



FROM WHERE I SIT

If family members could learn to respect disability as a valid minority experience, everyone would benefit. The disabled person could feel accepted as part of the family but with the bonus of her/his disability heritage. The family, in turn, could benefit from their exposure to disability culture, just as they might benefit from the heritage of an adoptee from another race or country.

"Disability and the Family,"
Carol Gill, *Mainstream* [Feb. 1994]

Disability Culture? Why, wa-a-ay back when I was a girl [yes, kiddies, television existed, but just barely] 'tweren't no such a thing. In fact, one was hard put to find a real disabled person, let alone one with culture.

We were usually locked away in institutions or confined to our rooms, except for the few, like myself, whose family didn't shy away from presenting us to the world and claiming us as their own.

For the most part I was treated as a 'normal' child and was neither coddled nor scorned because of my disability. But having respect for my 'disability heritage'—whatever that was—would have had no meaning for my family.

At that time no 'disability community' existed to transmit the values, goals, and meaning of the total disability experience; to provide realistic, initiative-taking role-models; to foment the expression of the disability perspective in the arts, in literature, in philosophy and religion; to re-think and ultimately to re-define the dominant [i.e., able-bodied] culture's concepts of beauty, healing, wholeness, sexuality, and independence. In short—to transmit a Culture of Disability.

I must admit that it is only recently that I have even become aware of a Disability Culture. Indeed, it seems to be only recently that it has become aware of itself.

Most cultures have roots that extend deep into the past and originate in the traditions, history, religion, and even geography of a certain peoples [I'm speaking here as someone who has absolutely no expertise in the subject].

In contrast, Disability Culture seems to exist because somebody, somewhere [about 6 and 3/4 years ago?] decided

By Jo D'Archangelis

that a Disability Culture was a good thing and we ought to have one and—pouf!—we did.

Actually, the roots of the Disability Culture may not be all that long but they do originate in the development of a viable disability community and in its calls for autonomy, accessibility, and empowerment.

But how do you get a culture arising from such a disparate bunch of people who have little in common apart from

a disability [however that may be defined]



—no shared genealogy, ethnicity, language, religious belief, politics, background?

Well, in some cases what you get are 'sub-cultures.' As, for instance, the Deaf Culture—arguably the most highly-developed and popularly recognized 'disability' culture around ['disability' in quotes since many of those profoundly deaf from birth don't consider themselves disabled]. For Pete's sake, they have their own university, their own theater, even their own language!

It has been suggested that what we all share as disabled people is our status as an oppressed minority. But 'oppressed' with its leftist-political connotations of people being trampled under the boot-heel of tyranny does

little to convey the subtleties and complexities of our inferior position.

However, if we must use one term to express our commonality, I prefer *isolation*. As disabled people we have all experienced isolation in one form or another—physical, emotional, institutional, political, social, sexual. And not only isolation from able-bodied society [the so-called 'mainstream'] but isolation, terribly enough, from each other. Shut in and shut out, hindered, barred, re-strained, confined, locked in silence and

darkness, we have been provided with little opportunity to

As disabled people we have all experienced isolation in one form or another...

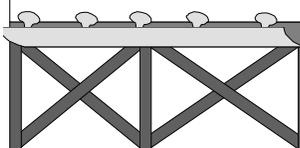
find real connection.

In our individual and collective efforts to compensate for and to overcome this isolation, we have learned to value self-autonomy, interdependence, resiliency, inner strength, the beauty of the non-conventional.

We are learning to express our uniquely affirming disability experience in many ways, and we are making connections from our side rather than waiting for the able-bodied community to act *for* us.

Although I didn't experience my 'disability heritage' when I was a child, I'm glad to think that this heritage is available now to those growing up disabled or becoming disabled later in life. Disability Culture *is* a good thing.

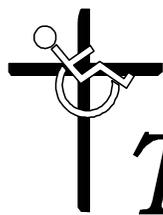
REV. DR. HAROLD WILKE TO LEAD SPIRITUAL LIFE RETREAT



enriching experience. Flyer/registration forms will be found in the Spring [April] issue of *Wings*.

[Yoo hoo, Local Churches: How about making it one of your 'inreach' ministries to provide transportation, financial support, and/or caregiving at that time for those of us in your congregations who may find the lack of these necessities major obstacles to attending this retreat?—Ed.]

We are pleased to announce that the Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke—pastor, lecturer, author, teacher, disability leader, and founder of the Healing Community, an organization to help churches and synagogues develop ministries with disabled persons—will serve as leader of the 1997 Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for adults with orthopedic disabilities and/or visual impairments. Mark your calendars for Friday, May 30, to Sunday, June 1 at Camp Cedar Glen [near Julian, Calif.] and invite someone else to share this unique,



THE DISABLED GOD: A Book Review by Linda Dunn

The *Disabled God: Toward A Liberatory Theology of Disability* by Nancy Eisland* is a thought-provoking book with a radical thesis. The author's opening salvo is that the Christian God as manifested in the resurrected Jesus Christ is disabled by the wounds of crucifixion and is therefore a "natural embodiment" of God within each of us, the disabled and the temporarily able-bodied.

Eisland posits that "the symbol of Jesus Christ, the disabled God, is both gift and enigma, enabling a two-way access through his broken body". She challenges the church to remove the barriers that deny people full participation in its functions. She urges our involvement in the Christian community, highlighting the liberatory theology which holds the greatest promise of the book.

I especially liked Eisland's description of her image of God in a sip-puff wheelchair. If we, the disabled, no matter what our faith, don't see God in one another, people will never see God in us.

However, I found her idea of God as disabled unconvincing. To me the stigmata of the crucifixion on Christ's resurrected body do not make for

Why does a church that preaches social justice fall so far short in practice...?

a disabled God. Nor do I feel it necessary for my self-affirmation as a Christian woman with a disability to see God as disabled. That the Christian God in the person of Jesus Christ

is a wounded God, a vulnerable God, is certainly true. And we are called by our faith in Christ to be vulnerable with one another, for it is through our shared woundedness that we find our strength.

But Eisland's criticism of the social-political-theological structure of the Christian church in relation to disability contains a great deal of validity. In her discussion of how myth and symbol transform our lives, Eisland invites us beyond ourselves in space and time. She says, "Empowering symbols are vital for any marginalized group. Yet if thoroughgoing transformation is the aim, those reconceived symbols must be linked to the dominant social-symbolic order." This suggests a need to integrate the dominant order to include persons with disabilities in leadership positions both as clergy and laity.

While most of Eisland's criticism reflects the ordination policies of the American Lutheran Church, the same restrictions hold true for most Christian denominations. Most don't even allow persons with disabilities to participate in non-ordained community ministries. Alas, within some Christian communities being female is treated as a disability, and being female and disabled is to be doubly cursed.

The book goes on to ask why the Christian Church has failed to take a leading role in "promoting our full humanity". This is a question I have often asked, as have many others. Why does a church that preaches social justice fall so far short in practice from that which it espouses? Indeed, many religious denominations have done little to remove the restrictive, theological, social, attitudinal, and structural barriers which have further disabled so many. Whether we have life-long disabilities or our disabilities come later in life, the Christian church in general refuses to affirm the God-given gifts and human dignity of our embodiment.

At the end of the book Eisland offers her ideas on Christian sacramental life and its liturgical practices in relation to disability. As a Catholic with a background in theology and liturgy, I found these ideas both moving and decisive. It seemed so obvious that we had all missed something important. How does what we practice say what we believe?

I recall my struggle with my church after I became disabled. I gave years of non-ordained ministry to a parish where people opened their lives and hearts to me. But the clergy, the institutional patriarchy, was something different. I felt a sense of personal devaluation from being ignored, avoided and patronized that left a wound which pains me anew every time I enter the church building—now that I can get in. The time has come for liberation.

[Editor's Note: Linda Dunn is disabled by a right hemisphere stroke that resulted in hemiparesis. She is a member of the Board of the Health Resource Center for Women With Disabilities, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.]

*Abingdon Press [Nashville, 1994].

Originally printed in abridged form in *Resourceful Woman* [Fall 1996], the newsletter of the Health Resource Center for Women With Disabilities, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, 345 East Superior Street, Room 106, Chicago, IL 60611, telephone: 1-312-908-7997, e-mail: jpsparkle@aol.com.

Reprinted here with some deletions restored by permission.



LISTEN UP! UMCD NEWS

Western Jurisdiction

◆ Holly Elliott reports that she and Laurel Glass [UMCD president] are working on establishing a Deaf Ministry in their new church, Fremont United Methodist Church, in Portland, Oregon.

◆ Los Altos United Methodist Church, Los Altos, California, has added an interpreter for children during Sunday School classes.

From the UMCD Western Jurisdiction Newsletter [December 1996].

◆ The Biennial National United Methodist Congress of the Deaf Conference will be held July 18-20 at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

◆ All deaf legislation was passed at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April, and the National Committee on Deaf Ministry will continue in existence for the next four years.

From *Signs of Change*, the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf Newsletter [Christmas Season 1996].



Wings is a non-profit quarterly newsletter published by and for United Methodist adults with physically disabling conditions.

Founder/Editor
Computer Layout/Graphic Design
Jo D'Archangelis

Wings Needs the Following From You

Ideas and suggestions for articles
Original stories, poetry, cartoons
Personal essays and anecdotes
Appropriate items from another source
The name and address of someone who is dying to be on our mailing list
A change-of-address notice if you are moving and want to continue receiving Wings

Send All Correspondence To
Jo D'Archangelis, Editor, Wings

Church Address
Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028
Telephone [619] 728-1472
Fax [619] 728-7433

Home Address
592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1
Fallbrook, CA 92028-3191
Telephone/Fax: [619] 723-2668
[Fax Mon.-Sat. 1-4 p.m. Pacific Time]

E-Mail Address
JODARLIS@aol.com

IF GOD IS A CIRCLE CLOSING

By Warren Lane Molton

If God is a circle closing,
reaching out wide like my mother's arms,
hands now fingertips apart,
needing only to touch
to make all things complete,
brokenness healed,
left hand finally knowing the right,
alpha reaching omega,
then I pray
that the hiatus of her hands
might not yet close,
for it is in that awkward place,
the space between her hands,
just small enough for me to hide,
where the breach would be bridged,
that God grows my soul.

Reprinted from *PILGRIMAGE*, Vol. 22, #2,
Pilgrimage Press, Inc. [Highlands, NC 28741]

mother must have committed a grave sin to receive a punishment as severe as Philip. Despite Philip's gentle demeanor, people found his appearance upsetting, and my parents were politely asked not to bring him to the church nursery when he was six. For years after that, they didn't attend church together; my father would stay home with Philip one week, my mother the next.

The years of continual care, day in, day out, began to wear on my mother. My father had changed jobs; he now traveled often on business. In 1970, my parents realized they needed to consider an institution for Philip. He became one of the first residents in a new institution for the profoundly and severely retarded in Tennessee.

When Philip died in 1992, my parents' grief and the depth of their bewilderment over his life was evident. Why was Philip born? What purpose did his life have? Those questions still confound me as much as they do my parents. Unlike the Sunday school teacher who viewed Philip as a punishment from God, I felt that Philip's presence showed the overwhelming responsibility that comes with the absolute freedom God gives us to choose how we will live--and the help God offers if we will take it.

And when I remember my childhood, I know that God was there, giving my parents the strength they needed to care for Philip, to love him, to hold our family together, and to cope with perplexing questions. My happy, thoroughly ordinary childhood is a quiet miracle to treasure, an extraordinary gift from God, through my parents, to me.

Re-printed from *Alive Now* [Sept.-Oct. 1995].



THE STRENGTH TO COPE

By Grace Renshaw

The pediatrician knew my brother Philip was retarded as soon as he saw him in the hospital after his birth. But he couldn't bring himself to tell my parents, who were left to make this heartbreaking discovery on their own over the next 11 months, as their tiny son failed to roll over, failed to sit up, failed to do any of the encouraging and endearing things normal babies do.

That tacit abandonment pretty much characterized the fate of families with severely handicapped children in 1960,

had an odd glint of intelligence. He never talked, but often drove me crazy by repeating the same high-pitched noise over and over for hours.

My mother made up cheerful songs to sing to him as she fed, bathed, and dressed him, and changed his frequent messy diapers. Years later, my father would tell me, "When you have a child like Philip, it either brings you together or tears you apart." Drawing on their faith in God, my parents made a commitment to work together to see it through.

Philip demanded so much attention at home that my father and

Philip's presence showed the overwhelming responsibility that comes with the absolute freedom God gives us to choose how we will live...

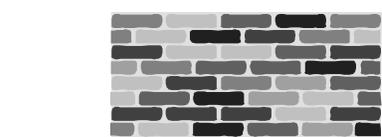
mother both became scout leaders to have at least one activity with my older brother, Jim, and me that didn't involve Philip. Rather than allowing family activities to revolve around Philip, they adapted them to include him. He learned to love trips down North Georgia rivers in the family canoe and happily ate sand during vacations at a small beach resort in Florida. Because my parents calmly and courageously decided to go on living life to the fullest, all of us--including Philip--had a happy childhood.

"Is he retarded?" she asked.
"Yes," was the quiet reply.

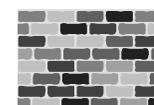
She stormed out of the doctor's office in tears and somehow managed to drive home without wrecking the car. With limited financial resources and almost no support, mother and father had started down the lonesome road of coping with a profoundly retarded child.

I was five when Philip was born, and he remained a complete enigma to me. He was totally helpless, but his eyes

But my parents also faced judgment and rejection. A Sunday School teacher once suggested that my



Grant, O Lord, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear and hatred cease; that, our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



AMEN



From *Celebrating Community: Prayers and Songs of Unity*,
copyright (c) 1993 WCC Publications..



AN OPEN LETTER: Making It Easy On The Eyes

To the Editor:

Regarding visual impairment—I would like to submit this as sort of an open letter to everyone, but perhaps particularly to the editors of church newsletters and Sunday worship bulletins.

There are many kinds and degrees of visual impairment and they are not necessarily obvious to onlookers. Many legally blind people can read some things with the aid of appropriate magnifying devices, but several factors can affect readability.

One way an editor can be helpful to visually impaired people is to be consistent in the choice of type fonts used in the computer/printer. Not only small size, but very bold type, or ornate type styles, or very thin-lined letters, or italics can make an article unreadable. If the same article was printed in 12-point Univers, for example, many legally blind people would be saved time and feelings of frustration of having to find and ask someone to read it to them.

Another very helpful thing would be to use black ink on white paper, without a shaded background—to give the best contrast for reading.

Although legally blind people are in the minority, statistically speaking, they are a majority in terms of their appreciation of efforts made to ease their transition into, and existence in, a less sighted life style.

Sincerely,
Alma Enyeart
Hacienda Heights, California



ANOTHER EVENT OF INTEREST

**January 31-February 2 Prayer And Healing Conference—
Los Angeles Area**

Workshops will include one on 'basic' prayer and one on 'cultural inclusiveness,' both led by Dr. Kenneth Tittle of the Mariposa Ministry.

For more information contact the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church at 1-800-244-8622, Fax 1-818-796-7297, or Dr. Tittle at 1-619-357-4768.

[Note: Registration and housing assistance are available for the Conference. We have been assured that this event will be PWD*-friendly!]

*Persons With Disabilities



Honor Roll Of Appreciation

We thank the following persons or organizations whose gifts of time and/or money have made possible the publication and mailing of *Wings*:

Marie Morse
Roy & Mary Klein
Pete & Ruth Sciumbato
Bob & Betty Jackson
Mary Jane Wissmann
Dr. Timothy Fern
Margery Chapman
Rev. Kathleen Ross
Rev. V. Lu Wilson
Lucille Fleming



WINGS SPONSORSHIPS

Annual *Wings* sponsorships, unlike subscriptions, are not required for someone to be put on or to be kept on our mailing list—but they are needed if we are to be able to continue publication and expand readership.

BASIC PHUMP/	
FRIEND OF PHUMPS	\$6-14
MAJOR PHUMP/FOP	\$15-24
SUPER PHUMP/FOP	\$25-49
MEGA PHUMP/FOP	\$50-99
TOTALLY AWESOME	
PHUMP/FOP	\$100 OR MORE

Please make checks or money orders payable to "Fallbrook United Methodist Church", mark them "Wings Newsletter", and mail to:

Wings Newsletter
Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028



Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028

*"For Disabled United Methodists and
Those Who Care About Them"*

Non-Profit Org.
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 35
Fallbrook, CA

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED