

BreakingBarriers



everybody belongs • everybody serves

To Serve, or to Be Served

by Chantal Huinink

Waterloo Campus Ministry, Waterloo ON

I am a Christian, a woman, a daughter, a niece, a cousin, and a friend. I am a social justice and accessibility advocate, a speaker, and a writer. I am a swimmer, a sports enthusiast, and a music lover. I am a graduate of psychology as well as a student of divinity and social work. I will soon be a chaplain and social worker. I also happen to have a physical disability known as cerebral palsy.

The support of campus ministry has provided me the friendship, guidance, time, and space to lay out the multiple pieces of my human identity and wrestle with how the puzzle pieces best fit together. I have had the joy and privilege of being a valued member of campus ministry communities in Guelph and Waterloo ON throughout my undergraduate and graduate schooling. My experience in campus ministry has enabled my faith to grow in step with my academic learning and has also prepared me to serve my church and my community beyond my time at university.



Chantal Huinink: grateful to be seen as more than her disability.

Being a valued member of campus ministry did not simply mean that worship, Bible study, dinners, discussion groups, and other social events were hosted in accessible places that would accommodate my power wheelchair. In fact, most times it meant the opposite. Campus

ministry and the people who comprise it enabled me to go where my wheelchair could not.

Ministers and students alike quickly learned how to lift me out of my chair and into people's "non-accessible" houses and vehicles, so that I could be wherever they were and go wherever they were going. I have even traveled to a winter cottage via toboggan, because it was not possible to bring my power wheelchair through the woods in the deep snow. The effort it took to bring me into a non-accessible location showed me more about God's love and his ability to overcome life's barriers than meeting in a barrier-free location could have.

Having had cerebral palsy since birth, I was accustomed to able-bodied people serving me, but I was not accustomed to serving others. Thankfully, being a valued member of the campus ministry community meant that I was seen as more than my disability. Gifts and abilities I barely knew that I had in the areas of hospitality, teaching, and leadership were recognized and nurtured. More importantly, it was expected that I would serve the community through them. Developing valued roles that fit my God-given gifts and abilities gave me a sense of belonging to the community and increased my awareness of my value to God and to others. Such awareness has empowered me and given me the desire to serve God and love others in every way that I can. ■

Themes

Summer 2015—College students with disabilities describe in this issue how they're being engaged to grow in their faith and discipleship.

Fall 2015—Children, youth, and "hidden" disability.

Growing up is hard, especially for kids living with disabilities that are not visible, such as mental health challenges, learning disabilities, dyslexia, and Asperger syndrome. Do you, or does your child, have a "hidden" disability? Please send us a note to tell us about it **by September 1**.

Winter 2016—Abuse and disability. More people with disabilities experience physical, sexual, and emotional abuse than the general population. We would like to help break barriers of silence and secrecy so that people can understand the experience of abuse and respond appropriately. If you have a disability and have experienced abuse, and are willing to share your story, please send us a note describing your experience **by November 13**.

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Equal Opportunity Accommodations

by **Melissa Veldman**

University of Waterloo student, Waterloo ON

The work of a disability services department may seem straightforward: providing students with disabilities the accommodations they need to succeed at the university level. We live in a world that embraces the idea of equal opportunities for all. Academic institutions strive for this goal too, but providing equal opportunities for students on a university campus can be challenging, especially when “leveling the playing field” for students with disabilities.

Some accommodations are straightforward, like providing automatic doors for students using wheelchairs, allowing service dogs in classrooms, and permitting students with learning disabilities to write their exams in a quiet, undisturbed area. Other possible accommodations raise difficult questions. What if a student’s learning disability requires them to request extra time to write an exam? What if a student’s mental health calls for more flexible deadlines for their assignments?



Melissa Veldman:
accommodations help to live out God’s call.

Because I use a scooter to get around campus, most people assume that my disability affects only my mobility. My fine motor skills are also affected, so I need extra time to write my exams. This extra 10-15 minutes allows me to write my responses. When people ask about my accommodations and why I need them, usually they understand that these measures are in place to prevent my disability from being a roadblock to my academic success and are not “special privileges.”

Post-secondary institutions that are grounded in Scripture (like Redeemer University College, which granted my bachelor’s degree) recognize that all students bear the image of the Creator and have a calling to fulfill in the kingdom, regardless of ability or disability. Accommodations that provide equal opportunities for students to learn and grow are sometimes necessary to help them reach their full potential and live out God’s call.

(This article has been abridged from *Partner*, Vol. 11/2, Winter 2012, by permission of Melissa Veldman and the Canadian Association for Christians in Student Development.) ■

Learning through Vision Loss

by **Katy Olsen**

Central College student, Pella IA

I was born with Knobloch syndrome, a rare collagen disorder affecting my retinas that causes me to be legally blind. Although my vision loss can be difficult and frustrating day to day, it has taught me to appreciate others, to push myself, and to not set unnecessary boundaries. Through this blessing in disguise, I am doing things today that I (and others) never thought possible.

My transition from high school through my first year at Central College could not have gone better. The support from faculty and friends on campus has been unbelievable. My professors and the Student Support Service (SSS) office are always willing to accommodate my needs and ensure that I have

everything in place to be successful. I have been blessed with a great roommate who is compassionate and always so helpful when I need her.

The accommodations I receive at Central are similar to those I had in high school in Des Moines. I have a student in each class who is assigned to take notes for me, and emails them to me after class. If we have an exam, my professor sends it to the SSS office so it can be enlarged and taken there with extended time if needed. I also use audio textbooks from an app on my iPad. Other than these



Katy Olsen (right):
spreads cheer during a Haiti mission trip.



A Community of Helpful Encouragers

by Jillian Isett

Hope College student, Holland MI

When I was 7 years old, I was diagnosed with an incurable auto-immune disease, systemic scleroderma, which over time will harden my skin and internal organs. Most scleroderma patients are diagnosed after age 40 and are given perhaps four years to live, but I was diagnosed as child when an area on my left leg started to harden and damage was visible. Over time, all we have done is pray and have faith that God will protect me and heal me. Miraculously, that area on my leg has softened and I can hardly see where the damage even was.

One symptom is Raynaud's disease, a painful sensitivity to cold that causes my arteries to spasm and limits circulation to my hands and feet, turning them purple. Digital ulcers on the ends of my fingers and bottoms of my feet make walking to class or using my hands really painful. Two surgeries in the last year have offered only temporary help while severely affecting the use of my hands and sapping my strength for months.



Jillian Isett (left): finds ways to glorify God in the midst of hardship.

Going to college has been my first time leaving home, and it was hard not having my family and the comforts of home. Living in Michigan, I'm used to the cold weather, but last winter was really hard on my body, especially walking to class.

Hope College has provided me with a strong community of encouragers who help me get through each week. Attending chapel and the Gathering on Sunday night have been helpful to my faith while keeping me strong in the Lord's promises. Through Hope's immersion trip to Jamaica, I served at the Caribbean Christian Center for the Deaf, and this summer I was a counselor at a Christian camp in Missouri for kids with special needs.

I feel thankful that I've made it this far. God has been my strength and refuge, and I stay positive through faith and prayer. I love immersing myself in things bigger than I am and finding ways to glorify God in the midst of hardship. I have become an advocate for the Scleroderma Foundation, participate in fundraisers, and try to encourage others through my testimony. ■

Learning through Vision Loss continued

few accommodations, I appear to be a typical student in the classroom. The SSS office has been proactive in solving problems I faced—sometimes before I even brought it to their attention.

I am working toward a degree in health and exercise science and plan to attend physical therapy school after my time at Central. My passion for cheerleading gets lived out as a member of the Central football and competition cheer team.

I am involved with campus ministries and take pride in continuing my journey of faith during this busy time in school. I am reminded often of Romans 5:3-5 and I am eager to see how God works through me during the next three years of college. ■

'And the Awards Go to...'

Breaking Barriers has been recognized as one of the best newsletters of its kind by the Associated Church Press, receiving two Awards of Merit and an Honorable Mention in 2014.

In addition to the newsletter's Best in Class recognition, individual honors went to Judyth Thomas for her Fall 2014 article, "Voices of Hope and New Dreams," and the Summer 2014 theme issue on Chronic Pain.

Co-editor Mark Stephenson also received an Award of Merit and an Honorable Mention for his Disability Concerns postings on The Network.

A complete description of the awards can be found online (www.rca.org/news/and-awards-go).



Editor's Note

Launching My College Education

As a new college freshman 40 years ago, on the day my mom and my two younger brothers moved me and my stuff into a dormitory at Northern Illinois University, I knew exactly one other person among the 25,000 students there—and he lived off campus with his wife. Although I'd been relying on crutches to get around since age 12, apart from qualifying for financial assistance through a new Department of Vocational Rehabilitation provision, few if any accommodations had been arranged ahead of time, except for requesting a dormitory room on or near the ground floor.



I learned my roommate's name minutes before the two of us met in the small room we would share for the next eight months. After Steve and I exchanged a few pleasantries, my mom, my brothers, and I made a trip back to the car to begin unloading. By the time we returned—without a spoken request or a word about my obvious physical disability—Steve had relocated his bedding to the upper bunk. I was touched by Steve's thoughtfulness.

At the time, pioneering advocate Ed Roberts in California was just gaining momentum for what would become the disability-rights movement, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (25 years old this July) was a generation away from inception. Whether it was my own negligence or ignorance, dumb luck or providence, starting college as a student with a disability in 1974 was mostly "figure it out as you go."

Like others moving away from home for the first time, my college experience was formative. I'm grateful that Steve's thoughtful gesture has been mirrored by countless people throughout my life, but such generous hospitality is neither guaranteed nor universal. So, with those students who have written for this *Breaking Barriers*, I'm grateful for legislation and school policies that seek to make appropriate accommodations the rule rather than the exception.

—Terry A. DeYoung

Personal Care, Spiritual Growth

by Colin Rensch

Hope College student, Holland MI

My college experience has been enriching and has presented me with many opportunities for spiritual growth. I have Duchenne muscular dystrophy and use a power wheelchair, which means that I require assistance with things like getting ready in the morning and using the bathroom throughout the day. To meet this challenge in college, I hire a group of classmates who act as my personal care assistants.

My parents and I were nervous about this system during the first couple weeks of school, and it was a serious test of faith to be sure. I was relying on classmates to provide the care that I needed, and, from a different perspective, my parents were counting on a group of 18- to 22-year-olds to take care of their son. My parents and I experienced no small measure of anxiety that first month, but God has helped me overcome every obstacle in my life and I knew that this would be no different. My assistants and I have made a great team, and they provide me with the help I need every single day.

The help that my assistants provide is absolutely essential, and so is the help that I receive from many other people on campus. Students, professors, janitors, deans, chaplains, and food service staff have all offered their help at various times. The biblical phrase "ask and you shall receive" comes to my mind as I write this. As prideful people, asking for assistance means admitting that you are not perfect, but this is OK. It is impossible to be a Christian all by yourself. We need other Christians to help us live out God's plan. By putting my trust in other people, I'm putting my trust in God by admitting that I can't make it alone.

Wrestling with the notion of scholarship in a Christian context and using my education for God's purposes has shown me how I can advance God's work through my studies and Christian scholarship. My Hope professors have taught me how to be a better Christian, so as I pursue a PhD in music theory, my hope is that I will do the same for my future students.