

Incident under Investigation

By Karen Lynn

It was 1976, a day like all others. I was 25 years old, walking out of a beige and brown stucco building from a meeting that just ended with California Department of Rehabilitation. What was different was that I had had just about all I could handle! I was infuriated, humiliated, and dishonored. As I walked out the door of the office, and took the elevator to the main level, step by step the anger grew inside of me. I felt as though I had just been whipped and tortured.

I walked to my car, opened my car door, and began to cry hysterically. I was hurt, marred, and very wounded. I was just told that I would not be able to carry out my life the way I desired. Somebody else in power was trying to impose their idea of what a "normal" life or a person with a disability should be.

I was told that I could not go to college like other "normal young adults." I was conveniently labeled mentally retarded for a second time in my life, and my dreams of becoming a dance and recreation therapist were shattered. My dreams of learning the things I never learned in 12 years of grade school felt like they were being stripped away for good. My chance to live a life, like everyone else, and to be looked at with dignity and respect were immediately being crushed, trodden over, and violently subdued.

All I wanted was to be able to live my life like all people. All I wanted was to be accepted in this world, and society, and live a productive life; with purpose and meaning in the areas I knew best. All I wanted was a chance to move forth, to learn, and to better myself, and the conditions I was all too familiar with. I wanted to succeed and make something of myself. I did not want to fritter my life away in front of the television set becoming a vegetable of the state.

I had much, much higher goals and expectations of myself. I had far more dignity and pride than they were willing to toss me. And, what's more, is that I had far more tenacity and courage than they could ever muster! They did not know who they were dealing with. Know body knew who Karen Lynn Hershkowitz was.

I wanted to do more. I was open, resilient, and receptive to learn. I was willing to do what ever it took. I wanted to properly be able to construct and write a clear, clean, concise, put together sentence without any help from others. Not so far

fetches in this 21st century, although for the 20th century, which I was born, and raised; it was an enormous obstacle! They were not going to allow me to learn. They, the (State Department of Rehabilitation) were not going to allow "this" disabled person, with Cerebral Palsy and a learning disability to go to college. It's very true that we are conveniently discriminated against and still are subtly.

I was not going to put up with this indirect abuse. Nor was I going to sit back on my laurels. Something snapped. Something deep within my soul told me to not give up or give in. I got in my car, drove home and began to plot. I could not sit still on this matter. Thus, the next day, I was writing letter after letter and making phone call after phone call to file a lawsuit to solve this issue at hand. What I did not know is that I would have to fight this battle completely alone. I did not know how long this would take, or how much agony I would have to go through. But I knew that I would be fighting for an entire people.

This act that I was about to take, had never been done before. It had never been undertaken so boldly, and never had such a person such as myself; from the disabled community, chosen to break out of what "the experts believed she could do!" So bold the act was, it never been dreamed of before. No one in the disabled community before me ever had the nerve, guts, courage, spirit, and bravery to challenge the system, and the established stereotypes, and all their beliefs, verbal battering, and contempt's for our desires, efforts, and needs, were held to be meaningless.

I would not sit in an office, and surrender control of my life and being; to a perfect stranger, who sat higher on the totem pole, without any understanding of the price I had to pay. They had their degree, they had their title, and they were determined not to allow me to have either. They could handle more severe versions of my disability because those people they thought could be controlled. There was no way, heaven on earth that I was going to be controlled, manipulated and forbidden to carry out my plans or destiny in the manner I saw fit. It would take years, but I won. I got the degree, and now, twenty-eight years later, I am proudly working towards a B.A.