

# Travel and Travail

By Karen Lynn

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I woke up early that Wednesday morning, scurried to get ready to hit the security gates of the LAX International Airport. My destination, to reach terminal B, at Newark Liberty, where I would spend five hours on a plane traveling towards the east coast. During the plane ride, the only thing that kept recurring in my thoughts, were reflections of my past. Air travel being what it is today, I had little else to do but think. So, I continued to think and think, and think. I kept thinking of what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it. With each twist and turn, a new memory arose. I looked around me. And, as I glanced around, everyone looked so comfortable and relaxed. They seemed to be at peace with the world. And why not! They sat comfortably with I-pods stuck to their ear in a reclined comfortable position with eyes closed, or in seclusion and solitude of their own little world. While I racked my brains, trying to think of what I was going to say, and how I was going to say it for my lecture in a few, short days.

If only they knew what was going through my head. If only they knew where I came from, and what my life was once like. They would have been shocked beyond imagination. They would have been shocked to hear the awful words I heard replaying in my head, like an old victrola many, many years ago. “Ms Hershkowitz, the expert arrogantly barked. You have to take twelve units a semester... that is, if you even want to think about going to college!” I rehashed again in my head, for my opening line! Thought after thought my mind grew weary just thinking about it. Thinking exactly how my words would impact my audience.

A thousand battles, in a thousand classrooms, in doctor's offices, in the work place, in the “helpful headquarters” of social workers, and Rehabilitation offices, and even in the secular high priest, who took it upon themselves to observe, to organize, and to control and prescribe mandatory orders for every aspect of my life. Who were these self styled, educated experts to believe they could direct my every waking hour. Who were they to tell me what I should or should not be doing with my life? Who were these men and women who thought they were God or could even play God with me? Did they think they were specially chosen to ruin my life? Well, if they did, they had another thing coming!

They did not know who they were dealing with, nor, did they know whom they were up against! All because of their cunning, conniving, callous ways of shrewdly thinking they knew exactly how to charm me over, to get me where they wanted me. They thought they know precisely how to misdirect my life, and misrepresent me. They thought they were above me, huh! And, in their quiet, roguish, mulishness manner, they thought they could subtly mislead, and cleverly, dehumanize me and speak down to me in

a manor with little dignity or respect. Well, if they did, they did not know what kind of surprises their coffee soaked offices of the California Rehab. Cadres were in for.

The flight attendant came around with drinks, but I was not interested. My mind was somewhere else. So I let my mind drifted back, back, back in time, to that sanctified moment in the mid-70'ies when I stood before an army of enemies, like a warrior, to fight and fend off with words stronger than any weapon anyone could ever hold. I forced all of them to acknowledge me as an individual, with desires and needs that I wanted to achieve. Most importantly, I had to obtain my college education, as I needed to make a place for myself in this world. I, I was the “disabled one” all I heard was... “How can a person with Cerebral Palsy teach dance.” Warmth and energy flowed threw my veins as I recalled hard earned victories: Dancing across the dance floor, under the watchful eye of my loving dance teacher, Al Gilbert. Teaching my students aerobics as an eager reporter snapped my picture and wrote a featured article on me. Or, marching to get the degree that everyone declared I'd never get.

What amazes me the most, is that this “mentally retarded” person, lade the foundation for the millions. My response to a hundred versions of “you can't do this” is, and always will be to move heaven and earth just to be treated normally, and not to be discriminated. New Jersey was getting close. I was 2 hours from that beautiful city. And all of a sudden, I felt my breath quicken. I felt fluttering in the pit of my stomach, so, I gently looked out the airplane window, towards the blue, puffy, canopy, where I told myself, “you'll be fine, sweetheart.” “Everything will be okay.” But, what was okay with me; was not okay with the rest of the word. It had been twenty-eight years since I won my law suit, and sometimes it seems as a people, as if we had taken only the first two steps, on a thousand mile journey. That was why I was coming to New Jersey. I was coming to raise up a new generation of leaders who would be inspired, moved, and stimulated to continue the struggles, and to follow in my footsteps. This generation of young men and women, could pick up where I left off. They could gather information to armor themselves on all fronts, to make this land that we live in and love, a gentler, kinder, more understanding world fueled by the memory of what I and so many others had gone through.

We were landing now. I march of the plane proudly, with a new iron determination and devotion to continue to carry on. Waiting for me was my friend. He was another C.P. person with his own battle scares and triumphs to tell. In a moments flash, we were now heading towards the university, where he taught. He wheeled himself into the classroom when he beckoned me to the front of the room. We shared a smile that summed up what we both had helped each other to achieve. We both remembered the price which we both had paid to accomplish and attain. And that was our greatest connection. I straightened out my jacket, glanced at my notes, took a deep breath, and began. “Good morning ladies and gentlemen, my name is Karen Lynn.”

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