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Dr. Daddy

Tifani Thomas

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Dr. Daddy

by Tifani Thomas

On December 24, approximately one month before my birth, my father had a massive stroke. The result of this stroke caused him paralysis on the left side of his body. This left him unable to walk or use his left arm. He became helpless.

My dad says he doesn't mind walking a little bit when he sees all the handicapped parking places occupied. What angers me the most is when I see a perfectly capable person jump out of the car and run into the store. If that person can jump and run, then they have no business using the special parking places meant for people like my dad. I just want to hit them. At times I wonder why we have those parking places when most of the time handicapped people cannot use them. This is one way my father's and all disabled people's rights are abused.

When I go places with my dad, people stare and condemn not only him, but me for walking with him. I do not know why people have feelings like this. Growing up with a disabled person has made me sensitive to the reactions of others to him. I see the able staring with looks of disapproval upon the handicapped. My dad may not be able to run and swim anymore, but at one time he could. People do not realize that handicapped people, especially those not born handicapped, have to overcome many obstacles such as relearning to walk, talk, and accept their

situation. We should not separate the able from the disabled; equality matters. Physical ability should not stand in the way.

Even though some people are inconsiderately unaware of the troubles that handicapped people have, aware people have come up with simple solutions. Wide doors, ramps, special cars, and elevators make it possible for people in wheelchairs and with leg problems to get around more easily. This calms my mind to know that different possibilities make handicapped people's lives easier.

The people born handicapped or those handicapped as the result of an accident should have the feeling that we as a community will not condemn them. Like my dad, all other handicapped people in the world hurt when scorned or laughed at. It often hurts me too.

Through the years I have seen my father get worse and then get better again. Jealousy often hits me when I see other fathers who can participate in sports, mow lawns, and even fix cars. Also through the years I have seen myself grow closer to my dad and love him even more. I learned to walk with my dad and a special bond formed between us, so when I look at him, and I see all the pain that unsympathetic people place on him, I suffer too. ■

(Note: Ms. Thomas wrote "Dr. Daddy" in October 1991.)