

# Living Independently

The struggle continues for a basic civil right



I write on July 4th, Independence Day. About 200 years after we declared our freedom from the oppression of British rule and became the United States of America, the most far-reaching, biggest, civil rights movement began to exert profound influence. I say biggest because, unlike any other oppressed populace I can think of, YOU could become a member at any moment (you have an almost 90 percent likelihood to become a member before you die).

For millennia people with disabilities have been oppressed. Historically disempowered through segregation and driven by fear, millions have been relegated to back rooms or institutions, denied access to civil life or choice in the conduct of their households.

One milestone of this modern civil rights thrust is the Disability Rights/Independent Living movement which began with the admission of my older brother, Ed Roberts, to the University of California at Berkeley. (Google his name to learn more of his influence and accomplishments).

Polio had left him paralyzed and unable to breathe without a respirator (the Iron Lung). He applied for, and gained admission to Cal. The headline of the *Daily Californian* read "Helpless Cripple Attends Cal."

He did attend, graduate and teach political science at UC Berkeley but he turned out the opposite of helpless. His personal charisma, organizational skill, political power and world travel directly influenced and aided a billion potential clients, and as I mentioned, every one of us, probably.

He and the "helpless cripples" who quickly followed and who then graduated into the Berkeley community secured freedom to move freely about through the citywide program of curb-cuts and access for wheelchairs and others to public transportation.

They established the first Center for Independent Living, a peer-run advocacy organization that supports every client in addressing their personal need for choice in living a maximally free and productive life. There are 400 such centers in the U.S. now and many more internationally.

The movement grows: Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was a major achievement after nationwide nonviolent actions and sit-ins at federal institutions. The next barrier to equality for "helpless cripples" is the most formidable and we could use your effort to help overcome, and dismantle this wall of discrimination.

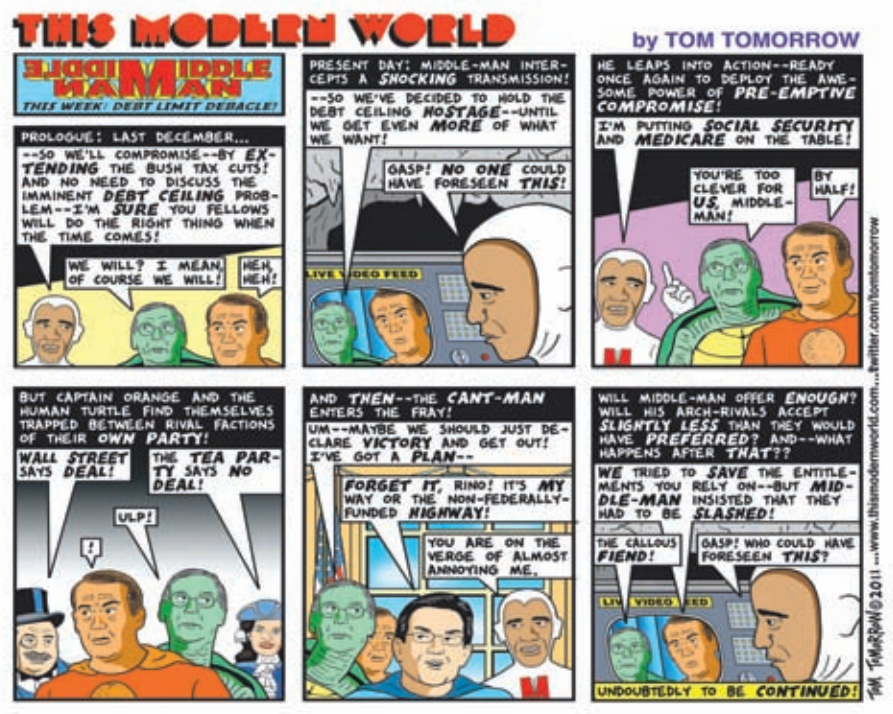
I'm on the board of directors for LILA, our Lane Independent Living Alliance. We are preparing a push to expand our already broad services and to better educate the public (especially our youngest students), in the knowledge, attitudes, language and etiquette of disability.

We are also preparing to expand our outreach to returning disabled veterans of war. If you have other ideas for programs to address needs call us at 541-607-7020.

Would you consider being on the Board of Directors of LILA? If so or not you are all invited to attend our "Celebration of Independent Living" from 11 am to 2 pm Saturday, July 23, at 990 Oak St. (two blocks from Saturday Market). There will be food, door prizes, a short (noon to 12:30 pm) presentation about LILA, and karaoke from 1 to 2 pm.

We will have applications to join the board if you'd like to serve in that way. If we don't see you there, put Jan. 23, 2012 on your calendar. That day has been declared "Ed Roberts Day" by Congress and on that day we will be hosting educational events in the schools and for the public about my brother Ed and the Independent Living movement.

*Mark Roberts is president of the board of Lane Independent Living Alliance, with offices at 99 W. 10th Ave. in Eugene. Visit [www.lilaoregon.org](http://www.lilaoregon.org) or call 345-7021.*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### THE MAN IN APARTMENT 6

Patrick Atkinson died today (7/11). He passed on after a long, hard battle with cancer, which chewed away at his body and spirit for many years until he could fight it no more. I don't know how old he was (79), where he was born or what his favorite color was.

I knew that he was an electrical engineer and worked as a private contractor in the aerospace and aviation industry for years, traveling from project to project, and probably helped save lives along the way. I knew he loved Hershey candy bars, the ones without nuts, and action movies. I knew he loved his Burgundy 1987 Toyota pickup, as he spent a lot of time buffing and waxing it in the parking lot of our apartments. We spoke briefly about politics, cars and the weather, short conversations in passing when he felt like talking. Other times we would just acknowledge each other's presence, as I could feel the pain he was suffering through his eyes. He was never married, had no children and very few friends. His family was an estranged brother who lived in Alaska. Probably his best friend in Eugene was his neighbor, Larry, who tried to get him to eat, tried to keep his spirits up and supplied him with chocolate bars until the end of his days.

I probably spent a total of three hours with him in a span of four years and knew him as intelligent, alone and waging a war with the cancer and himself. And yet I grieve. I wished I paid more attention. I grieved that he was so angry and in so much pain with no one but his own thoughts to share this anger. And I grieve that he has become another statistic without a celebration of the importance of his life.

So I ask that we celebrate today the life of Patrick Atkinson, of the many accomplishments and contributions he made to society, of his thoughtful intelligence and expressions, of his pioneer spirit and love for the open road and sea. Patrick, you will be missed, and you passed on from this world with dignity and the gratitude of the world around you. You are now finally at peace, the Man in Apartment 6.

*William Kasper  
Eugene*

### CODE 3 IS RARE

Thanks your cover story about CAHOOTS (6/30). As a CAHOOTS worker, I appreciate your interest in our often ignored and misunderstood work. Inevitably, there are some inaccuracies in the story, and some points deserving elaboration or clarification.

In the section of the article titled "Code 3 & other urgencies," Dante Zuñiga-West writes, "When violence becomes a legitimate threat to the safety of a CAHOOTS team, they call in for police coverage with 'Code 3,' meaning the need is immediate." Unfortunately, there are some dangerous circumstances that require "Code 3" emergency assistance. However, these circumstances are rare. CAHOOTS works very well with EPD, but CAHOOTS workers rely primarily on their own rapport-building and de-escalation skills to resolve tense situations. When that doesn't work, police might be called in for help. Additionally, when CAHOOTS does request help from police, it is rarely in self-defense but rather because an uncooperative client is unable to provide their own self-care due to a mental health or substance abuse problem.

In the section "Requiem for a box," the author writes — regarding the HIV Alliance's needle drop-boxes — "Though the drop boxes sound like a great idea, they do pose a particular problem." He goes on telling the story of one addict who broke into the drop-box outside of White Bird Clinic, hoping to find needles with residual drugs, implying the drop-boxes may do more harm than good. Hopefully, this isn't interpreted as CAHOOTS' disapproval of these drop-boxes. Speaking for myself, I totally support the HIV Alliance and their many "harm-reduction" projects.

It is also unfortunate the article does not give more credit to the many agencies CAHOOTS collaborates with on a regular basis. CAHOOTS is largely only viable because of other community services, such as Willamette Family's Buckley Center, Shelter Care's Royal Avenue Program, Looking Glass's Station 7 and New Roads programs, and FOOD for Lane County's Dining Room, to name a few.

Lastly, there's a tendency when



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