



Wings

...Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31 [NRSV]

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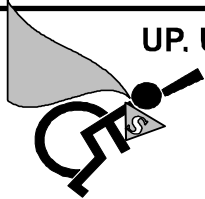


A Faithletter For, By and About
United Methodists With Disabilities



Fall
1998

UP. UP AND AWAY!



FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D'Archangelis

Poor Superman...I mean, poor Christopher Reeve, the actor who played the "Man of Steel" in several movies during the '80s. As almost everyone knows, he suffered a spinal cord injury in a horse-jumping accident four years ago, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down.

Like most people I feel sorry for the guy, but not—unlike most people—because he spends his days tooling around in a wheelchair and puffing on a portable respirator.

Heck, we should all be so well-adjusted, so well cared for, so supported by family and friends, so actively engaged in life as Reeve is—giving speeches at the Academy Awards and at the Democratic National Convention, directing television films, being interviewed by the likes of Barbara Walters (who invariably gets all misty-eyed at his mere presence). One day when I wasn't looking, he was apparently anointed Official Spokesperson for all us PWDs (people with disabilities). So what's to feel sorry for?

Well, for one thing, Reeve is the target of sometimes rancorous criticism from disability activists who regard him as nothing more than a glamorized telethon "poster boy." They demand he use his media access and celebrity cachet to bring attention to such issues as the abysmally low rate of employment among PWD's or the erratic enforcement of the ADA and the misguided backlash against it.

Instead, almost all he talks about from his "rolling pulpit" is increased funding for spinal cord injury and his vow that as God is his judge he will never be hungry again—no, wait, that's Scarlett O'Hara—let me see, oh yes...that someday, possibly in as little as five years, he *will* walk again!

To tell you the truth, I can't blame Reeve too much for his priorities. If I had been ambulatory for over 40 years, been celebrated for my portrayal of a soaring super-hero, and

then suddenly found myself in that cultural symbol of helplessness and captivity called a wheelchair, I'd want to get up and out there mucho pronto too.

Moreover, Reeve is probably right to believe that research could lead to an effective treatment, even total regeneration, for spinal cord injury in the not-too-distant future. Call me weird, but I also think that might be a good thing. Even if one doesn't

...I don't suppose I'd turn down the opportunity to to walk again--least of all leap tall buildings at a single bound--if by some miracle it were presented to me.

particularly need or want a cure for him/herself ("My disability is a gift from God" or "I'm not broken so I don't need to be fixed"), I couldn't imagine wanting to deny the possibility of treatment or cure or prevention for any disabling condition to others, including future generations.

Now having said all that, I nonetheless maintain that walking is highly over-rated as a means of mobility and have never quite understood how people will literally put their lives on hold and expend enormous amounts of time, money, and energy, or even undergo torture and mutilation, just to be able to set one foot in front of the other.

I suspect though it's not the actual walking that's so important, but getting rid of the accursed wheelchair. I once saw this guy on television,

apparently a true story, who had been some kind of athlete until he was injured and became a paraplegic. He spent months in intensive rehabilitation, constantly exercising and working out, and then had miles of electronic, computerized circuitry implanted in his legs to stimulate the muscles into forward motion. And all for one purpose—that he, braced in metal and leather to stand upright, could walk down the aisle on his wedding day!

As I watched this guy lurching down the aisle like a tuxedoed Frankenstein, I wondered if it wouldn't have been easier for him just to wheel himself

down the aisle, say his vows, plop his bride on his lap, and wheel them both back up the aisle. Easier, yes, but apparently un-manly or un-American or un-something.

Still, I can't begrudge anyone in a wheelchair the hope of walking again. Everybody in difficult circumstances has to have something to hold on to to keep on going. And I don't suppose I'd turn down the opportunity of being able to walk again—least of all leap tall buildings at a single bound—if by some miracle it were presented to me. But it's just not something I've needed to cling to in order to sustain myself during the past 48 years in a wheelchair.

Rather, the sustaining and determining hope around which I choose to focus my limited energies is simply to try and use whatever gifts God has blessed me with in the way he wants me to and thus get through each day without screwing it up too badly. Perhaps not as galvanizing or inspiring a hope to others as Christopher Reeve's is, but hey—it works for me.

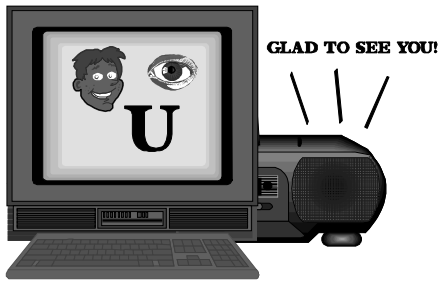
A MAJOR MINORITY

Based on a 1991-92 federal survey of 30,000 households:

- There are at least 48 million people in the United States with a disability.
- Some 24 million people—nearly 1 in 10 Americans—are severely disabled.
- 46 million Americans with disabilities are 15 years of age or older.

Source: Associated Press

TECHNOLOGY MAKES ON-THE-SPOT EVANGELISM POSSIBLE By Snoopi Botten



Editor's Note: Snoopi Botten was born with cerebral palsy, cannot walk or talk, and found Jesus Christ at the age of 16. When he's not working at a street mission in Minneapolis, Minn., he's singing in bars. He speaks—and sings—with an Augmentative Communication Device (ACD). For readers as ignorant on the subject as this editor is (or was), an ACD converts symbols and pictures selected and displayed on a screen into synthesized or digitalized speech—or song. The following piece originally appeared on an on-line list server for ACD users and was forwarded to the editor by e-mail. (By the way, the "Vanguard" and "Liberator" Botten mentions are model-names for ACD's.)

As most of you know, I'm now using a Vanguard to talk with instead of a Liberator...I'm accessing 40 words a minute, which is not bad.

I just went to Promise Keepers, which is a yearly ministry for men. I took my Vanguard so I could meet people, and you guys are going to flip when you read what I ended up doing!

I showed up two hours early and was very easily talking to people, buying stuff, and everything else. An announcement was made that they needed more "evangelists," people who counsel and pray with other people at the altar. Without thinking, I signed up to do it. It was so strange; even as someone was filling out the forms for me, my answers were 100-percent spontaneous. I attracted a lot of annoying attention as people were wondering how the heck I was answering so fast...

Anyway, I almost felt like a fool because I never, ever thought any one

would come to me for prayer. But I followed the instructions and went to the front with all the other evangelists. I was shocked when the other evangelists started to send people over

When I came to know Christ, I told God he would have to challenge me daily; I didn't want him to underestimate me like everyone else [did].

to me. I was able to help one man re-dedicate his life to God. When it was all over, some of the other evangelists talked to me as if I weren't disabled in any way.

I used Vanguard the entire time. It's so fast it feels totally natural for both me and the other people around me...I'm still adding to my vocabulary and trying to make it even faster, but I never thought I'd be an evangelist at Promise Keepers. I'm still in shock that I was an on-the-spot evangelist with no preparation!

Following are excerpts from Botten's later e-mail messages directly to the editor:

My goal is a lot like yours—I want to encourage more religious involvement for people with disabilities. I'm writing my own music, arranging it, and everything. I'm recording it in a studio, and I'm working on getting the promotions together....

I was saved when I was 16, and it's been a battle ever since, to say the least. I do what I feel God calls me to do. I mean, ever since the age of 23 I've been singing in bars, which isn't easy for me because "Christians" aren't supposed to do that. Yet God uses me to bring people to Jesus through my music and through my just being who I am. I'm glad I'm not alone. Jesus himself was given a hard time for being around and socializing with sinners....

It seems like no matter what we do, someone always says something like, "Wait until he's healed—won't he be a blessing?" I hate that! I was thought to be brain-dead at birth. I know Jesus Christ restored my mind. I don't know why I can't walk, nor do I care. God is using me in ways that he could never do if I could walk....

There will always be people who think that a disability is nothing more than a demon. I've had three exorcisms in my life by well-meaning people who were trying to test their own faith instead of listening to God's will. In my opinion, people who need to try their faith actually have doubt....

When I came to know Christ, I told God he would have to challenge me daily; I didn't want him to underestimate me like everyone else [did]. Jesus has me doing things that I never even dreamed of. And a God like that does not mind questions—he welcomes them....

I've found that you only think you are handicapped until you let God use you. He turns every disability into a strength. God is all the strength anyone needs. "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me...."

People need to hear that. If we dare to believe God's word, he will meet us. It was so neat at Promise Keepers. In spite of my pain and self-doubt, God needed me to minister to specific people. I had to let go and let God.

CORRECTION

Due to a mental lapse (of which there are plenty to go around), your esteemed editor has been giving an incorrect website address in the *Wings* info box in past issues. The **correct** website address is given in the info box at the left.



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

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 dying to be on our mailing list
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Pssst! Wanna Be An Angel?

We need your financial support to continue publication and to expand the readership of *Wings* nationwide. If you think *Wings* is worth it, please make a check or money order payable to the "Fallbrook United Methodist Church" (or "FUMC") and mark it "Wings Newsletter." Mail it to the [church address](#) below.

Basic Angel	\$6-\$14
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NO ONE CAN MAKE ME ABUSE DRUGS—I'M A VOLUNTEER

By Dr. Dee Bissell

I am writing as a person who has experienced addiction herself and who is married to a recovering person. My husband was an alcoholic for many years, and I became a prescription pill addict to cope with his addiction and what it was doing to me. My drug was in a pill, my husband's in a bottle or can. Yet we both had the same problem—we just didn't realize it. The past thirty years have been a blessing as we discovered our addictions and were willing to do something about them.

The doctors I went to had no clue about addiction, and they had no clue when prescribing me medication that I was at high risk to become addicted to it.

I had polio at the age of four months and grew up with two alcoholic parents. When we come from families with a history of alcoholism, we are

genetically predisposed to become addicted (though not necessarily to alcohol) ourselves. We don't have to become addicted, but if we are not aware of the danger, it is easy to fall into the trap. With my background and with *my disability* I was set up for addiction.

Only after being educated as a "Substance Abuse Professional" did I find I was a high-risk person for addiction to alcohol or other drugs (*see risk factors for persons with disabilities on this page—ed. note*) and would have to be careful what I took for my ailments. I also needed to find alternative ways to handle my problems or pain. 12-Step programs have been a blessing for me and have helped me through so many difficult times.

There are more than 48-million people with all kinds of disabilities in

the U.S. Approximately 10% of the general population has an alcohol problem. In the disability community the figures are even higher.

Addiction is an all-pervasive problem. It isn't an easy thing to deal with if you're the one with an addiction. It's a living nightmare if you care for someone with an addiction. Are there answers to these problems? I give a resounding Yes!!!

Bissell is a retired member of the National Christian Association of Counselors and is currently residing in Ellenton, Florida.

FOR HELP WITH ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG-RELATED PROBLEMS, Dr. Bissell recommends Ephesians Life Ministries, Inc., telephone [301] 439-7191. This is a ministry that deals with substance abuse from a Christian perspective and can give referrals to other states if needed.

FOR INFORMATION ON DISABILITY AND ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ABUSE, contact Resource Center On Substance Abuse Prevention and Disability, VSA Educational Services, 1331 F Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC, 20004, Voice Telephone [202] 783-2900, TDD [202] 737-0645, Fax [202] 628-3812.

Common Risk Factors For Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse For Persons With Disabilities

MEDICAL

People with disabilities often use medications, sometimes two or more concurrently prescribed, over extended periods of time which may influence behavior or interact with other drugs such as alcohol. Medical conditions associated with disabilities can decrease a person's tolerance for alcohol and other drugs or lead to dependency on them for temporary relief from pain and discomfort.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Family, friends, and professionals—misguidedly motivated by compassion, guilt, frustration, or camaraderie—may inadvertently encourage people with disabilities to misuse alcohol and other drugs. With the onset of a disability, a person may experience the increased stress of difficult adjustments to a whole new life style and/or daily routine. Negative reactions to a disability—shock, denial, anger, depression, resentment, guilt, and/or embarrassment—can lead to unhealthy coping strategies.

SOCIAL

Young people with disabilities especially may have less opportunities for social experience or greater needs for acceptance with peer groups and thus may be more vulnerable to alcohol and other drug abuse through peer pressure. Lack of transportation, recreational, or social opportunities frequently isolate people with disabilities of all ages from each other as well as from the non-disabled community, thus leading to depression and poor self-esteem.

ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT

People with disabilities often face loss of job or major medical bills and related costs, creating financial anxieties and stress. Two-thirds of all people with disabilities who are of working age are unemployed, even though 66 percent of them say they want to work. Of those who are employed, only 25 percent work full time.

ACCESS

People with disabilities frequently encounter limited access to substance abuse materials or programs because of different learning styles, cognitive or sensory limitations, and physically inaccessible facilities.

While any of these factors alone could pose a risk, the cumulative effect cannot be underestimated—and cannot be overlooked—as a key factor in rehabilitation.

—D.B.—

REVEALING THE BROKENNESS

Shame,
sorrow,
failure--
alone.

We do not want
to think,
to reach,
to remember,
to tell.

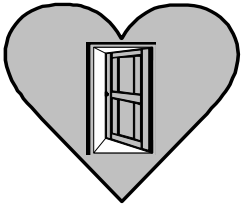
We want
to hide,
to act just fine--
perfect.

But healing comes
by revealing the brokenness,
confessing to God,
who knows
our need.

Then
the light
of Christ's love
can shine
holy, healing
beams of grace,
and bring
life from death,
hope from despair.

--Roberta Porter--

Alive Now [March/April 1996]



OPENING HEARTS, MINDS AND DOORS

National Campaign Challenges Congregations To Welcome People With Disabilities

2 000 American religious congregations committed to welcoming people with disabilities by the year 2000—that's the goal of the Accessible Congregations Campaign launched by the National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.) joined by Initiative 2000, an Atlanta-based non-profit organization formed to celebrate the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities.

Ginny Thornburgh, Director of N.O.D.'s Religion and Disability Program, an interfaith effort since 1989, said, "True religious access is about opening hearts, minds and doors to millions of Americans with disabilities who seek a full life of faith."

To qualify as an Accessible Congregation and to receive a certificate, a house of worship must commit to the following three principles:

♥ *In our congregation, people with disabilities are valued as individuals, having been created in the image of God;*

♥ *Our congregation is endeavoring to remove barriers of architecture, communications and attitudes that exclude people with disabilities from full and active participation; and*

♥ *People, with and without disabilities, are encouraged to practice their faith and use their gifts in worship, service, study and leadership.*

Whether they are in the initial stages, the final stages, or the somewhere-in-between stages of making their congregations accessible to people with disabilities, faith groups are urged to add their names to the list. "We are encouraging commitment, not perfection, from congregations," Thornburgh emphasized.

Adapted from a N.O.D. press release (June 9, 1998)

To receive a packet containing an application and further information on the program, contact: Accessible Congregations Campaign, N.O.D., 910 - 16th St. NW, Suite 600, Washington DC 20006, Voice Telephone [202] 293 -5960, TDD [202] 293-5968, Fax [202] 293-7999, E-mail religion@nod.org

To facilitate congregations in making people with disabilities welcome, N.O.D. publishes a wonderfully comprehensive handbook, ***That All May Worship***. Now in its 5th printing, this interfaith handbook covers a wide variety of disabilities—physical, sensory, and mental—and in clear, readable language gives the "how-to's" of making worship, education, and fellowship accessible both physically and attitudinally. Single copies of the 39-page handbook are \$10 each (no S&H charged) and may be ordered from N.O.D. at the address given above. Contact N.O.D. for information on multiple-copy orders.

Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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**That all may praise God,
All may grow,
All may serve,
All may be served, and
All may worship**

From *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People With Disabilities*, Ann Rose Davie and Ginny Thornburgh, (c) 1992 by the National Organization on Disability [Washington D.C.]



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