

Against all Odds

Physically Challenged



by Dennis Peterson

Accepting the challenge: that's what disabled people do when they acknowledge their limitations and learn to work within these boundaries, and we can accept the challenge of making ourselves accessible. I have gained much strength from working with physically challenged people, feeling that charity is an important part of a person's life. My attitude towards charity is a very Jewish one. In Hebrew the word charity is *zedakah*, which also means righteousness. In other words, charity is not a favor you do, but rather simply the right way to act. It started when I volunteered time for the Volunteer Braille Services who, through their Independent Living Program, provide counseling, communication training, travel training, housekeeping, and adult education for the visually impaired. Their Corporate Motto is "It is impossible to give dignity, independence and enrichment to someone else's life without making your own abundantly happy."

This led me to be on the Gay Care Committee for Lesbian and Gay Pride '83, which provides for day care, medical attention, interpreters, and accessibility. Seeing the beauty of American Sign Language (ASL) made me finally begin learning ASL and brought me in contact with members of the Northwest Chapter of Rainbow Alliance, a national organization of hearing impaired lesbians and gay men. When I first met Hank, who is now a good friend, he asked me if I wanted to dance. This really threw me off guard. I need to be motivated by just the right music and sometimes wine to get in the spirit of things, but Hank was quite at ease. In his article, "Silent Speech, Inner Rhythms" for the *New York Native* (December 5-18) Richard Ulmans writes: "Some night at the Saint (a NY disco) there will be a failure in the sound system. The music will stop, and we'll all be left standing high and dry. All except for Sam and his friends. Then we'll be watching them for the rhythms, instead of the other way around. And that night, maybe we, too, will finally learn to dance to our own inner music." (By the way, for those wishing to do volunteer work with the deaf, there is a new service called NW ANSIR that relays TTY messages. Call Denise at 231-1889.)

These experiences have taught me that it is good to reach out to people who are differently abled, for you will often learn and grow more from the contact than they, but most of all it teaches how to see the inner person, a talent that needs nurturing in us all. Before you make the effort it is good to know something about the subcultural differences in order to behave appropriately and get across the right message.

Some of us hold back from talking or helping physically challenged people because the sympathy that moves us when we see some-

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