



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PRESS!

**Winter
2008**

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A Letter from the Executive Director

By Betsy Valnes



The Winter Issue of *Youth Empowerment Press* is focused on education and employment. These are huge topics in the lives of young people with disabilities. Each of us has a personal story to share about struggles and triumphs in either area. However, I am going to focus on one particular person who is living a battle around self-determination in education right now.

Micah Fialka-Feldman is a member of the Network. He also serves on our Advocacy Committee. Micah is going to school at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. Like any student, he wants to have the opportunity to live on campus. However, the University is not allowing him to do this because Micah is the first student in his program to want to live on campus. And while the school's slogan reads: "Where Innovation and Opportunity Meet," Micah has experienced more than just a bump in the road.

Micah challenged this "policy," and took all the appropriate steps. He started with the office of student housing. When they said 'no,' he went to the administration. When they said 'no,' he went to the Board of Trustees. When they said 'no,' he petitioned his fellow students (got their signatures of support) and took it back to the Board of Trustees. This time he also took several supporting letters from outside organizations. NYLNL was one of them.

Maybe this battle for equal rights is something one would expect. However, the confrontation and opposition from those in the disability community is something one would not expect.

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Statements and comments from people who refer to themselves as disability rights activists have come out saying that Micah is asking for “preferential treatment.” Some have said that he is “breaking the rules.” But when, might I ask, has any Civil Rights movement made headway by conforming to “the rules”?

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the following in his Letter from Birmingham Jail: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. ... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

We as young people with disabilities have all experienced some form of oppression. Our peers talk all the time about how we don’t feel equal. We don’t feel included. We don’t feel empowered. Then here comes an opportunity for new ground to be broken. A young person (like Micah) takes a leap to challenge the norm. He tries to gain the rights he deserves, and people in our own community challenge not only his integrity, but the validity behind his efforts.

It is a sad day when we support the oppression of those within our own community. When we ourselves cannot see past “the norms,” we have done a disservice to not only our movement, but to the individual lives of those who are fighting (what should be) the same fight.

If you are reading this as one who has already outwardly spoken in disagreement with Micah’s fight, please consider the following: “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade-unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.” (The Reverend Martin Niemoller, the anti-Nazi German pastor.)

If you are reading this as one that respects Micah’s fight, but has said nothing, please consider the following: “When we stay away because we don’t know what to say, it may as well be rejection.” (Rabbi Harry Kushner.)

If you are reading this as one who has supported Micah in his fight, please consider the following: Champions believe in themselves before they win! As an organization, the National Youth Leadership Network thanks you for taking that risk and standing behind the efforts of another, for without actions such as these none of us would likely be anywhere.

For more information on Micah and his goals to live on campus, please visit the following sites:

Micah's fight Continues, Oakland Post November 12, 2008:
http://www.oaklandpostonline.com/print_article.php?id=735

Micah and OU Students Discuss Future Plan, Check out YOU Tube:
http://scripturn.com/video_38_xNJ3LePk.html

Board of Trustees meeting at OU Comments from friends, student leaders and allies:
http://scripturn.com/video_EhgWPoAmvUY.html

Student: Oakland University Press:

- http://www.oaklandpostonline.com/read_article.php?id=560
- http://www.oaklandpostonline.com/read_article.php?id=557

Oakland Press:

<http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2008/10/26/life/doc4903dffc25ae836391830.txt>

Detroit News:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081103/SCHOOLS/811030341&imw=Y>

Follow-up article on the Detroit News Web:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2008811050492>

A Letter From the President ***By Stacey Milbern***




Dear NYLN Family,

Happy holidays! I hope this letter finds you well. This autumn has been a very busy time for the disability community. It feels good to look back on the year and reflect.

I have been thinking a lot about an event I went to this summer, the Allied Media Conference (AMC). The AMC is a gathering in Detroit that brings together independent media-makers, many who are youth. It was amazing to see young people taking the city in their own hands and changing what it means to live in the Detroit.

Through the AMC, I had a chance to really get to know NYLN member Micah Fialka-Feldman. He welcomed me to Detroit. Since I was new to the AMC community, he made sure I always knew what was going on. He made sure I had what I needed to participate. Conference organizers told me about how Micah and his family had worked with them to make sure that access wouldn't be an issue for anyone. As a result, many disabled people attended. Disability issues were on the table. Unlike other events, many workshops focused on integrating a disability analysis into broader social justice work. It was a transforming experience for me. I owe a lot to Micah for it.

Micah has picked up the banner of access again. After being denied campus housing, he is working to make college more accessible for disabled people. Activists in Michigan will tell you that this is not just about Micah living on campus--- it is a struggle for access that Micah is championing for others. Micah's ability to bring together all kinds of people to support this cause is changing what access and inclusion really mean and who they include. As a friend and fellow activist, I am proud of his work. NYLN, as an organization that promotes youth taking power, is also proud of his work. Every one of our Governing Board members voted to stand in solidarity with Micah. We will do whatever we can to support this fight.



You can read more about this struggle for accessibility by visiting this website: <http://www.throughthesamedoor.com/> I hope you will join us in talking about what access really can mean and how it can change how we interact with the world. If you are ever facing something similar, please know you can come to us.

In community,
Stacey

IN MEMORIUM

*Obituary for
Corey L. Burton Rowley*

July 21, 1968 – October 13, 2008



Tremonton, UT - Corey Rowley, a national leader in the disability rights movement lost her long battle with cancer much too soon on October 13, 2008, at age 40, surrounded by her family in Salt Lake City, UT.

Ms. Rowley was a highly successful progressive voice for change and her leadership had a significant impact on the lives and rights of 54 million Americans with disabilities.

Ms. Rowley served as the executive director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council and the Utah Statewide Independent Living Council. She chaired the Utah Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities and served on the Board of Directors of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and as Vice President and Chair of the Legislative and Advocacy Committee for the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL). She received the 2006 Justice for All award from AAPD and the 2007 Frank Harkin Memorial Award from NCIL for her leadership.

Growing up in Fielding, Utah, she graduated from Bear River High School. After successfully surviving leukemia during her pregnancy with her second daughter in 1991, Ms. Rowley took her personal experience with disability discrimination and her vast knowledge about public policy, and led many national initiatives to increase employment, improve access to healthcare, assistive technology, voting, independent living services and supports and to increase the implementation and enforcement of civil rights protections for people with disabilities. She was especially known for her work to increase the legislative impact of grassroots organizers, youth leadership development and for initiatives that led to the inclusion of the history of disability rights in public



school curriculum.

In addition to her expertise in organizing, advocacy and public policy systems change, she loved history, politics and she was the life of any gathering she attended.

Ms. Rowley is survived by her mother, Gwen Burton, her daughters, Amber and Alex Rowley, her granddaughter, Bella Rowley and nine brothers and sisters, Janet Call, Joan Ann Gilbert, Val Burton, Gary Burton, Cindy Richins, James Burton, Melanie Evans, Charlene Kidman and Keri Burton as well as many nieces and nephews and a wide circle of friends in every state across the US. She was preceded in death by her father William Darrell Burton Jr. She will be deeply missed but the impact of her efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities leaves a lasting legacy.

A “Thank you Note”

By Zachary Quick



I have been requested by an “educational professional” to write a letter of thanks “to the ‘educational professional’ who has had the greatest impact on my life”. I’m sure that the intent of this assignment was to create a warm and fuzzy thank you, full of all the wonderful memories of how that teacher nurtured and encouraged a student. I am writing this note to you because in fact you taught me great life lessons in fifth grade. While I was by no means nurtured or encouraged for a single day that year, I can guarantee that you did teach me valuable lessons that will serve me throughout my life.

The first life lesson you taught me was that sometimes those people who have been charged with taking caring of you will not or cannot honor that sacred charge. When they fail, I learned that I have to take care of myself. In fifth grade, my dyslexia had not been diagnosed; I didn’t know why I couldn’t understand what other kids did, I couldn’t understand why I couldn’t read and comprehend or why words never looked the same. I guess you were frustrated with me because I “didn’t get it”. I understood your frustration, because I was frustrated myself!!! But see, I was counting on **you** to help me figure it out. You didn’t even try! You called me lazy, you told me to pay attention, you told me to get organized. But see, I was paying attention, I was working hard and I was as organized as a dyslexic can be, but I still didn’t get it, and neither did you. The difference? I kept trying and I took care of myself and I never gave up! But you? You gave up on me within the first month!

In fifth grade, I learned what many “educational professionals’ still don’t get, that everybody learns in a different way. You did not recognize my difference; therefore you could not respect the gift I had to offer the class. You wanted everyone to be a cookie cutter learner and that cutter was mighty small. In fifth grade, I learned not to look for cookie cutter anything: not cookie cutter friends, cookie cutter cars or cookie cutter clothes. You taught me to not only look for differences, but to respect the gift that those differences offer.


I learned in fifth grade not to completely trust those in charge, because while they may have authority, they may not always have understanding. I learned this lesson walking by myself from the classroom to the resource room. That was the longest walk of my life and I walked it every day. You had the authority to tell me to that's where I needed to go. But you didn't understand the humiliation of leaving the room in front of my friends, you didn't understand how it felt to be the "dumb kid" coming back into the class room, you didn't understand how it felt when I came back and didn't know what the class was working on or how it felt to fumble through my work trying to see what everyone else was doing. You just told me when it was time to go and told me to be quiet and not disturb anybody when I came back. You had no understanding of my feelings, but by God you had order in the classroom! I learned a lot in fifth grade about understanding. Now, I go out of my way to understand how other people feel, I go out of my way to be "walk a mile in their shoes", I go to the "n-th" degree to understand the struggles of my friends and family; all because you taught me the **hopeless** feeling of being misunderstood. With the little authority I have experienced so far in my life, I try to use that authority coupled with empathy.

I also learned a lot about patience in fifth grade. I learned patience by trying to copy down assignments and spelling words from the blackboard week after week. See, dyslexic's just can't copy; it's a known fact (although not by you). I came to you many times, especially when I struggled so much that I copied the spelling words down incorrectly and then learned to spell them incorrectly. When I couldn't copy, you told me to "Slow down, take your time, be patient". When my Mom discovered those misspelled copied words, she started to help me. I worked on those damn words every night. My mom and I started with 5 the first night, 10 the second, 15 the third, all 20 on Thursday. We did 'em in the car, we did 'em in the tub, we did 'em before bed. I failed every test; I failed every test by a lot. I did learn patience, but not with copying. I learned to be patient with you! Finally, by the end of the semester, you at least gave me a spelling word list, and then I only had to copy down assignments. Sometimes, I would copy down the assignment incorrectly and do the wrong home work, I would do page 14 instead of page 41, then I would be in trouble for doing the incorrect assignment. When I came to you for help, you told me to slow down, take my time and be patient! Yes, you taught me patience!

In fifth grade I learned to deal with fear, I learned to manage overwhelming fear when it threatened to eat me alive. I used to get sick to my stomach in the morning over breakfast. I was worried you would ask me to read aloud and my friends would listen to me stumble over words that just didn't seem to make sense; words I could use in ordinary conversation, but just couldn't recognize or "sound out" when I read them. I used to get sick to my stomach on Fruit Loops, so often that my parent's made me eat Cheerios. I knew it wasn't the cereal, I recognized it as fear. But I met that fear every day. When I closed the car door when my Dad dropped me off at school, the only way I could walk through those doors was to imagine how good it would feel to open that same car door when my Mom picked me up at 3:05. I knew, no matter what humiliating thing happened at school, in eight hours I would open that car door and be safe again. You taught me that I could meet my worst fears and still survive.

I also learned in fifth grade that it is important not to judge too quickly, that it's important to dig a little bit beyond the surface in many of the challenges we experience in everyday life. I learned that sometimes we jump to a conclusion, and that conclusion becomes our erroneous reality. You taught me this valuable lesson by judging me the first week and by drawing the erroneous conclusion that I was lazy and that I talked too much. That was your erroneous reality for my entire fifth grade year. Let me tell you again, I was not lazy!!! I was DYING INSIDE and you didn't even know, worse you couldn't see my pain because of your erroneous reality. Sure I talked too much, I was trying to impress people with how smart I really was, so they wouldn't jump to the conclusion that I was stupid. You never knew me, you never dug **even a little** bit below the surface.

You also taught me about the vice of pride. Remember when you would make us correct our own math papers and then you would call out our name and we would report our score in front of the rest of the class. Well, I couldn't stand the humiliation, so I started to cheat, just now and then, so maybe I could report only 7 or 8 wrong, instead of 10 or 12. Yes I was proud, I despised my failures; I was too proud to report my struggles in front of the entire class. But you sure taught me a lesson when you discovered my cheatin' ways and reprimanded me in front of the entire class. I was just fighting to survive but you basically dressed me down in front of the class. Yes, you made an



example of me. I could not engage in the vice of pride when you proved to the whole fifth grade class that not only was I the dumb kid, I was a low down cheater as well. I had nothing left to be proud about!

The greatest lesson you taught me was to have faith in God and to believe in myself. My daily prayer life actually started in fifth grade. Every night, I prayed to God to “make me better”, I pleaded with him to heal whatever was wrong with me that no one could understand; I prayed for help to learn. I prayed fervently every night to give me the strength to make sure that I didn’t cry in class no matter what happened the next day. I prayed sincerely to God to forgive me when I cheated on my math papers and asked for extra forgiveness over the guilt I experienced because that I couldn’t tell him I would stop cheating and sin no more. You taught me, that in the worst of times (and fifth grade was very bad) that I needed to depend on God’s grace and to continue to believe in myself.

I am now college bound, school and academics are still dreadfully difficult, but I’m determined to succeed. My high school friends call me Rudy (based on a character in a movie called “Rudy”) because I never give up. Because of the lessons I learned in fifth grade, I suppose I have a pretty good chance to be successful in college. So I guess, I owe you a thank you. My sincere hope is that you do not receive an abundance of thank you notes that are similar to this. The irony of the entire situation is that I learn in a different way from many of my peers. I just think the lessons I learned from you should have been learned in a different way as well.

Going to College: Tips and Ideas for Students with Disabilities

By Emily Kathryn Holmes



Going to college can be a fun and confusing time for any high school student. For high school students with disabilities it is sometimes more confusing than fun. I have spoken to many high school students with disabilities about college. Every time I talk with them there are certain questions that are asked. These questions usually deal with two topics: accommodations and professors.

The accommodations you need for college can be confusing. Students often have questions about how to get their accommodations. They also want to know about the kinds of accommodations they can get. Here are three ideas for making college accommodations easier to get.

- 1) Know what your disability is and how it works. When you understand your disability, you can understand what your strengths are and what your challenges are. When you know what your strengths and challenges are, it will be easier to figure out the accommodations you need.
- 2) Think of the accommodations you have in high school. Think about which ones work and which ones do not work. The ones that work in high school might also work in college. Also, think about any new accommodations that might help you in college.
- 3) Get online and visit the websites of each college you are thinking about going to. The websites should have a section on the Office of Disability Services*. This section may list the different accommodations that the office offers. This will also get you thinking about the accommodations that might work for you.

The Office of Disability Services is there to make sure you have your accommodations in the classroom, but that is not all. The office can also help you with accommodations in other places like

- in the dorms,
- at a job on campus,
- and/or at an extra activity like a sport or a club.

Working with professors can be scary for disabled students. A lot of times students are scared because they are not sure if they should disclose (tell people you have a disability and what it is) their disability to their professor. They might also be scared because they do not know how the professor will react to their disability. Here are some tips about working with professors.

- 1) You should never feel like you need to tell the professor about your disability but telling the professor about your disability can be a good thing. The professor might ask you what he or she can do to help you be successful in class. Professors are there because they want you to do well in their classes. Professors do not want you to fail but there will always be a few professors who are hard to handle. However, most professors will not have a problem with your disability.
- 2) If you do end up having a problem with a professor, first try to work with the professor on your own. If that does not work, go talk with someone at the Office of Disability Services and ask for help.
- 3) Always be polite. Getting angry at someone never helps the situation. If you are getting frustrated, go talk with someone at the Office of Disability Services. Remember, people do not always do things to be mean. Often, they may not understand that what they are doing is not ok. If a professor does do something that you find frustrating, take the time to educate them.

The Office of Disability Services can help with other people besides professors. They can also support you and help you with any issues you are having with students and/or staff.

Talk with your parents or your school counselor if you are not sure about

- your disability and how it affects you,
- the accommodations you have in high school,
- and scheduling a meeting with the Office of Disability Services at a college or university.

These are just a few tips and ideas for making college a little easier. There are many more tips and ideas out there. If you are thinking about going to college, talk with students with disabilities who are in college and ask for tips and ideas from them.

*Each college has a different name for the office that helps students with disabilities. The Office of Disability Services is the name used in this article.



Knowing Your Rights in Education

By Brenda Hill

Education is important to success. It is also a key to living independently. Several laws have been designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities. These laws were made to help people with disabilities access the benefits of education. It is important for students to be aware of their rights. This will help them to become self advocates within the education system.

To learn more about this subject I interviewed Mr. Howard Kallem. Mr. Kallem is a lawyer for the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education. Most of the information in this article was gained from my communications with Mr. Kallem.

There are three major laws that grant rights to students with disabilities. These are:

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,
- Title II of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), and
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Section 504 and Title II of the ADA ban discrimination based on disability in two areas: programs or activities getting federal funds and public entities. IDEA takes a slightly different approach. It focuses on students in grades K-12 and younger. IDEA gives funding to schools for special education services. To get funding a school must agree to follow civil rights regulations.

These laws work together to prevent discrimination. They cover the entire education system. The basic purpose of these laws is to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. As a result, a student cannot be excluded from a school or a program due to a disability. Schools must also be free from bias in grading. Students with disabilities must be free from harassment. The law also recognizes that students with disabilities may need assistance. This is to level the playing field, not to provide advantages.

Some forms of assistance include aids, services, or accommodations. These apply to the classroom, athletics and dormitories. Some common services are:

- Physical and occupational therapy,
- Modified curriculum,
- Resource room help or tutoring,
- Extra time on tests,
- Alternative testing location,

- Physical accommodations (ramps, elevators, accessible toilets, etc.),
- Sign language interpreters,
- Books in electronic or alternative format,
- Accessible websites, and
- Tests in electronic or alternative format.

To learn more about educational services go to:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/publications.html#Section504>

Mr. Kallem reported that 50-60% of complaints to the Office of Civil Rights involve disability issues. Many are related to disputes over services. Many are also related to a school failing to recognize that a student has a disability.

If a student feels that he or she is being treated unfairly a report should be filed. The law requires that every school district and college have a grievance process. Students may use these to voice concerns. This process should be made easily available to students. Grievance procedures are commonly found on a school's or college's website. These can also be found in the student handbook. Each state department of education also has a way to report complaints. Students may also file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education. More information can be found at www.ed.gov/ocr.

Being aware of your educational rights will make it easier for you to protect them. The laws represent progress that has been made to remove barriers for students with disabilities. However, we must always continue to seek improvements. This will help to correct any shortcomings of the current laws. It will also ensure that the laws meet our needs as best they can.

Special thanks to Mr. Howard Kallem, for taking the time to help out with this article!

Responsibilities for Students with Disabilities: Education & Employment

By Alicia Payne



Disabilities are not all the same, some people have hidden disabilities that are not always obvious. The decision to disclose (tell someone you have a disability) your disability is YOUR decision but it can be helpful to share with certain people, like professors and supervisors, the fact you have a disability.

One of the things I would recommend for students with *any* disability is to make a list of your strengths and what you have trouble with. When I attended Rose State College I always went a few weeks before classes started to my professors' offices. Most of them would ask about my strengths. After we talked, they helped me find ways to accommodate my disability. Now I can do most things like students without disabilities.

But there are other responsibilities students have:

- Meet with the counselor in the Disability Support/Services Office
- Talk with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor because Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to assist you in some way
- If you want, discuss your disability with your employer
- Make sure you take a course load that fits your schedule and your capabilities (do not overdo it!)
- Volunteer! You usually make some of the best contacts that could help with employment
- Get involved with a student disability organization if they have one on campus. If not, think about starting one
- Get involved in your state's chapter for AHEAD. I once was the student representative for OK-AHEAD and they put on some awesome conferences! You'll learn things that will help you to succeed and it could also help with employment

Plus be sure to check out the resources checklist I put together in regards to education and employment.

Resources:

AHEAD – American Association on Higher Education and Disability

107 Commerce Center Drive, Suite 204

Huntersville, NC 28078 USA

Phone: 704.947.7779

Fax: 704.948.7779

URL: www.ahead.org

Disability Nation

Phone: 480.302.9300

Email: contact@disabilitynation.net

Skype screen name: lsw99

MSN messenger lsw99

URL: www.disabilitynation.net

National Youth Leadership Forum

1919 Gallows Road, Suite 700

Vienna, Va 22182

TBI Raiders

P.O. Box 215

Wellston, Ok 74881

Phone: 405.356.9966

Fax: 440.550.6315

Email: tbraiders@sbcglobal.net

URL: www.angelfire.com/ok5/tbraidersok

Yahoo screen name: college_lady_ok

Gettinghired

1545 US RT 206

First Floor

Bedminster, NJ 07921

Phone: 866.352.7481

Fax: 908.470.2166

URL: <http://gettinghired.com/>

International Corner

Study Abroad in France: An Interview with Loren Ashton

Loren Ashton, who is Deaf, studied abroad in France for a semester in college. In an interview, she shares how she told her parents about her dream to go abroad and gives tips for other young leaders with disabilities to travel internationally.

Why did you want to go on an international exchange?

I wanted to find out about differences between France and the United States (i.e. cultural customs, politics, food, manners, etc).

Where did you go? What did you do there?

I went to Aix-en-Provence, France; I attended the Institute of American Universities. During the semester, I traveled to Paris, Nice, Marseilles, and Venice.

How did your parents respond when you told them you wanted to go abroad?

My parents were surprised. We had talked about me traveling through Europe for the summer and doing some class courses. So, I went to the study abroad office for information and the advisor suggested I go for a semester. It was something I never really considered, but I felt I needed to do it while I was still in college. When I told my parents, my dad was 100% for it, and my mom wasn't. She thought that I was just joking about the idea, but she came to accept that studying abroad was something I really wanted to do.

What was this like for you and for your parents?

My relationship with my parents became stronger. I saw what kind of people my parents are, and they realized I do many things without their help. They know I am independent, but the study abroad experience proved I was capable of doing anything.

What was the most difficult part of the experience for your parents?

My parents were concerned about being able to communicate with me. I emailed them almost every day, either short or long e-mails, so they knew I was doing fine. Sometimes we set up a specific time to meet online and talk through the AOL instant messenger (AIM).

What were some of your biggest concerns?

In my two previous experiences of studying abroad in high school, I traveled with a large group of classmates and a teacher but no sign language interpreter. My biggest concern was getting a sign language interpreter to go with me to France, so it would make my experience much more meaningful and worthwhile. My study abroad advisor and the Disability Resource Center (DRC) specialist at my college,

along with my parents and I, played a big role in making my study abroad experience a success.

What services or accommodations did you use? How were these different from home?

I used an ASL interpreter from the U.S. that my school arranged. I met many deaf French people and they shared how rare it is to have a sign language interpreter. Closed captioning only came on TV at specific times and only for news channels. They were able to go to the movies because many American movies play in the French theatres along with French subtitles. They did not have any 2-way pagers at the time, so they used e-mail, AIM messaging, and texting each other on cell phones. It was up to me to make things happen, be assertive and get what I needed.

Was French an issue at all during the experience?

I couldn't speak French at all! I used gestures with people that I met. My ASL interpreter knew the French language, so she translated at times when needed. Interestingly, I saw many of my American friends and classmates struggle with not understanding what a French person said to them. I understood their frustration, because growing up I was used to the language barrier and have developed skills to cope with it.

What activities did you get involved with outside of school?

I was involved in writing a paper for my professor at the University of Arizona. I interviewed deaf French people on many different issues, such as how they:

- Deal with the hearing culture and feel about their Deaf culture and history
- Communicate with their parents and if their family learned LSF (Langues Signes Francais/French Sign Language)
- Make personal choices in their adult lives, such as marrying another deaf person or a hearing person, and dealing with their hearing co-workers.

What were some of the changes you noticed in yourself after returning from your exchange?

I became more grateful for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). I accepted my deafness more and I felt it was okay to be Deaf. Before going to France, I didn't like communicating through an interpreter who voiced for me when I spoke. I wanted to speak up for myself without any help. After France, I started to appreciate that I know sign language. I became self-confident to use sign language in front of my family even though I grew up strongly oral. I also became more responsible for my own actions.

What advice would you give to other young people with disabilities who want to go on exchange about approaching their parents about it?

I want other young people with disabilities to use common sense, be grounded and be realistic long before thinking about studying abroad. I advise doing a lot of research on the place that they have chosen to go. Also, travel with an open mind because studying abroad is a completely different experience – they will find out more about themselves and about others.

For parents, I want them to know they need to encourage this kind of opportunity for their son or daughter with a disability. Chances are their child will change for the better in many ways, such as gaining self-awareness and cultural awareness. Their son or daughter will learn more about differences between people and cultures, and even appreciate what they have at home!

For more information about studying abroad or learning a foreign language, contact the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange. It is a project sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and administered by Mobility International USA.

National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

<http://www.miusa.org/ncde>

Email: clearinghouse@miusa.org

Windows Instant Messenger: clearinghouse_miusa



I am on one of my regular morning walks on the way to class on Tuesdays/Thursdays. I would pass people getting ready for the all-day farmer's market in the little old town of Aix en Provence.



I went with classmates to Venice for a ten-day art class trip from Aix en Provence. I'm pictured here with a gondola oarsman on one of the days when the weather was just starting to warm up.



National Youth Leadership Network

The National Voice for Young Leaders with Disabilities

HELP MAKE NYLN GREAT – MAKE A DONATION TODAY!

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization run by young people with disabilities. We empower all young people to reach their maximum potential.

Members of NYLN must:

- Be between 16 and 28 years old;
- Have a disability;
- Want to share and learn more about leadership and advocacy skills.

To be a member of NYLN:

- Visit our web page: www.nyln.org;
- Go to the link at the bottom of the home page and register to be a member;
- There is no fee.

Members of NYLN receive:

- Weekly e-mail updates of opportunities for young people around the country;
- Quarterly e-newsletters;
- Invitations to participate on national teleconferences/webcasts;
- Links to training materials and resources created by young people, for young people;
- Information about other opportunities through the Network.

All donations are appreciated and TAX DEDUCTIBLE!

Name/Organization Name: _____

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\$_____ = Donation amount

Mail your donation to: NYLN, Box 5908, Bethesda, MD 20824
Questions? Please call 1-866-480-6565 or e-mail bvalnes@tie.net

NYLN thanks the following organizations for their ongoing support and mentorship. Professional partners are essential so NYLN can be empowered to serve you.



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2885 Dickson Drive
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