



## FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D'Archangelis

**Q.** *Dear Ms. Disability Etiquette, What is the proper procedure for shaking hands with someone with an obvious disability whom I meet in church? How about hugging? I don't want to hurt or embarrass anyone.*

*Temporarily Able-Bodied  
But Friendly in San Diego*

**A.** Dear Friendly TAB in San Diego,

Your desire to learn 'the proper procedure' for making socially-acceptable tactile contact with PWDS (persons with disabilities) is commendable. Too often TABS will shy away from even saying 'hello' to us, least of all placing their hand upon our persons.

There are certain peculiarities and obstacles involved, not for all situations, of course, but for some. For example, Ms. DE glides around in a power chair and, because of muscular weakness, is unable to lift her hand from the joystick. Consequently, people have sometimes taken to shaking her index finger which is always somewhat extended, albeit, she hastens to add, in a non-obscene manner.

At other times, they have pressed their hand on top of hers, which is a lovely gesture, but it inadvertently moves the joystick causing Ms. DE to suddenly careen past them (or into them) leaving them to wonder what her goldarned problem is.

Ms. DE's rule-of-thumb for handshaking is, if in doubt, i.e., if the PWD seems unwilling or unable to extend her/his hand, then ask, "May I take your hand?" If there is affirmation, take the hand (right or left, whichever one is indicated), gently shake it, and—this is most important—return it to where you found it.

If handshaking is out of the question, as in the case of some amputees, then one might briefly place one's hand on the PWD's shoulder or upper arm, but not on the top of the head. Do not *pat*, as patting signifies "you poor little thing you", and it is never good manners to signify pity or condescension.

As for hugging, Ms. DE is generally in favor of it. Rest assured, rarely does a friendly hug injure an unsuspecting PWD. On the other hand, an overly enthusiastic embrace may disrupt delicately-maintained balance, and one doesn't want one's huggee to fall into one's arms, does one? (Well, maybe one does, but that's a different topic...)

Again, it is best to simply ask, "May I give you a hug?" And then if the answer is "hey, why not?" or something similar, be prepared to work around braces, crutches, uncooperative limbs, footrests, joysticks, guide dogs, and/or eyeglasses (Ms. DE's glasses tend to wind up askew when she is hugged). It is, however, well worth the effort for both the hugger and the huggee.

Now Ms. DE presents even more interesting complications to would-be huggers for she has severe scoliosis (or what we refer to as a "sexy, sinuous, sensual, C-shaped curve") and sits low in her chair. Thus one has to bend way down to Ms. DE's level without audibly creaking (a common problem with friends of 'a certain age') and get one's arm around her spatially-compressed body without causing either dislocation or embarrassment.

Ms. DE herself prefers that one

**"We move about in our steel cages, isolated from others...A spontaneous hug becomes an acrobatic act of straddling footrests, avoiding joystick contact, caution not to unbalance us, then repositioning our fallen arm afterward."**

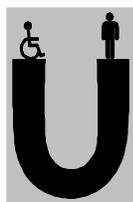
*From "From the Editor's Keyboard: The Human Touch," by June Price, Living SMArt (June/July/August 1997).*

place an arm lightly about the shoulders and give a little squeeze. An additional but optional move—depending on the level of affection and agility of the hugger—is to place one's cheek next to the huggee's (this is where Ms. DE's glasses often wind up askew, but it is a small price to pay).

Finally, dearest TAB, if showing friendly respect or affection to a PWD appears, at first, to be fraught with frustration, consider the frustration some PWDS feel in not being able to initiate handshakes or hugs or to return them in kind—at least not in the brief, cursory way in which most such social contacting take place.

However, Ms. DE finds the most effective action any PWD can take, with or without handshakes and hugs, is really quite simple: a friendly smile and/or a spoken "I'm so happy to meet you—see you—know you."

*(With sincere and profound apologies to Miss Manners.)*



## PHYSICAL GULFS By Dr. Arnold Beisser

*Editor's Note: Dr. Beisser was a medical school graduate and championship tennis player when he contracted polio. Completely paralyzed, he was hospitalized for 3½ years, 1½ of them in an iron lung. After much difficulty he found a medical school to accept him as a candidate for a residency in psychiatry and eventually achieved a successful career as a psychotherapist.*

*This excerpt is from his autobiography, Flying Without Wings.*

**A**lthough the hospital personnel frequently seemed to invade me, people who visited seemed to keep an extra distance from me. They would leave more space than normal between us while we talked. When I would be introduced to someone new, they would hold back cautiously, so I rarely had physical contact with nonhospital people. They did not touch me, they did not shake my hand, they did not reach out in any physical way.

They were probably afraid that they might hurt me, or catch what I had. Or perhaps they feared they might do something wrong and appear foolish. I was unable to reach out myself, so there remained a physical gulf between me and others in the world. It was lonely, and I longed to be touched. I sometimes

*(PHYSICAL GULFS continued on page 4)*

## UMWDS SEEK "PRESENCE" AT 1998 CAL-PAC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**T**entative plans are afoot, so to speak, to muster a strong "presence" of United Methodists with disabilities, hereafter known as UMWDS (pronounced uhm-wids?), at the 1998 California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Frustration with indifference to disability concerns at the Conference and at the local church level increased this past June when a disabled member of a southern California UM church attempted to submit a resolution to the Annual Conference meeting at the University of Redlands.

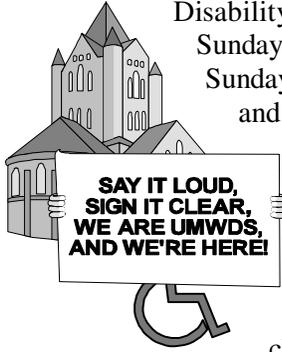
### An Unresolute Resolution

The 1996 General Conference had mandated the observance of Disability Awareness Sunday in all UM Conferences on a date to be determined by each conference.

A resolution designating the third Sunday in October as Disability Awareness Sunday (*aka* Access Sunday) was already in place in the Cal-Pac Conference. But the observance had been omitted from the Conference calendar due to conflicts with Laity Sunday and, according to one

Conference official, to a decision to emphasize Golden Cross Sunday (health and medical issues) instead.

In May Jo D'Archangelis, editor of *Wings*, was encouraged by a Conference staff member to write a resolution changing Disability Awareness Sunday to the fourth Sunday in October and calling for the Conference to make resources readily available to local churches.



However, unfamiliarity with the arcane procedures for submitting resolutions plus difficulty in obtaining the requisite 15 clergy and/or lay Conference member signatures within a short time-frame plus a last-minute revelation that the fourth Sunday in October conflicted with All Saints Day resulted in the resolution's untimely demise.

### A Three-Pronged Proposal

Now a small but committed group

of UMWDS and their non-disabled supporters, FUMWDS (Friends of...), are proposing to heighten awareness of church and disability issues at the 1998 Annual Conference by:

1. Sponsoring a booth to be staffed through the course of the Conference by members of various church and disability groups;

2. Submitting resolutions focusing on disability concerns within the Conference and local church; and

3. Presenting a Conference worship service featuring the spiritual gifts and graces of UMWDS.

### A & A Suggestions

Other suggestions that have been made to increase disability awareness and accessibility in this Conference are:

- ◆ Large print hymnals and Bibles
- ◆ Brailled order of worship, hymnals, and Bibles
- ◆ FM transmitter and headphone sets for the hard-of-hearing in worship
- ◆ Sign language interpretation for worship
- ◆ Wheelchair accessibility to sanctuaries, chancel areas, meeting rooms, classrooms, and work areas in all Conference and local church facilities
- ◆ A disability advocate, preferably a UMWD, on the Conference Council of Ministries staff
- ◆ An eight-hour, comprehensive course for pastors on disability ministries to be given at Claremont School of Theology
- ◆ Scholarships for seminarians with disabilities at Claremont School of Theology
- ◆ Wheelchair accessibility to parsonages and other pastoral housing
- ◆ Transfer of annual disability retreat to more accessible site

### How To Get On Board

A broad-based alliance of disabled and non-disabled United Methodists, clergy and laity, is needed if these efforts are to succeed. If you wish to add your own ideas and suggestions and/or offer your support—physical, moral, financial, prayer—please contact Jo D'Archangelis, 592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1, Fallbrook, CA 92028-3191, telephone/fax [760] 723-2668, e-mail JODARLIS@aol.com.

### On-line UMWD Group



Also, if you are interested in joining an on-line group of (occasionally) intelligent and articulate UMWDS and FUMWDS discussing church and disability issues in this Conference, e-mail JODARLIS@aol.com.



is a non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions.

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

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| The name and address of someone dying to be on our mailing list | A change-of-address notice if you are and want to continue receiving <i>Wings</i> |

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## CONSIDER JAMES OSCAR BROWN

By Ken Tittle

**H**ave you considered James Oscar Brown? He was a good man, a genuinely decent man, a Christian man even, who loved God and his neighbor. In fact, he dedicated much of his free time to helping people with disabilities. It was said of him, "He is eyes to the blind and legs to the paralegic."

James Oscar was a prosperous, successful man too, with fine children educated in the best schools, a boat

moored at Coronado, a ski lodge in Aspen, and a healthy IRA. His monogram, *JOB*, was emblazoned on everything from his luxury sedan to his underwear.

Then one day things began to fall apart for James Oscar. First some business reverses and the need to sell the boat and the ski lodge. Then his health. Perhaps it was macular degeneration or multiple sclerosis or a brainstem stroke, or maybe he was visiting a bedridden child in the inner city when a random bullet tore through his spinal cord.

His remaining financial resources evaporated. He lost his business. His wife left him. His children were too busy to call him now that there was no ski lodge.

His life lay in ruins as his friends, his pastor, and members of his church came to pay him a visit.

"Why me?" James Oscar asked.

"God is purifying you," said a church member. "God punishes those he loves. Let him root out hidden sin and pride from your life. Come to him in true repentance, and he will restore to you the years the locusts have eaten."

"I need help," said James Oscar.

"I'll be there for you," said his pastor. "I'll visit you at home every Communion Sunday. That way you don't have to come to church and depress the others. Besides, all those steps..."

"Why would God do this to me?" cried James Oscar.

"God wouldn't do this to you," said a friend. "God makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike. He doesn't meddle in our affairs. Bad things just happen to good people, that's all."

When James Oscar had to venture

out in his wheelchair, embarrassed and ashamed, strangers would come up to him in the street. One tried to get him to a healing service.

"Our God is a loving God," he said. "Your disabilities are from the evil one. God doesn't want anything unpleasant to happen to us. Just accept Jesus and believe, and you will walk again and prosper again too. All things are possible in him. By his stripes we are healed. That's *are*, son.

**James Oscar was a prosperous, successful man too...His monogram, *JOB*, was emblazoned on everything from his luxury sedan to his underwear.**

Present tense—*are*. Whenever two or three agree on anything...."

Poor James Oscar. He promptly got a urinary tract infection and was hospitalized for two days, which was as long as Medicaid said he was allowed.

"You must try harder not to be disabled," encouraged another friend. "Where there's a will, there's a way. As the Bible says, 'God helps them that helps themselves'...I forget just exactly where that is...Let me bring by the videos of 'Heidi' and 'The Secret Garden.' That should inspire you."

Another friend scolded him for his negative attitude. "You should be grateful God disabled you," he said. "Probably if he hadn't disabled you, something terrible would have happened to you, or you would have done something evil. God works all things for the good of those who love him."

By now James Oscar was beginning to doubt that he still loved God. But

when he tried to reject God, a terrible emptiness swept over him, and he felt totally meaningless and worthless. He cried out to God, "I am ready for whatever you would say to me." But he heard nothing.

So he rolled his chair out onto the porch just as a tremendous thunderstorm gathered and broke. It crashed around him, fiercely shaking the trees with swirling, pouring rain. Blinding white lightning sizzled so close he had no time to brace for the exploding thunder. Then suddenly it was gone, leaving him breathless.

The western sky flamed into a brilliant sunset and then deepened into purple. The morning star appeared among the gold-rimmed clouds still catching the sun's last rays. Awestruck, for the first time in many months, James Oscar forgot to think about himself.

Just then a friend joined him and knelt beside his chair. She hugged him warmly and handed him a daffodil from the spring meadows. Then laying her hand on his, she sat beside him in silence. When she finally spoke, she said, "It must be very hard for you sometimes."

James Oscar began to cry, and his friend cried with him. Then the friend hugged him again and said softly, "God loves you very much. The God who went to the cross for you loves you very much."

In that moment James Oscar Brown knew it was true. And nothing was ever the same for him after that.

Reproduced and altered by permission from original on Mariposa Ministries website: <http://www.satcom.net/mariposa>  
Ken Tittle is founder/co-director of Mariposa Ministries in Calexico, California.



### *Waiting In The Silence*



Waiting in the silence,  
Hoping for a Word.  
Dancing in the water,  
Waiting for a dream.  
Waiting in the silence,  
My Lover speaks...  
"Move on in hope,  
Dance on in faith.  
You heard my voice,  
The vision takes shape."

—Amelia Chua—

Reprinted from *Alive Now* (March/April 1997).

## "LIFE WORTH LIVING" THEME OF UPCOMING VIDEO SATELLITE TELECONFERENCE

By Martha Griswold

The Living Independently in the Valley (LIV) Center, an ILC serving the Pasadena-Altadena area in California, is realizing a long-held commitment to public education on disability issues by co-sponsoring a nationwide Video Satellite Teleconference called "Life Worth Living" on Thursday, November 13.

Those of us who read the reports of people seeking assisted suicide know that the issue is not primarily about very old people in intense and untreatable pain in the last days of life. It is rather about people no more seriously disabled than we are who have not found ways to make life work for them. Being disabled and successfully surviving in the face of societal pressures are the issues this teleconference will address.

Mailings are going out to disability advocates, community organizations, churches, and professional groups around the country so that everyone will know that we people with disabilities are speaking up for ourselves and saying that our lives are to us well worth the living!

The video satellite technology gives all of us who are disability advocates a chance to organize mini-Conferences across the U. S. with some of the leaders of the disability community talking to us from a television screen at a "downlink site" near us.

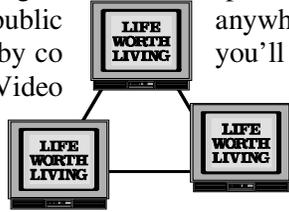
An 800-phone line will let participants ask questions or make comments. The format will include time for each downlink group to have its own discussion about the issues.

Our co-sponsors are "experts" on satellite technology, and all you need to do is express an interest in sponsoring a mini-Conference anywhere in the U. S. and you'll get all the technical support you need. So far 20 sites have signed up, but a recent conference that framed assisted suicide as the issue attracted 160 downlinks.

For further information on the "Life Worth Living" Video Satellite Teleconference, contact:

Martha Griswold, Executive Director LIV Center, 943 East Altadena Drive, Altadena, CA 91001, telephone [626] 797-9847, fax/answering machine [626] 798-6741 (call before faxing), e-mail [mgliv1@aol.com](mailto:mgliv1@aol.com).

Martha Griswold has "successfully survived" with spinal bifida and is a social worker as well as the host of "Access Unlimited" on Los Angeles radio.



(*PHYSICAL GULFS* continued from page 1) thought that I was like a leper or an "untouchable"....

It is strange that my first spatial concern was being invaded without my permission. Later, I was dismayed that people seemed to stay away from me entirely. Just as other people felt awkward with me, so did I with them. Either way my boundaries were insecure and I felt off balance.

Fear of rejection or of appearing foolish by intruding where I was not wanted kept me from initiating contact by use of words. Slowly, however, I began to realize that the responsibility was mine, and I had to do things to make physical contact easier.

When I began to try to overcome this physical gulf, I found my efforts were rejected very rarely. Usually people were relieved and grateful when I let them know what I wanted them to do. As I have become more open and less embarrassed about myself, the chasms seem to have lessened. My fears that others might not respond, or worse, would respond unwillingly, are seldom realized.

From *Flying Without Wings* by Dr. Arnold Beisser, Doubleday (Jan. 1989), reprinted Bantam Books (Mar. 1990).

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