

## Pondering the Past, and Guiding Individuals towards Their Future

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Thank you for inviting me to your school today, and to share with you a part of who I am. This afternoon, I will not only read to you a piece of my autobiographical book, "The Broken Hoof," but we will move together in rhythm, while teaching, and, I will empower you with some videos of where I have come from and what gifts I'd like to give to all of you. I'd liked to help you learn that "Anything is Possible" if you put your mind towards it.

You are all sitting here before me now, because deep, down inside of your own heart, you believe in yourselves like no one else does or ever has. You believe in your own individual's gifts and talents. And you believe that you are very special, in a very unique way. Each and every one of you, just like me, I'm sure, has had to overcome challenges and extreme difficulties. We all have these difficulties and obstacles, however, not all of us have the courage and strength, to face up to them, accept them, learn from them, grow from them, and change our attitudes in a positive way, while becoming willing to do what ever it takes to reach the goal we desire so badly.

Today, we will find new techniques; new approaches, and new ways to bring about these changes within ourselves, our attitudes, our beliefs, and our lives. We will begin right where we are now. And we will do it with unconditional acceptance and kindness. We will learn to be gentle with ourselves and our feelings. And, we will learn to accomplish our challenges one at a time. Today we will have some fun exploring ourselves with some of these methods.

We as individuals, have the power to change, along with change the world around us, but only if we have that willingness. This willingness within, will take us on marvelous journeys, but only if we trust this power of belief, then and only then will our accomplishments be unlimited.

When I was your age, the young people who surrounded my world, were all disabled. Why, you might be asking yourself? Well, I'll tell you. When I was five months old, I got very sick. It left me

with the paralysis you see today on my left arm and leg. I could not go to a regular school, because I could not learn like other children my own age. I had a learning disability called dyslexia. This learning problem made it very, very, hard for me to read, write, and do math like the other children in my classes. Thus, I had to go to a school that had children with Cerebral Palsy, like me, polio, multiple sclerosis, down syndrome, and other disabilities.

These were the only young people that I knew. So I had to create different ways to learn. I had to motivate myself, and tell myself that I could pass a test. I had to learn to be open minded. I had to learn to believe in myself, and to believe that no matter what my outer appearances looked like, I could change it. I would keep telling myself that I could change my life and the world immediately around me.

The difference in having a disability now, verses when I was a child, was that the educational system did not have the laws that you have today. I was pushed into classes where I was not learning like the other children around me. And when my mother got the first special education teacher, by talking to the principal, I was put in a classroom, behind a screen, to figure things out for myself, while sitting all alone for hours at a time, to fend for myself.

Finding my dance teacher, Al Gilbert, changed my life completely. Through his caring, gentle, and poised composure, I learned by example what it took to give it to myself, and then, eventually to all of you. Everyone of you here today, are here because you want to be here, you want to change and make your life better, and, you want to find and develop your gifts and share them with the world. This is and can be possible. It is all encompassing.

I would like to share a little bit of the journey I took to try to change some of the attitudes about what people with my disability were able to do. I spent a lot of time trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle called learning. Just as dance had made my body and spirit strong, now I was on a quest to find the tools which would unlock the door for me. Inadvertently, I helped unlock the doors for all disabled people.

I understood intuitively, that I would some day have to ultimately care for myself completely. To do that, I needed a good

job. To get that job, I needed a higher education. And, I needed to learn all the things I never learned in 12 years of my fundamental schooling. The people, who were supposed to be helping me, sadly didn't see thing the same way I did. They felt I should settle for something less than I believed I was capable of. To make a long story short, I fought and won the first Civil Rights Case in California, this guaranteed my right to earn an Associate of Arts degree in English and dance. While I was at college, I found helpers who understood my desire to learn all the things I never learned before.

This now led me to succeed in many different areas. I became an adaptive fitness instructor, an advocate, a published author, and a public speaker. My book, which I am going to read from shortly, was published in 2006, but took over twenty years to complete. And, in its infancy, it won second place in the Kaleidoscope Literary Prose Fiction Art award of 1983. I know every one of you has something to offer and give to the rest of the world. It is all about unlocking it. My hope is that my story and my visit here with you today, is the key that unlocks a door of deep desires for you. My other hope is that you find the power within yourself to succeed and the ability to be positive in every way. I hope that by me speaking here today helps you to find the area, the talent, and the gift you so joyously feel within your heart to give and share with the world.

A Long time ago, I found a poem by a famous British amputee; William E. Henley. He lost both his legs at the age of 12. When I first read these words, in college, these words from Maya Angelou sung sweetly in my spirit. Angelou first sees this as a mark of paternalistic contempt. She is held by a white superintendent in school who has just told her class, to be content to be athletes and cotton pickers. She turns it into an anthem or song of praises for our people and hers. It goes like this... "It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll. I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.

I leave you with these sweet empowering words- take them home with you today to conquer and triumph! Make a positive mark on this world and leave a path behind you that no one else has ever left before.

Thank you for allowing me to share this with you, today. I will now answer any questions that you may have or that cross your mind.