

CRIPSTORY

The Unheard History of Disability

Ed Roberts

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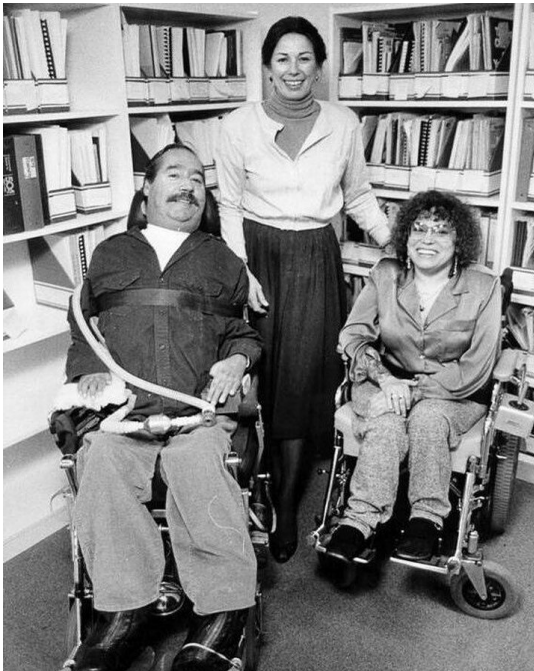
In 1953, at the age of 14, Ed Roberts was diagnosed with polio. He spent 18 months in the hospital and returned home paralyzed, except for two fingers and several toes, as he had trouble breathing on his own. To assist him with breathing, he used an iron lung at night and often rested during the day. Roberts attended school via telephone communication until his mother, Zona, insisted he attend school in person at least once a week for a few hours. Overcoming his fear of being stared at, Roberts transformed his sense of personal identity and stopped thinking of himself as a “helpless cripple,” instead seeing himself as a star.



Roberts became an advocate for himself when he had to fight for his diploma because he had not taken driver's education or physical education. He went on to attend the College of San Mateo and was admitted to the University of California Berkeley. However, he had to fight for the support he needed to attend college from the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, as they believed he was too severely disabled to ever hold a job. Despite these obstacles, Roberts was admitted to Berkeley in 1962. He faced the challenge of finding housing with an 800-pound iron lung, but the director of the campus health services offered him a room in an empty wing of the Cowell hospital, which he accepted on the condition that it was treated as a dormitory space rather than a medical facility.



Roberts' admission to Berkeley opened doors for other students with disabilities, and the Cowell Residence Program was formed. Roberts earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in political science from the university. In 1976, he was appointed as the director of the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the same agency that had previously labeled him too disabled to work. When the politics in California shifted, he co-founded the World Institute of Disability with Judy Heumann and Joan Leon.



Ed Roberts is a well-known disability activist who paved the way for the disability community. His bravery in advocating for himself enabled him to fight for others like him, ultimately benefiting the disabled community. While he certainly did not do all of this alone. His courage to fight for himself allowed him to fight for everyone else like him—disabled people.

This is just a small part of his story, and I encourage you to learn more about his life and contributions. Roberts' vision of equality for disabled people has inspired many and improved lives.





DISABLED

PEOPLE

ARE

PEOPLE!!

DIYabled



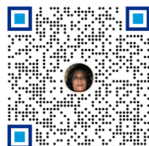
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