

of dealing with my own anxieties about what I was doing and what I was in for, they made my day-to-day life a living hell. I had to move out and search for another setting where I could be accepted as doing a perfectly normal and human thing.

Once I was able to move to another attendant support service setting, where staff got to know us as a family right from the start, I had no further problems with attendants accepting us. When I became pregnant for the second time, the attendants were jubilant. What a change! Since my first pregnancy had gone well, and little Katie survived we novices as parents, my family felt more comfortable about our having a second child as well.

My husband, David has been the primary caregiver for both of our daughters. It is not an option for me to be home, so I continue working.

All these experiences have contributed to my growth and development as a human being. Of course people with disabilities are fully human; we all start out that way! We need families to love us. We need friends to teach us how to care about other people. We need someone special in our lives to share ourselves with and with whom we can be intimate. We need to accept ourselves for all that we are; this helps others to accept us too. We need to be out there in the world, so even our very presence can raise awareness.

In our own unique ways, we need to leave new "bones" which show our own hearths, our hearts, and our "centredness" in our community. Perhaps we have focused too much on *independence*. Human beings are *interdependent*. We always have been. We always will be.

I've always felt like an explorer—pushing the boundaries of where others said we could go. It's almost as if I had to do the things I have done just to prove the common person wrong. Told I'd never do anything productive for a living, I did. Told I'd never live outside of a hospital, I did. Told I'd never walk, well, who needs to?

What people with disabilities need to work on is protecting our rights to have *choices*. We have not been given many choices in the past. Low public awareness and a poor perception of us has made inadequate service systems acceptable. We've been put on waiting lists rather than offered services which meet our needs with dignity. The people closest to us—our families, medical professionals, and our friends—have betrayed us with limited expectations. And many of us have sold ourselves equally short, believing the shallow possibilities others cast our way.

People with disabilities, more and more, are a powerful force to be reckoned with. We are getting better at making our needs quite clear, whether it's a need for services or uplifting relationships. If we wait for others to do it for us, it will never happen. It's up to us.

This article is based on a keynote address given by the author on April 3, 1993 for the Ottawa-Carleton Independent Living Centre's conference on Sexuality and Relationships.

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JANCIS M. ANDREWS

Deaf Mute?

"What a pity—that couple can never speak to each other about their love."

(Woman talking about a disabled couple).

This dance of fingers
sheds veils of air, reveals
ten times over
the nakedness of my desire.
My palms doubly celebrate you,
inscribe my love
upon the space between us, enclose
tenderness, shape it
like a flower.
And though the world about us roars,
this silence
is our own private universe
wherein I sow a promise: kisses
falling like stars
upon your mouth, each fingertip
a white flame
foreplaying Heaven, igniting us
toward that wordless ceremony
where you and I
will blaze in pas-de-deux
into the profounder silence
that will be our bodies, singing.

Jancis M. Andrews lives in Vancouver and has had her poetry published in numerous magazines. Her collection of short stories, Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair was published by CaCaNaDaDaDa Press in 1992.

WOMEN, SEXUALITY AND DISABILITY

Peeling Off the Labels

"Peeling Off the Labels" was a symposium on women, sexuality, and disability which was held on May 30 and 31st, 1992 in Toronto. The summary of the proceedings contains reports on all of the workshops held at the symposium, addressing issues such as body image, HIV/AIDS, cultural differences, sexuality and parenthood, and lesbianism. It also contains other relevant articles.

The summary, *Peeling Off the Labels* (written by Shelley Tremain), is available from DAWN Toronto, 180 Dundas Street West, Suite 210, Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8. Telephone: (416) 598-2438.