



Modern Civil Rights Movement

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People who are disabled have more brick walls holding them back than just the complications of their disability. How do I know? I am one of the millions of Americans living with a disability.

I have cerebral palsy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 19 percent of Americans – 54 million people – are living with a disability. That’s equivalent to the populations of Florida and California combined.

For some reason, many of those we in the disabled community refer to as our “able-bodied” peers treat us as if we were aliens on their planet, which is not only uncool but immoral and often illegal. It makes people with disabilities feel as if we don’t belong in our own neighborhoods, schools, towns, and society.

Every time I am made fun of or taken advantage of it makes me feel like I am back in the time of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, except instead of African-Americans being socially excluded,

it’s people like me living with a disability who are being excluded. As a teenager I often feel as though my biggest challenge is not overcoming the obstacles of my disability, such as being relegated to a confined space at a high school football game, or worrying if I can get into someone’s home without a ramp, but overcoming this other form of discrimination. All I want is to be socially included.

What is “social inclusion”? It’s giving people with disabilities an equal opportunity to share in social opportunities enjoyed by their “able-bodied” peers, including dating, friendship, sports, parties, and so on. Sadly, social inclusion does not happen as much as it should for those with disabilities.

As far as dating, for example, if I like a girl and I tell her, she inevitably replies, “You are a really sweet guy, but it’s not going to work out with us.

I’m sorry.” I mean, it seems like all these girls get together and rehearse the same line! I know it is because they are afraid to step out of their comfort zone and be associated with a guy in a wheelchair.

Besides being rejected in love, I am also excluded when it comes to friendship. How? My so-called friends make promises that they never keep, like “Oh yeah, you bet we are going to hang out.” When? “I will call you and let you know.” This usually ends with me hum-

ming the “Jeopardy” theme song. And that is the only sound because the phone never rings.

I am also vulnerable to being taken advantage of by strangers. One day I was with my mom, who wanted to get her nails done. I decided to wait outside. It was really hot and I got thirsty, so I wanted to get a bottle of club soda at a nearby store. I asked my mom for

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some money, and she handed me a stack of bills. Now, you should also know that I have a severe math disability. Anyway, Mom said it should be enough, so I rolled into the store to get my soda with a store worker’s help. At the register, the guy told me the total and I just handed him the stack of bills and I asked if it was enough. The guys said it sure was. However, I still don’t know if he was telling the truth. This uncertainty may be a part of my life until I overcome my math disability, which I may never be able to do. And so I, along with many others, am at the mercy of those who may seek to take advantage of me.

I’m not saying I’m Martin Luther King, but I do have a dream: to spread disability awareness. If people in our society are not aware of how we in the disabled community feel and what we care about, then our society will never live up to the words of our founding fathers: “All men are created equal.” ♦

pride & prejudice