chapter: Fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear in times of crisis. The third chapter is about marshalling strength for the ongoing struggle of day-to-day challenges and the practicalities of that on an ongoing basis.

Cooper: Gearing up for battle…

Lidsky: And then chapter four is about strength and acceptance. There I set out the *Eyes Wide Open* view of







strength and weakness and disability and acceptance and surrender. I put my two cents in there. The fifth chapter is the *Eyes Wide Open* view of luck and chance and how we perceive luck in our lives. Obviously, I'll leave it to the reader to judge, but I think the parallels to the experience of sight are pretty strong. We do think we have an understanding of probability and chance and whether we're lucky or unlucky. I don't think we look at that in the most productive way.

Then chapter six is the *Eyes Wide Open* view of success and what it truly means to succeed and to define your success and optimize your business plan, so to speak. In that chapter I borrow concepts from business, where we have financial statements, balance sheets, profit and loss, the statement of cash flow—all these concepts interact in interesting ways. I thought, "Why can't we apply these concepts to our lives and the decisions we make based on what we're trying to achieve for ourselves."

Martirosyan: And chapter seven?

Lidsky: That one is called Ears Wide Open. I suggest in that chapter that we tend to do a pretty lousy job of listening to one another, if we listen at all. (*laughs*) And I give my two cents on how we might more actively and more effectively communicate with one another. Again, I give some examples from the business world, from my experience growing and running my company. Then the final chapter is called Heart Wide Open, where I ask: If you gave yourself permission to commit to counting your blessings and not your burdens, what might that look like in your life? That's more of an aspirational chapter.

In between the chapters I offer seven "fishing trips," following on the idea of the backwards-swimming fish. Also recognizing that some of the material in these chapters is a little heavy and conceptual, although there are plenty of stories and humor, too, but it can be heavy reading, so I figured I'd sprinkle in anecdotes from my life that are loosely illustrative of some of the ideas from the previous chapter and the book, in general, so you're kind of trolling my life to see these backwards-swimming fish. I tried to weave in stories with a twist of perspective. Those were a lot of fun to write.

Martirosyan: Was it during your process of writing the book that you came up with the concept that what you might have lost in sight, you gained in vision?

Lidsky: Absolutely.

Martirosyan: The chapter that talks about Heart Wide Open, did you see that as being even more relevant with this election?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) I try to stay away from politics. But I did post a blog about electing a reality. In some respects that's what's going on here. There are two completely different representations of reality being peddled by the candidates. Some of it's outright lies, there are facts you can point to and they're either right



Lidsky family: Isaac and Dorothy with children Lily Louise, Phineas and Thaddeus—collectively, "The Tripskys"—and baby Clementine

or they're wrong. Unfortunately there seems to be a lot of lying going on. Some of it is classic, you can find an economic expert to support pretty much any proposition you want to advance. Your experts say one thing, my experts say another. That's interesting, too. But in the third bucket, to your point, a lot of it's choice. It's that simple. Two people face virtually identical or at least very similar circumstances in life and have very different outcomes, live very different lives as a result. What's the difference? I think it's choice.

Cooper: When you say "choice," though, it's coming from their intrinsic values.

Lidsky: [*pause*] Well, I guess in a sense I would say you choose your values.

Cooper: Nurture or nature?

Lidsky: I don't think any of us get to blame nature for our values or what we believe.

Cooper: I would debate you on that one.

Lidsky: Okay.

Cooper: I think there's empirical evidence there different basic types of temperaments on the planet, and each look at things in a different way. The information comes in and is churned out differently. I think that's why there are wars, debates that go on forever, because one side is saying, "I believe it this way," and never coming close to understanding the other view. And beyond temperment... recently there was a picture of a dress that went virual. People looked at the dress and some said it was gold, others said it was blue. It's what you were talking about, that realities are different through our sight… Puppies in the same litter will react to the same enviroment differently from their siblings. They haven't yet been trained or nurtured differently, they're intrinsically moving toward their reality. Some are outgoing, some shy,…

Lidsky: Behaviors are one thing. But with respect to values or principles, I definitely would not—

Cooper: Maybe it's a matter of semantics…

Lidsky: I think we're saying probably the same thing in a weird way. I guess in a lot of ways that's precisely the point of *Eyes Wide Open*. How your brain is wired because of your DNA, or how you were raised, or your experiences, or the culture you grew up in. By definition, we are going to selectively take in and process information in fundamentally different ways. We all do. To me the whole point is that, if we choose, we can be aware of this and hold ourselves accountable for the way in which we, as individuals, choose to put a gloss upon the world we share with all sorts of people who may have a very different take on the same experience.
Cooper: I think the $64,000 question is how do you get people who are on extreme ends of the spectrum to communicate without demonizing one another? How do you get them to sit at a table?

Lidsky: I don't know, man, I wish I did. It's something I hope—at least in some microscopic way—my book will contribute to. It's definitely a theme in the book, the extent to which life is nuance. I think we live in quantum nuance. Any extremes almost by definition can't be right in life. At the core of *Eyes Wide Open* is checking yourself, keeping aware of the filters that are literally physically wired into your brain.

Cooper: That's part of what you were able to capture in the brevity of a TED Talk, even though what we're doing right now is peeling back those layers and delving into each of those areas... I just want to say before I forget that you said something about the beauty of humor. I've never heard that before. That's a nice way to put it.

Lidsky: Laughter is pure joy. I love to laugh. Honestly, I have yet to find too many things I enjoy more than making people laugh.

Cooper: One of Lia's best friends is Kathy Buckley, the stand-up comedian. She's deaf, and we did a story on her many years ago. She did a controversial thing within the deaf and hard-of-hearing community by getting a cochlear implant… And when she did stand-up for the first time and heard the laughter, she broke into tears.

Lidsky: Oh, yeah!

Cooper: When I watched your talk, you had a couple of good jokes in the beginning that made the audience laugh and get into the humor.

Lidsky: Yeah, I can't be too serious for too long—almost to my detriment at times. I just think it's impossible to take yourself or others too seriously in this world.

Cooper: You and us three.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*) Let's back track to the Weasel years. Any fun memories from those days?*

Lidsky: Oh, yeah! That was a blast. The first fishing trip in the book is about that. It's called "Action, Lights, Camera." It tells the story of how I was cast for the show, which was an uncommon experience. There was a show called *Saved by the Bell*. The original show was on for four or five years and was wildly popular. Most of that cast went on to do a show called *Saved by the Bell: The College Years* in prime time. And they created *Saved by the Bell: The New Class* for the Saturday morning time slot that was vacated. And there was a direct mapping of the six new characters to the six old characters, and a lot of the scripts were very similar. The upshot for me was that there was a nationwide search to cast *The New Class*. It was covered by *Entertainment Tonight* and all the teenybopper magazines. I got cast, moved to Los Angeles and got thrust into a television show, which was popular before it was even created. We would do publicity tours, public appearances, charity events, photo shoots and all that stuff before we even taped one minute of the show.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*) Wow!*

Lidsky: I got fan mail before we taped the first show.

Martirosyan: That's why the chapter name was called "Action, Lights, Camera."

Lidsky: Exactly! And it ties into the theme of the book in that it was a false reality. There was also the narrative that the cast members were bonding and close friends, and this off-screen friendship would manifest on-screen. But you can't just throw six people together and inform them that they'll be best of friends. It doesn't work that way.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*) I was curious about when the switch happened, because it's kind of rare for a kid to go from acting to college and becoming a lawyer.*

Lidsky: I've been so blessed to have the opportunity to reinvent myself along the way. I grew up in Miami really enjoying school. My parents and my older sisters valued education. I always knew I wanted to go to college. The acting thing was the acting thing. It culminated in being out in LA. I was diagnosed around that time as well, so then I was an out-of-work, 14-year-old actor in Los Angeles, who'd gone blind.

I knew that LA and Hollywood weren't for me, and I was going to go to college anyway. I had moved out to LA the summer before my sophomore year of high school, and I didn't want to move back to Miami for a random senior year, so I applied to college early. I wrote to the colleges explaining my plans and what else I wanted.

Cooper: Oh, that's how you got the year's jump on everyone?

Lidsky: Yeah. I skipped seventh grade and 12th grade.

Cooper: Graduating from Harvard at 19, that's pretty impressive on a CV.

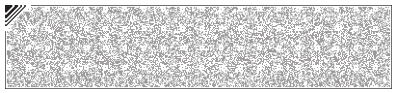
Lidsky: Impressive or otherwise, it's really not a common experience. Like anything in life, it has its pros and cons. I was just doin' my thing.

Cooper: What's the con?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) I grew up very quickly. I did a diaper commercial when I was six months old.

Cooper: And then everything hit the fan?

Lidsky: Exactly. (*laughs*) It's only partly a joke. It was kind of all downhill from there. I did 100, 150





commercials growing up in Miami. I got big parts in small things, small parts in big things. *Saved by the Bell* was my lucky break, I guess. But it takes a toll on your social standing to always be the youngest, and then a year younger, and then two years younger than everybody else. Obviously there were a lot of benefits, too.

Cooper: Your first commercial at six months—you got that gig on your own?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) Yup. Crawled right into it.

*Martirosyan: (*laughs*) How did your parents know to get you out there?*

Lidsky: I have three older sisters. They had acted a bit in their youth. By the time I was born, my mom knew the game, knew the players, and she put me in it.

Martirosyan: What ethnicity is Lidsky?

Lidsky: The name is Polish, but both of my parents' families moved around Eastern Europe and then wound up in Cuba to escape religious persecution. Both of my parents were born and raised in Cuba, and they left when Castro took over. So we're referred to as "Jewbans," because we're Jewish. There were about 11,000 or so Jews from Europe in Cuba when Castro showed up.

*Cooper: (*laughs*) I had not heard that one before! That's pretty good.*

Lidsky: Jewbans. It's a thing. I prefer Cubish, but Picasso has a lock on that, unfortunately.

(*laughter*)

So we're Jewbans.

Cooper: Have you been to Cuba?

Lidsky: I went in 2010 as a litigator. My boss was Tom Goldstein, a Supreme Court litigator. Long story short, we represented the Cuban Five, who were kind of like the Bad News Bears of international espionage. In the 90's, the Cuban government shot down their Cessnas flying relief missions over Cuba and the US government threw the book at them. Accused them of quote-unquote "rolling up a spy network" in Florida.

So these guys got very long sentences, and one went to jail for murder, which was quite a stretch. Either way—whether you drink the Kool-Aid or not—they were our clients, and we were essentially retained by the Cuban government. So Tom and I went to Cuba to meet with representatives of the Cuban government in February 2010. It was an interesting experience. A footnote: The trade we did recently for the American contractor who was imprisoned in Cuba, the guys we



Clerks with Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

sent over were the Cuban Five.

Cooper: So when it comes out, you can play yourself.

Lidsky: Yeah! (*laughs*) You never know what the future will hold.

Cooper: Have you thought about getting back to acting? I know you're probably full-time with your business.

Lidsky: One of the things on my bucket list is stand-up, but I really don't want to act again.

Cooper: I published National Lampoon *for a while. I was around a lot of funny writers, and they would try stand-up here and there. It's a different beast. I think you have to be a good actor to do good stand-up. You have to memorize your lines and know how to play to an audience, while making it look like you're just talking to them. After seeing your TED Talk, I know you could pull that off.*

Lidsky: Thanks. I've long wanted to try it. I will some day, no excuses.

Martirosyan: Let us know when you do.

Lidsky: I will.

Martirosyan: What kind of assistive technology do you use, whether for reading or your computer?

Lidsky: Voiceover on Apple products is great. I use JAWS on my PC. I use a product called the Victor Reader Stream made by a company called HumanWare, which is awesome. There's a gizmo called the Colorino (Talking Color Identifier for the Blind). Some of these folks should talk to some branding consultants. Victor Reader Stream, that's kind of a weird name. I don't love Colorino either, but Colorino helps you figure out what color clothing you've picked out. It can also tell you where there's a light source, so you turn off lights before you go to bed and that kind of stuff. It's awesome, the tools that are out there. I tell my sighted friends that the dirty little secret is that being blind is not that bad.

Cooper: Have you heard of ReadSpeaker?

Lidsky: No.

Cooper: It does a nice job. It's not just for people who might be blind, or low vision but also for people learning a second language. It reads and highlights as it goes along. The whole sentence is highlighted, and the individual word is highlighted in another color, so now you're learning the new language.

Lidsky: Oh, that's cool!

Cooper: We also use AiSquared, which expands your website to an extreme size. The font is probably 500 percent larger. And in print, we're the first magazine to use VOICEYE. We went to Korea and met with them. In a sense it's like a QR code on steriods, this patented process has a lot of content in high-density dots. We put the code at the bottom of the editorial pages of the print magazine. With any smartphone you can download the free app and then hover over it until it recognizes the code, beeps, and then reads out the content on that page. You can hear the printed page.

Lidsky: That's phenomenal! I hadn't heard of that.

Cooper: The Korean government is using it. It's great for people with dyslexia or low vision. We place it on the bottom center of each article because of graphis in the magazine, but for governments and other entities, the standard place to put it is in the top right corner of every page.



Lidsky: Then you know where to find it.

Cooper: Right.

Lidsky: So someone hands you something printed and you put your iPhone over the dots on the top right corner.

Cooper: And that's without the web. If you're on the web, it reads out loud in 58 languages.

Lidsky: That's so cool!

Martirosyan: We have a program called the ABILITY House, a universal designed home for families with disabilities, built by volunteers with disabilities. Do you do any corporate social responsibility projects?

Lidsky: That is awesome. Yes tons of stuff. ODC has done work for Habitat for Humanity, for the Wounded Warrior Project, and Home at Last, which is similar to that. We've built wheelchair ramps for folks. We did something for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. I'm blessed to work with a team of people who want to help folks out and do good within communities. That's a no-brainer.

Cooper: ODC?

Lidsky: We bought a company called Orlando Decorative Concrete. It was an awful name, but we had to stick with the brand to some extent, so we made it ODC. The company itself has a really cool story that I share in the book. It has succeeded beyond my wildest goals or dreams. I have a phenomenal team of people that I've worked with along the way. As we met and surpassed our company goals, I've transitioned into more of an owner/chairman kind of role than an employee in the business.

The current president of the company, Tony Hartsgrove, is a partner, a friend, and a guy I respect immensely. He's running the business day to day, which has given me the time and space to write my book and do my speaking. For me, it was about creating a business and executing a vision. I think we did that quite nicely, and now that phase is behind us.

Cooper: Tell us about the nonprofit that you created.

Lidsky: I founded it in 2005. The idea was to bring together, coordinate, and support the grassroots efforts of communities around the country that were trying to raise awareness and research funding for retinal degenerative diseases. I've led that organization for about five years. It was really cool. We grew to about a dozen cities and raised awareness, along with a lot of money. In 2010, when my wife became pregnant, I was working in law and there was too much on my plate, so I stepped back from any involvement in the organization. My





Isaac playing Weasel in *Saved by the Bell: The New Class*



mom has run it since 2010.

Cooper: And she's the one who fired you?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) I was fired from the sitcom, but this time I quit.

Cooper: I didn't know you were fired from the sitcom.

Lidsky: My character, Weasel, was the nerdy guy, the Screech, I guess. That *College Years* show was canceled quickly. The real Screech, the original Screech, a guy named Dustin Diamond, was quite a draw for NBC. He had a following. They took him from the *College Years* and brought him back to the *New Class* as the assistant principal. In the immutable logic of Saturday morning television, there's not room enough for two dorky guys. So he became the dorky guy and I was gone.

Cooper: And you put a contract out on him?

Lidsky: (*laughs*) No. I wished him well.

Cooper: Did you get to know him?

Lidsky: A little bit. Our cast did some work with the original cast early on, and through the publicity and joint marketing, we got to know them a little bit, but I wouldn't say we were close. The one I got to know the best was Mario Lopez, who played a character named Slater. We lived in the same apartment complex in Burbank. He was and probably still is a very muscular and fit guy, and I was this 13-year-old scrawny kid. I would make my way to the gym and he would humor me; we would quote-unquote "work out" together. It was hilarious. He was a good guy. Unfortunately, I have not kept in touch with him, but he was the one I was closest to.

Cooper: We should invite you to speak on our panel at the United Nations. During the Convention for the Human Rights of People with Disabilities, we run a side panel. Last year, we focused on assistive technology. One was a small camera you put on a glass frame—

Lidsky: Is this OrCam?

Cooper: Right. We invited OrCam, as well as Canon, Hackaday and Sesame Enable. Do you know those guys?

Lidsky: I know about the OrCam folks. They are awesome.

Cooper: How do you envision yourself five years from now?

Lidsky: I have absolutely no idea what I'll be doing, and I love it. ■ ABILITY

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Job Accommodation Network

should I or shouldn't I?



Deciding if, when, and how to share disability-related information with a prospective or current employer can be overwhelming. The decision-making process requires answering a number of personal questions that may be different with each employment experience. There is no single right or wrong approach to disclosing a disability. The disability disclosure decision-making process can include questions like: "Do I have an obligation to disclose?" "When is the right time?" "How much information does the employer need?" and "How will disclosing the information affect my employment?"

While JAN Consultants cannot decide what is the best approach to disability disclosure for everyone, the remainder of this document is a summary of issues and answers to some of the most frequently asked questions related to disability disclosure and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This information is relevant to both individuals with disabilities and employers.

Disability Disclosure and Employment

Disability disclosure can occur during any stage of the employment process, including pre-employment, post-offer, and while employed – whether it be within days, months, or years of initially being hired. Generally it is up to the individual with the disability to determine the right time to disclose, given his or her particular circumstances. The ADA places restrictions on disability-related questions that can be asked of applicants and current employees so there are only limited situations when disclosure may be required. Applicants should be aware that covered employers are not permitted to ask non-voluntary disability-related questions on a job application. Disability-related questions can be asked after a conditional job offer has been made, but only if the same questions are asked of all applicants entering into the same job category. After an individual has started working, an employer may only ask disability-related questions if they are *job-related and consistent with business necessity* – for example, when an accommodation is requested or when an employee is having performance issues that may be related to a known medical impairment.

Disclosure and Pre-Employment

With limited exceptions, an employer may not *require* an applicant to disclose information about a disability or medical impairment prior to making an offer of employment. However, there are situations when an applicant may need to disclose information about a disability during this early stage in the employment process. For example, if an accommodation is needed to complete an on-line application, participate in a job interview, or take an employment test, an applicant may need to disclose his or her disability to receive an accommodation.

Only applicants *with disabilities* are entitled to receive an accommodation under the ADA. When an accommodation is requested for the hiring process, and the need for the accommodation is not obvious, an employer may ask an applicant for *reasonable documentation* about his or her disability because the employer, in this instance, is entitled to know that the applicant has a disability in order to receive accommodation (EEOC, 1995). An applicant may be asked to provide a note from an appropriate professional (i.e., healthcare provider, rehabilitation counselor, etc.) that explains the individual's disability, limitations, and need for accommodation.

In limited circumstances, employers can ask applicants to *voluntarily* disclose their disability status without violating the ADA's restrictions on medical inquiries. Employers who are required to undertake affirmative action based on federal, state, or local laws, and those who use disability-related information to benefit individuals with disabilities may invite applicants and employees to voluntarily self-identify as having a disability. In requesting this information, an employer must state clearly, in writing or otherwise, that the information is being requested on a *voluntary* basis, that it will be kept confidential, that refusal to self-identify will not subject the person to any adverse treatment, and that the information will be used only in accordance with the ADA and federal laws that require affirmative action (e.g., Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act). The voluntarily-disclosed information must be kept separate from the application.

Disclosure and Post-Offer

Individuals are often compelled to share disability-related information during the post-offer stage of employment because many employers ask medical questions or require medical examinations before a newly hired employee begins working. Employers are not limited in the categories of questions that can be asked during the post-offer stage. This means that after receiving a

conditional job offer, an individual may be asked about his or her medical history in its entirety, as long as the employer asks the same questions of other applicants offered the same type of job. An employer may ask specific individuals for more medical information if the follow-up questions are related to the medical information obtained during the post-offer inquiry or examination. While this essentially requires an individual to disclose information about disability – *even when an accommodation is not needed* – the information revealed during post-offer cannot be used to rescind a job offer unless it can be shown that the individual would be unable to perform the essential functions of the job (with or without accommodation), or would pose a direct threat to him/herself or others (EEOC, 1995).

Disclosure to Receive Reasonable Accommodation

Generally there is no *obligation* to disclose disability-related information to an employer until the need for reasonable accommodation becomes apparent. Reasonable accommodation may be needed to participate in the hiring process, to perform essential job functions, or to receive a benefit or privilege of employment. The need to disclose and request accommodation will become evident when an individual knows there is a workplace barrier due to a disability. An accommodation can be requested even when a disability was not disclosed upon being hired. Of course, the timing of a request can be rather important. It is better to disclose a disability and request accommodation before job performance suffers or conduct problems occur. According to the EEOC, an employer does not have to rescind discipline (including a termination) or an evaluation warranted by poor performance simply because an employee has disclosed a disability or requested accommodation (EEOC, 2008).

Sometimes employees disclose disability-related information, but do not specifically request an accommodation. It can be difficult for supervisors and managers to know what to do with a simple disclosure. If a disclosure is not made in the context of an employee requiring an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition, then it may not be necessary to proceed with an interactive process to discuss accommodations. However, it may be necessary to seek clarification from the employee regarding why the disability-related information was disclosed and if the employee is asking the employer to provide a reasonable accommodation. If the employee clarifies that his or her medical impairment is affecting job performance, then the two parties should begin the interactive process to discuss possible accommodations.

When an individual is prepared to disclose his or her disability because an accommodation is needed, the individual should inform someone who can act upon a request, such as a manager, supervisor, or human resources professional. The employee should make it known that an adjustment or change at work is needed for a reason related to a medical condition. According to the EEOC, the employee can use "plain English" and does not have to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." After a disclosure and request for accommodation is made, then the interactive process should begin. EEOC suggests that individuals with disabilities might find it useful to document accommodation requests in the event there is a dispute about whether or when they disclosed their disability and requested accommodation. One way to document an accommodation request is to make a written request. JAN offers a sample accommodation request letter to assist individuals in drafting a request for accommodation.

Disclosure and Confidentiality

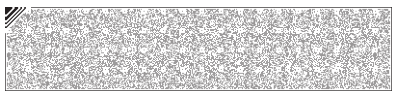
Individuals with disabilities are often hesitant to disclose their disability or share information about a medical impairment because they prefer to keep the information private. They do have a right to keep medical information private. There is no requirement to inform coworkers about a disability or need for accommodation. While coworkers may be aware that an employee is receiving accommodations because it may be obvious, they are not entitled to know why. Informing *all employees* about the ADA and the right to request accommodations, and encouraging a workplace culture that is inclusive of workers with disabilities, are ways to ward off unnecessary questions related to coworker accommodations.

The ADA requires employers to keep all disability-related information confidential. Employee medical information should only be shared with those who are considered to be on a *need-to-know* basis. Managers and supervisors are encouraged to limit the information they acquire about an employee's disability. They often do not need to know the specifics of an employee's medical impairment to implement accommodations. Details about the accommodation may be all that is needed to make a schedule change, provide equipment, or modify a policy, etc. Knowing fewer details about an employee's medical impairment will be beneficial when other employees ask management questions about accommodations because a manager will not be in a position to unnecessarily reveal information he or she is not aware of.

Questions & Answers Related to Disability Disclosure

JAN Consultants respond to a variety of questions related to disability disclosure and the ADA. While JAN is not a legal service and does not provide legal assistance or advice, JAN does share guidance provided by the EEOC to assist our customers. Here are some examples of common questions and responses related to disclosure:

1. Is an applicant required to disclose his or her medical impairment when applying for a job?



No, with limited exceptions. Under the ADA, an employer generally may not require an applicant to disclose information about a disability or medical impairment prior to making an offer of employment. Covered employers are not permitted to ask *non-voluntary* disability-related questions on a job application or during the hiring process. However, there are situations when an applicant may need to disclose information about a disability during this early stage in the employment process. For example, if an accommodation is needed to complete an on-line application, participate in a job interview, or to take an employment test, an applicant may need to disclose his or her disability to receive an accommodation. Another example is when an employer could reasonably believe that an applicant will need reasonable accommodation to perform the functions of the job. In that case, the employer may ask whether the applicant needs reasonable accommodation and what type of reasonable accommodation would be needed. Also, in limited circumstances (e.g., for affirmative action purposes), employers can ask applicants to *voluntarily* disclose their disability status.

2. Must an employee with a disability disclose his or her disability and request reasonable accommodation at a certain time?

No. An individual with a disability may request a reasonable accommodation at any time during the application process or during the period of employment. The need to disclose and request accommodation will become evident when an individual knows there is a workplace barrier due to a disability. An accommodation can be requested even when a disability was not disclosed upon being hired. According to EEOC, it is usually in an employee's best interest to request a reasonable accommodation before performance suffers or conduct problems occur.

3. If an employer asks disability-related questions during the post-offer stage, is the individual required to disclose his or her disability?

The decision whether to share information about a medical impairment is up to the individual to make. However, an employer may condition an offer of employment on the satisfactory completion of a medical questionnaire or examination. If a questionnaire is not completed or an individual refuses to participate in an examination, an employer may rescind an offer.

4. Is an applicant or employee required to complete the self-identification of disability form used by federal contractors to meet their affirmative action obligations under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act?

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act requires covered federal contractors to *invite* applicants to self-identify as an individual with a disability during the pre-offer and post-offer phases of the application process, and to invite employees to self-identify every five years. This is an *invitation* to self-identify, not a requirement. The self-identification of disability form is a *voluntary* form, so each individual may choose to disclose his or her disability status, or not. Federal contractors are required to use the form provided by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) for this purpose. The form also includes a statement that invites individuals to request accommodation to apply for a job or perform job duties.

5. Is an individual with a disability required to disclose his/her specific diagnosis when requesting accommodation under the ADA?

Many employees who request accommodations prefer not to disclose their diagnosis, usually out of fear related to stereotypes or stigma attached to the condition. There is no formal guidance from the EEOC regarding this question. Under the ADA, employers may be able to insist on knowing the name of the impairment as part of determining whether the employee has a covered disability. However, some state laws (e.g., California and Connecticut) restrict employers from requesting a diagnosis or asking for detailed medical information. Employers should be informed about the requirements of state law before requesting a diagnosis.

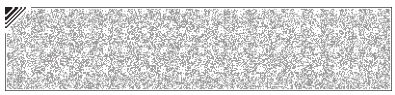
An employee may begin by giving a more general description of the condition when an accommodation is requested. For example, "I have a mental health impairment" or "I have a condition that affects my immune system." In some situations, a limited description will not sufficiently describe the individual's impairment, limitations, and need for accommodation. An employer may request reasonable documentation to determine that an individual has a covered disability for which he or she needs a reasonable accommodation (EEOC, 2002).

6. If an employee discloses a disability in response to a poor performance evaluation or discipline for unacceptable conduct, is an employer required to change the evaluation or withhold disciplinary action?

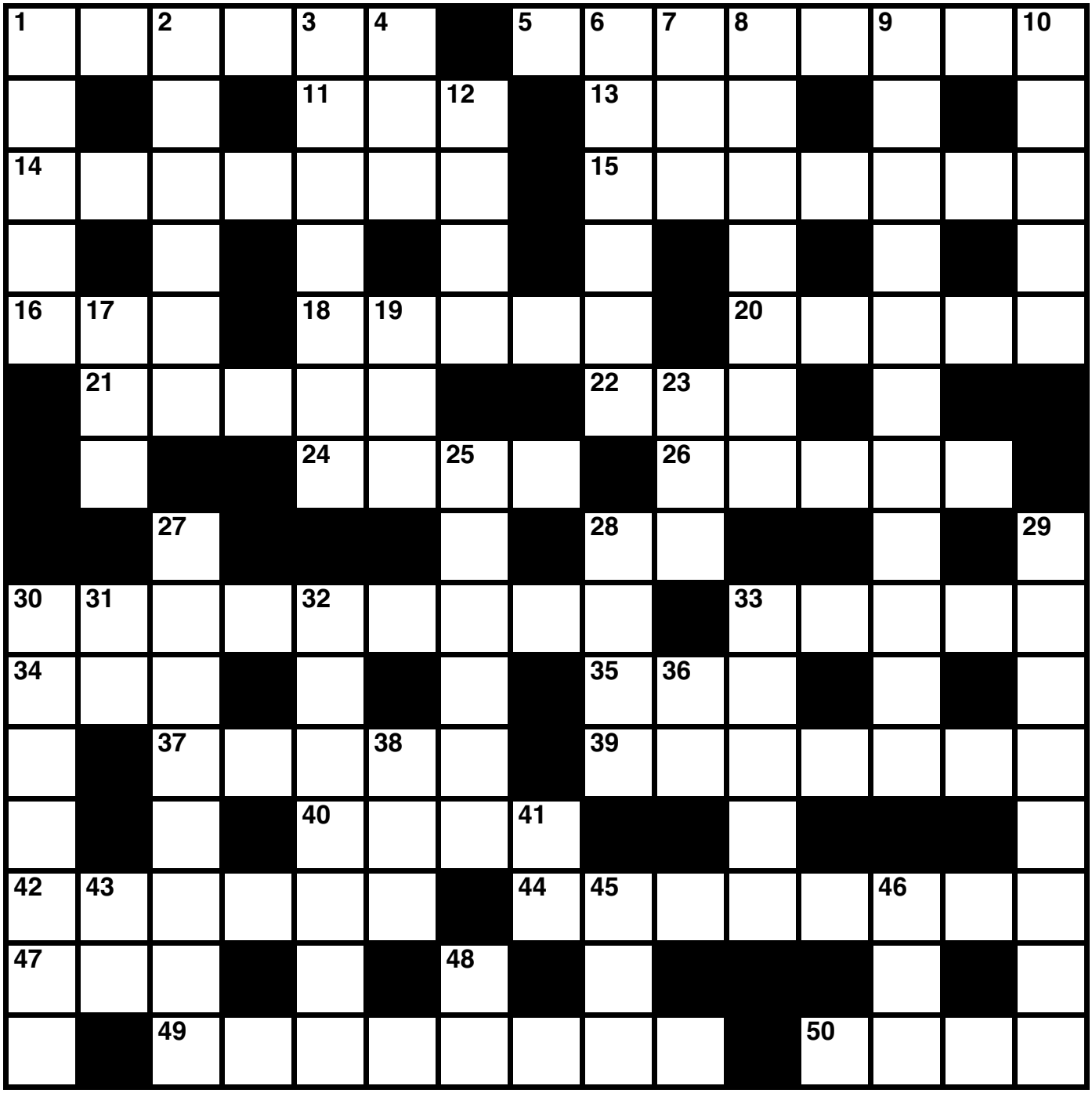
No. An employer may hold an employee with a disability accountable under the same uniformly applied performance standards and conduct standards that are job-related and consistent with business necessity as they would employees without disabilities. If a disability is disclosed or an accommodation is requested in response to poor performance or misconduct, an employer should engage in an interactive process with the employee to discuss how the disability affects performance or conduct and what accommodations may be effective in assisting the employee to meet the standards. ■ ABILITY

by JAN Lead Consultant, Tracie DeFreitas

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ACROSS

1. LA park for children of all abilities, goes with 9 down
5 Godsend
11 Word with "day" or "night"
13 Joe Berenyi paralympic cyclist has won golds for this nation
14 Successful ending
15 Visually impaired paratriathlete who won a World Gold, ____ Reid
16 Approved!
18 Give out
20 Goes for it
21 Racetrack or scarf
22 Numbered rd.
24 Something urgently required
26 Newton or Asimov
28 Operating
30 Championed a cause
33 Kind and gentle dog, for the visually impaired
34 Peter of Neverland
35 "Uncle Tom's Cabin" girl
37 See 2 down
39 Significant other, e.g.
40 Monies borrowed
42 William and Harry, for example
44 Engineer who lost both legs, now doing pioneer work in prosthetics, 2 words
47 She was part of a bed-in for peace
49 Family Foundation focusing on inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide
50 "The Art of Fugue" composer

DOWN

1. Smart
2 iOS app that allows people to report accessibility obstacles, goes with 37 across
3 Elation or anger, e.g.
4 Elton John or Paul McCartney
6 Wood
7 Suffix with Japan or Taiwan
8 Greets with respect
9 Goes with 1 across
10 Life objectives
12 Changes color
17 Corn cob
19 Fr. religious figure, abbr.
23 Oz man's makeup
25 I found it!
27 "Two and a Half Men" actor who helped the expansion of 1 across, 2 words
28 Office of Disability Employment Policy, for short
29 Writer of "Tapping into Hidden Human Capital," 2 words
30 Johnny Depp's pirate role
31 Sound system, for short
32 Took part in a bee
33 First name of the superstar country singer who supports a charity working to find a cure for Parkinsons
36 Hospital for vets
38 Firms for short
41 New England state
43 __ display
45 "Pulp Fiction" star, Thurman
46 Baseball performance measurement
48 Portland's state

Crossword Puzzle

answers on page 64

SEE BETTER AT ANY AGE

AUTHOR
- The Miracle of Pi in Eye
- LASIK in the 21st Century
- Cure for Keratoconus

VOTED BEST
- Newsweek Showcase Top Doctor
- LA Daily News Readers
- VC Star Readers
- Consumer Research Council

DOCTOR'S DOCTOR
- Surgeons & Physicians
- Chiropractors & Dentists

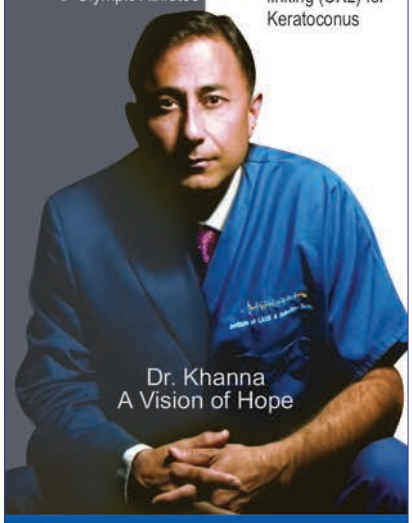
SURGEON TO STARS
- Actors & Celebrities
- Olympic Athletes

FOR PATIENTS 18-45
- Thin Flap Lasik
- ICL

FOR PATIENTS 45-65
- Superlasik
- Pi in Eye

FOR PATIENTS ABOVE 65
- Pi in Eye
- Laser Cataract Surgery

OTHER THAN LASIK
- Pterygium
- Intacs & Cross-linking (CXL) for Keratoconus

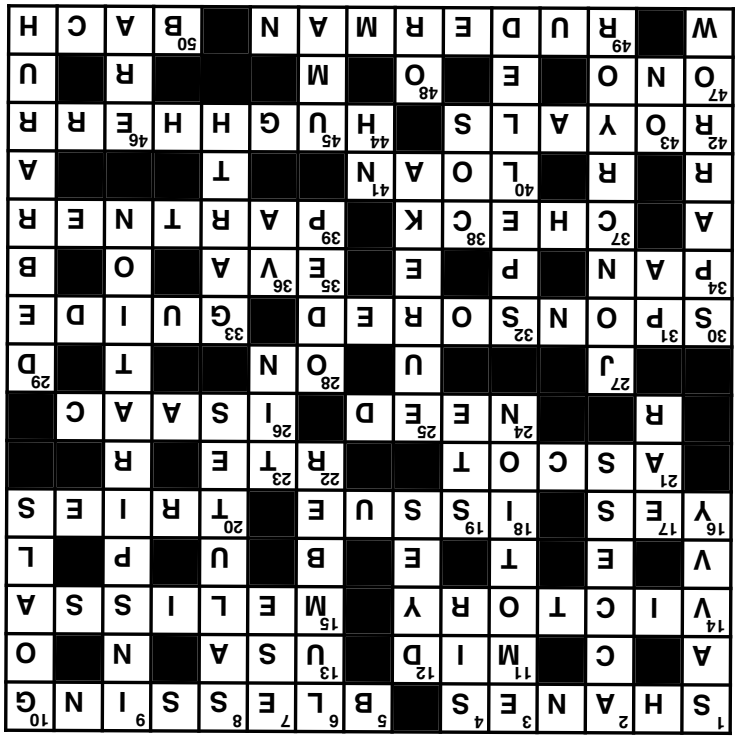


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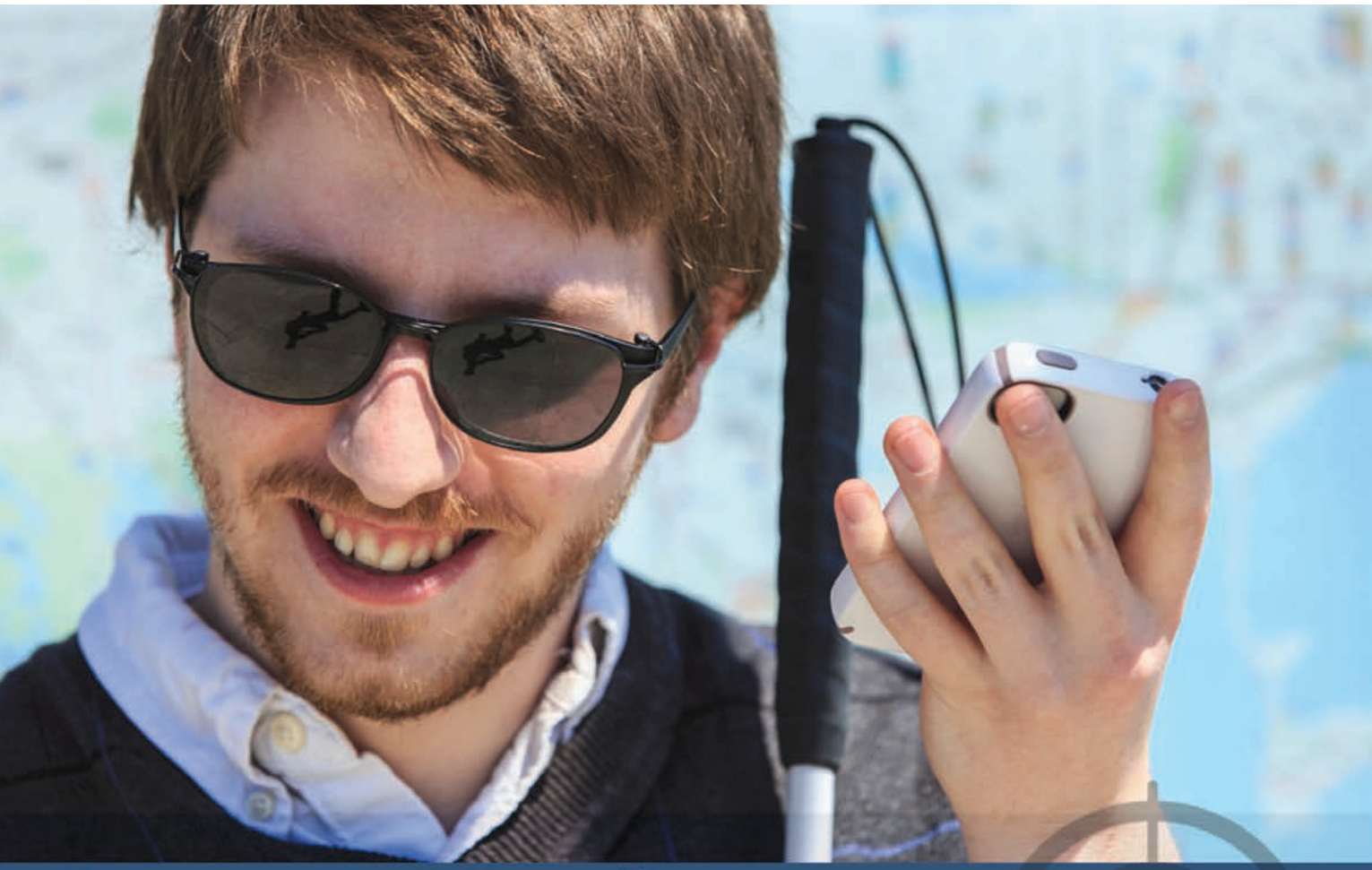
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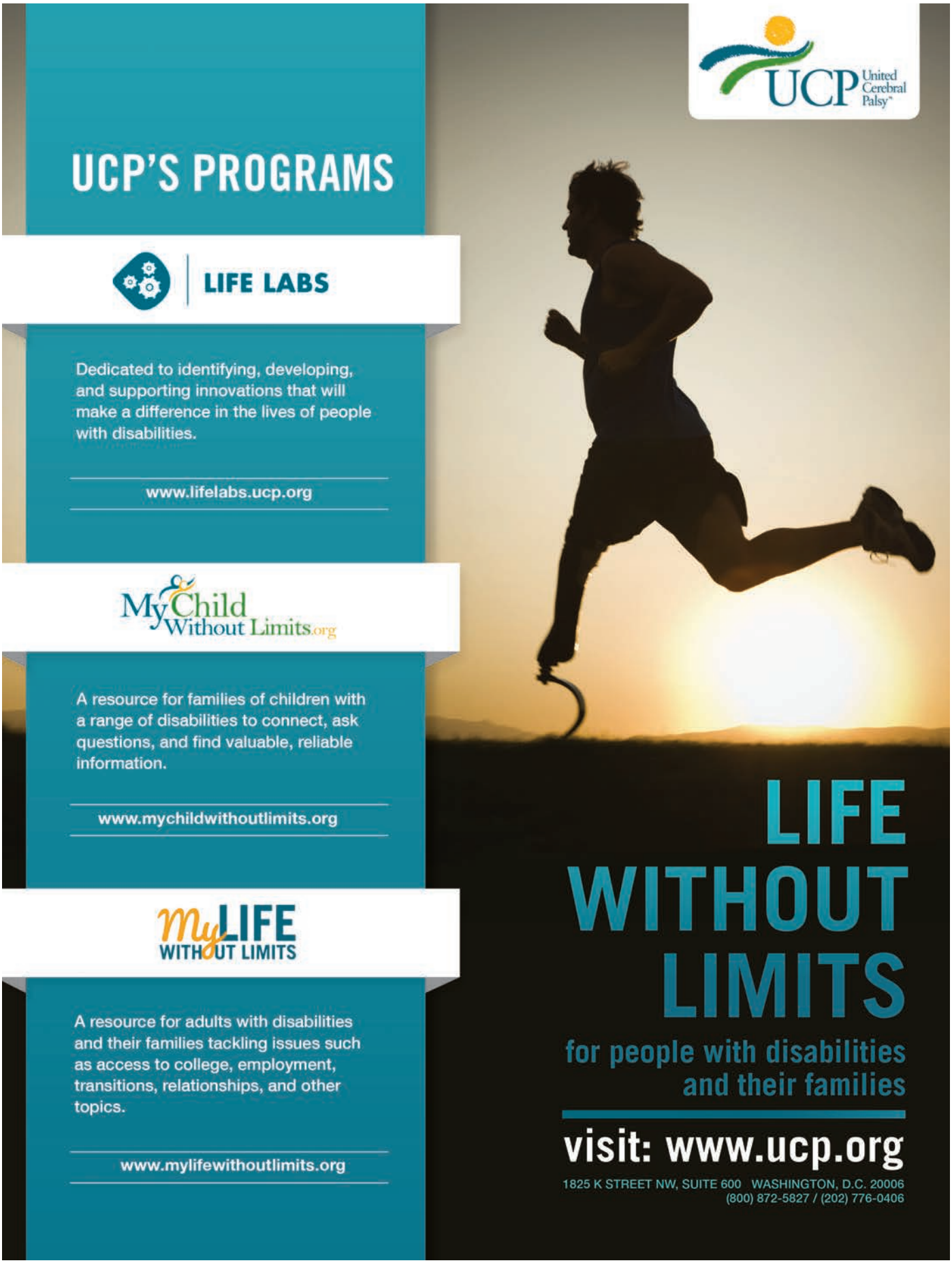
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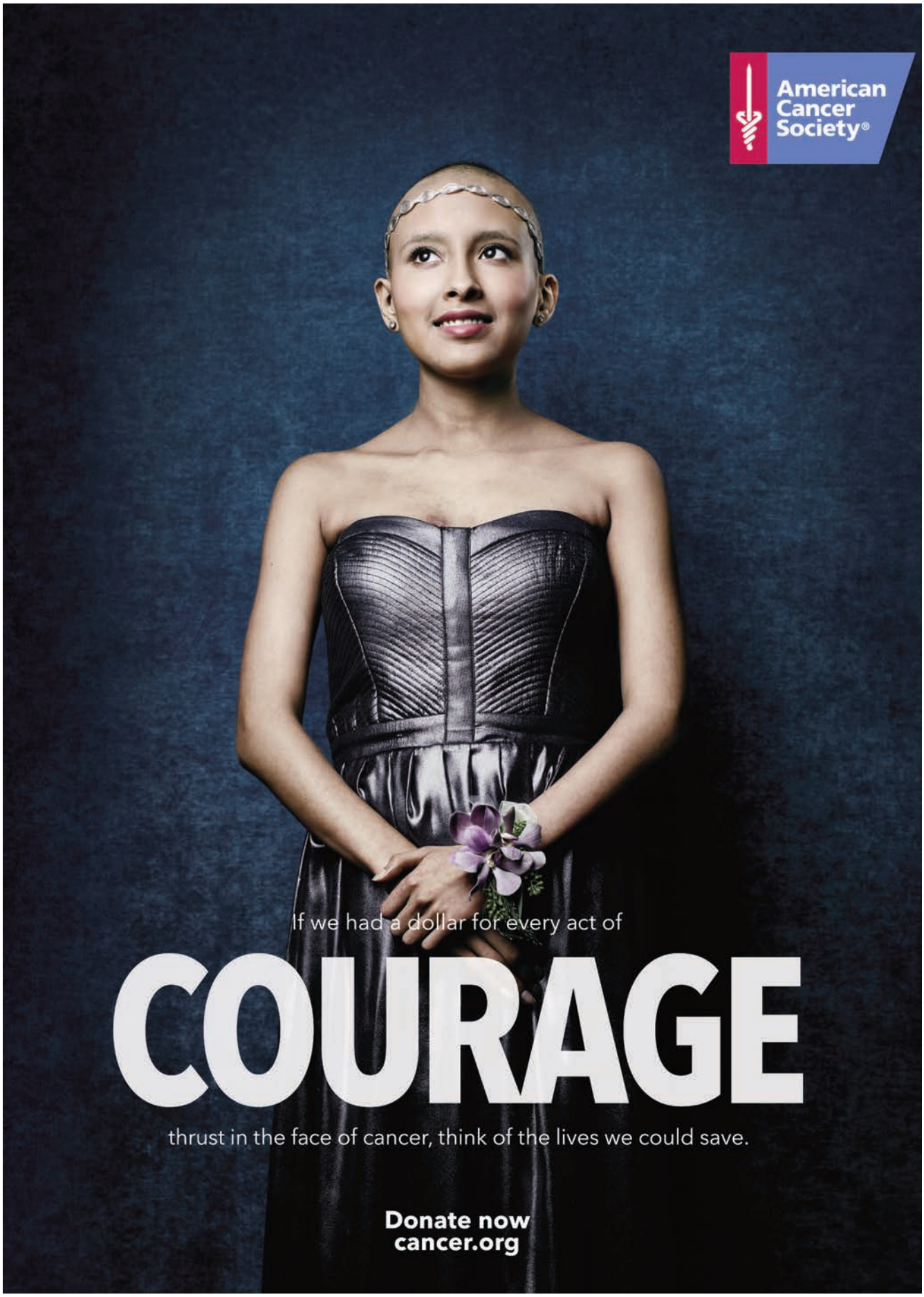
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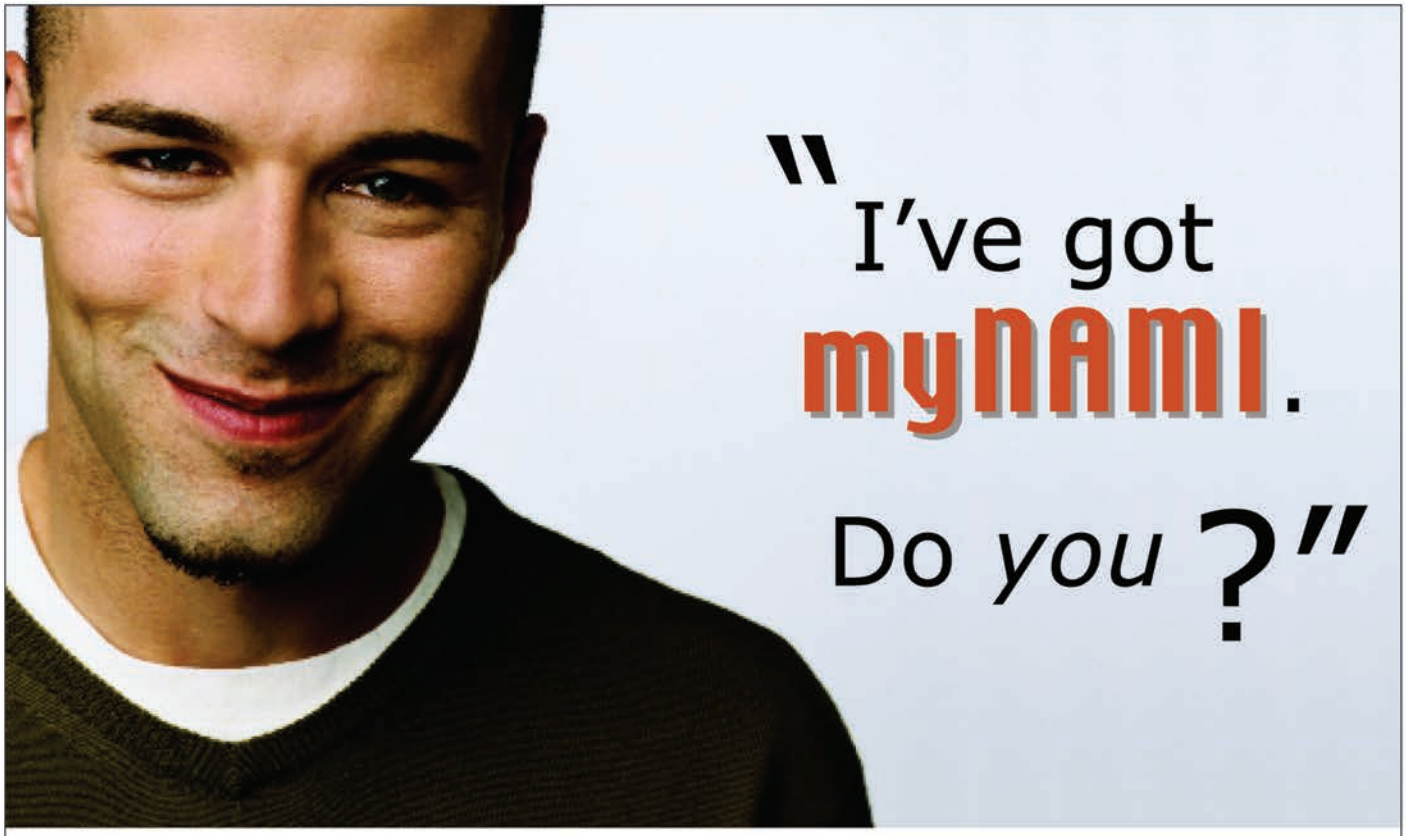
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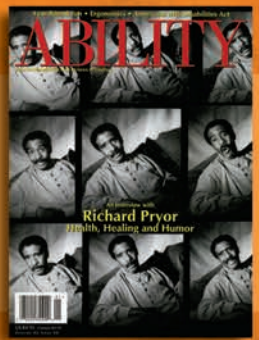
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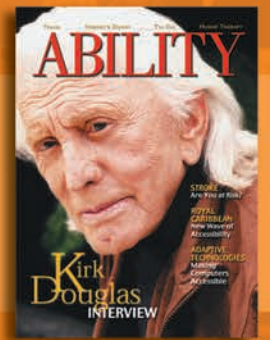
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