BREAKING BARRIERS

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Trials and Triumphs

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By Bekah Porter

The sharp jabs kept coming. One after another they pierced the small of 8-year-old Chad Hoekstra's back. Screaming and writhing in pain, he begged for more morphine_anything to stop the torture.

The nurses tried telling him "no." Too much morphine would cause the liver to fail, and that meant almost certain death, but he didn't care. He just wanted peace.

Leaving the hospital, his mother went home and fell on her knees, pleading with God to help her little boy. "Lord, I can't stand this. Either take him to be with you or let the pain be gone," she prayed.

The next day Chad lay in bed, a different little boy. Sleeping soundly, he was proof that miracles do happen.

The miracle hasn't stopped. While a horrible accident claimed the physical freedom of an active child, it in no way has damaged the invincible spirit that has been an inspiration to so many others.

"Of course, I've felt bitter about my situation, but then I remember that I am this way for a reason," said Chad, now 23 and still living in his hometown of Sioux Center.

He can only speak between breaths provided by the tracheal tube inserted through a hole in his throat. Chad is a ventilator-dependent quadriplegic; he cannot move below the neck.

Fifteen years ago he was playing in a friend's backyard. A house was being built on the adjoining lot, and the two boys had climbed to the top of a pile of excavated earth, acting out different war scenarios when Chad eyed a large chunk of compacted dirt. Springing from his position at the top of the pile, Chad jumped onto the chunk, attempting to ride it as it rolled down the hill.

With each and every turn it took, his head jerked forward, extending his small neck farther than it was intended to go. Bump! Bump! Bump! Each tiny jar slammed vertebrae against raw spinal nerves, until his dangerous ride finally came to an end.

"I just remember lying at the bottom of the hill, feeling all tingly. I couldn't move, and I couldn't breathe. My friend was standing over me, screaming at me, asking if I was all right, and I couldn't answer him," Chad said.

He was anything but all right. He couldn't breathe from the dirt lodged in his throat, and he was powerless to extract it. His friend's father had witnessed the scene and immediately ran over and cleared Chad's air passages.

"There is no doubt in my mind that my life was saved that day," Chad said. "It was nobody's fault. It just happened; that's all. All I know is I'm grateful I'm alive."

Chad was rushed by ambulance to Sioux Center Community Hospital, then airlifted to Mercy Medical Center in Sioux City.

"Am I Ever Going to Walk Again?"

Battling pain both physically and emotionally, Chad proved to be mature well beyond his 8 years.

"Mom, am I ever going to walk again?" he asked one day.

His mother's eyes filled with tears, and, unable to answer, she left the room. She soon re-entered with the doctor who had been treating him. Chad asked him, "Will I ever walk again?"

"No, Chad, I'm sorry, but we don't think so." The doctor said. There was a long pause as Chad considered what he had just been told.

"Well, what about my arms? Will I be able to move them?" "God can work miracles, Chad, but probably not." Another pause.

"Not even my fingers? I can't move my fingers?" "No, Chad, not even your fingers."

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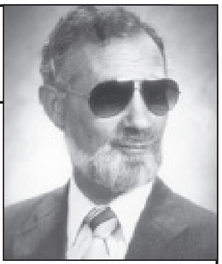
From the Director



Rev James Vanderlaan was ordained in 1971. He has spent the last 14 years of his ministry as the Director of Disability Concerns. Please join us in thanking him for his years of faithful ministry. Rev. Vanderlaan retired June 30, 2006. Rev Mark Stephenson has begun work as the new Director of Disability Concerns.

A question . . .

A friend with painful disabilities asked me, "Does hell exist?" We who have disabilities often think of heaven as being the final and everlasting end of our misery, as it was for Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31: all his paralysis, sores, hunger, and misery were gone forever, and his joy in the presence of God with father Abraham was complete. But how can we think about heaven without remembering hell? How can we remember Lazarus without remembering the rich man? Is hell everlasting torture in fire? Can heaven and hell both be true? Did God create both?

For me the question is not whether hell exists. Choosing to reject Christ is undeniably a possibility. Otherwise human moral and spiritual freedom and accountability no longer exist.

Rather, the question is what hell is like. To me the most chilling passage in the entire Bible is Revelations 14:9-11:

> If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.

I cannot harmonize this description of Jesus forever torturing his enemies, not allowing them to die, listening to their screams, watching them roast like meat over a campfire with the Jesus presented in the rest of the New Testament. This imagery rises out of the style of writing called *apocalyptic literature* that was present during the intertestamentary period and on into the Christian era. It is highly symbolic and must be translated into other imagery in order to be understood properly.

The image of hell as a place of torture by fire where people are prevented from escaping their agony by fainting or dying seems to have originated from such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 66, where the fire is the dump fire of burning chariots and other wooden implements of war and where the worm that does not die is the maggot eating the dead horses. In that passage the description is intended to picture the end of persecution and war.

To me, the other biblical imagery of hell is more in keeping with what God reveals about himself and about Jesus. It is the imagery of hell as darkness, a darkness that God's enemies prefer and choose instead of the light of his presence. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

This picture of hell as a place or condition that people prefer to the light of God's glory is much more in keeping with the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

If our disabilities help us to love God in return, we thank God for them. And we pray that God will find some such way to awaken love for the light in all who prefer darkness.

All this, I think, is in harmony with the picture of hell C. S. Lewis presents in his book *The Great Divorce.* I recommend this book to anyone wrestling with these issues. —*JV*

Caregivers!

Using the following web community address, caregivers can ask and answer questions or make comments that they feel could benefit someone.
www.caregiver.guidedvision.com

Please try it out and let us know what you think.

—*JV*

You may now access *Breaking Barriers* through our website at

http://www.crcna.org/pages/disability.cfm#publications

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Letters

Friendship

The Friendship Class in Luverne, Minnesota, began meeting in the fall of 1989 with about ten student/friends and mentors. Many of the mentors and some of the friends who were part of our group that first year are still with us. The picture shows my parents, Bert and Clara DenHerder (right) and myself (left). All three of us have been with the group since the beginning. My daughter, Kristi, and grandson, Arie (4 years old), have been helping out this year too. Kristi is a substitute for our song leader, Mary Jacobsma, and me as needed. She has also stepped in when other mentors were not able to be at our meetings. Arie loves to help by handing out maracas when we sing and holding up the memory verse poster so we can read that together at the end of our group session. Most recently he played the part of Zaccheaus when we acted out that story. I feel very blessed to be a part of the Friendship Class in Luverne and to have four generations of my family involved in this ministry as well.

Phyllis Vos
Luverne, Minnnesota

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Dear people at Disability Concerns,

Just a note saying how impressed I felt when I read your magazine. What your people can accomplish when you put your trust in the Lord for his strength! I read it from A-Z and it humbles me always! God bless you all.

Grace Baggel
Trenton, Ontario

◆ ◆

Dear Rev. Vanderlaan,

This week I received *Breaking Barriers.* A recurring thought entered my head when I read the article “Bad Things” by Llano Gorman.

I understand and feel with him the terrible disillusionment and pain he underwent, and I am glad he conquered these difficulties. I have from experience learned that there is another side to this; namely, how families cope. If parents are strong people and have the faith to rely on the Lord, they will manage to provide a home for their children, including the “disabled” person.

We have a severely mentally handicapped son who is 45 years old. He is like a nine-month-old child but in an adult body and with the strength of a man. He cannot tell us what is ailing him or where it hurts. His brain doesn’t tell him that juice or milk is for drinking when he is thirsty. The same is true with his food. The biggest problem is when he has pain and just screams. We can’t figure out what is wrong. Then I pray, “Lord, just take him home, I am so tired of this.” I would not do anything to end his life, but I can see that parents may become desperate, like the Saskatchewan farmer, Robert Latimer, who killed his disabled daughter.

We have a support group, and that gives us strength. But without that, I probably would have left our son in the institution where he was. No, we don’t have him home, but he lives very close to us, and I am there often. What I want to say with this story is that it can be very hard on families.

Thanks for *Breaking Barriers.*

Loes de Leyer
Barrhead, Alberta

◆ ◆

Dear Rev. Vanderlaan,

I have just received the Spring 2006 issue of *Breaking Barriers.* The front cover story, “A Sledgehammer in New York” by Jon Dykstra disappointed and discouraged me. It does a great disservice to the community of people with disabilities, and *Breaking Barriers* has aided and abetted this disservice by publishing the article.

The tone of the article is that some changes have been made, and since those changes make some aspects of life better for disabled people, these people should go away, be quiet, and be thankful for small improvements. I don’t have the luxury of needing to be empathetic to disability issues. I am a person with a disability. I face the challenges of requiring a wheelchair for mobility 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. The challenges of using the bus system, gaining access to restaurants and businesses, attending parent/teacher interviews at my son’s school, and going to church are things that I am very familiar with.

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Trials and Triumphs, continued from page 1

The disappointment was hard to swallow, but each day arrived whether Chad wanted it to or not, and soon the Hoekstra family was beginning to set about making the necessary adjustments. His parents, Rev. Cliff and Linda Hoekstra, set about renovating their home to accommodate their son's needs. Chad was fitted for an electronic wheelchair. While things obviously were not as they used to be, the Hoekstras wanted as much normality as possible.

Chad, who had been in second grade when the accident occurred, was not able to return to school for a year, and when he returned to his classmates, he was not quite ready for their reaction.

"They were scared of me at first. Now I can understand why they were scared; it was something different, but at the time, yes, it was hurtful," Chad said.

Overcoming Stereotypes

As he grew older, just like any other teenage young man, Chad found himself struggling with self-confidence. All through junior high and high school, and even into college and adult life, Chad still has not grown fully accustomed to the stares he draws when out in public.

"There are plenty times I have felt embarrassed about myself. People look at me differently, and I am wondering, "What are they thinking about me? Are they thinking bad things? Do they feel sorry for me? What kind of person do they think I am?" he said.

"Probably the hardest stereotype to overcome is that when people see a person in a wheelchair, they seem to think he has a mental illness."

Isolation and loneliness attack frequently. "I felt left out a lot. I didn't get to go out and do a lot of the things my friends did, and I have to stay home a lot when they're out. I don't think I'll ever get married. I wish I could, but realistically, I don't think it'll happen. I can't move out of home and be on my own. I just feel limited."

He has accepted the fact the he will never be completely independent. While technology has allowed him to run his wheelchair, operate a computer, and use a cell phone, all by blowing or sucking on a mouthpiece and maneuvering his head around, he still cannot feed, bathe, or dress himself.

He lives with his parents. Nurses come daily to help him with his daily cares, and Linda, who stays home with him, serves as a direct caregiver as well.

"I'm not ashamed that I need the care. Some people might be bothered by being so dependent. But I am just glad that I get the care I need. It doesn't bother me," he said.

Lying in bed at night, Chad watches the moon gleam off the tubes he's connected to and listens to the steady rhythm of the ventilator machine next to his bed. The sights and sounds surrounding him remind him that without medical intervention, he wouldn't be alive. He only has to look up to be reminded of his decisions to persevere through the pain and obstacles he faces on a daily basis. On a tiny shelf above his bed rests a small silver decoration that shines when the light from the window hits it just right. Letters cut from tin form the word he has adopted as one of his personal mottoes: Dream.

Perhaps no one is more capable of understanding the power of the word than Chad. He constantly is dreaming of reaching beyond his limitations. One thing has set him apart, his faith.

"I use faith every single day. That's how I get through a lot of the stuff that threatens to discourage me. Let's just say that I talk to God a lot. I reveal my feelings to him, and he takes away the negative," he said.

"I think I have a pretty good sense of humor, and I sometimes catch people off guard by jumping in and saying Hi," he said. "I think you have to be comfortable with yourself in order for others to be comfortable as well. If you can make jokes about the situation, then sometimes you can set people at ease. So, when they are staring at my trach tube, I might say something like, "You know, I heard that air helps." Or when they try not to look at my chair, I tell them about how hot my ride is. By the way did you know this thing can hit almost 9 miles per hour? That's pretty sweet for a wheelchair."

While Chad might appreciate a witty quip, his humor hasn't been able to carry him through quite everything.

A Legal Battle

At the age of 21, when most young men would be comparing apartments, he was faced with the decision of choosing a suitable nursing home.

Due to the high costs of his medical care, his insurance company had dropped his coverage, turning his case over to the state. According to Iowa law, the state only provides home care until the age of 21, at which time he was required to move to a state facility.

"I didn't want to play bingo every day, I can tell you that," Chad said.

He was pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology and human services from Dordt College in Sioux Center at the time, and he was far from ready to abandon his ambitions.

Chad and his parents prayed about the situation and decided in the end that legal action would be the best course to take.

Armed with a positive outlook and a prayer, he made history. Chad became the first case ever in Iowa to be granted an exception. He now is the only ventilator-dependant quadriplegic to live in his home environment.

"I can't even begin to explain how great this is. I'm too young to be living in a nursing home or any other organized facility. I can receive my care here at home, and this is where I want to stay," he said.

Trials and Triumphs, continued

Answered Prayers

With the fear of being taken from his home behind him, Chad was able to focus on the future. He graduated from college in 2005 and quickly began his search for jobs that would utilize his talents.

"That was a tough time, I'll admit. I really wasn't sure anyone would hire me," he said.

He found a temporary job at a telemarketing company in Sioux Center but didn't think he was meeting his potential. During that time, he again heavily relied on his faith. He spent many afternoons wheeling up and down the side walk asking God to provide him with the right job.

"God answers prayers. I can tell you that," Chad said.

One day last fall, he noticed a man doing yard work. The two struck up a conversation, and before long, they were discussing Chad's employment.

He didn't think much more of the conversation until the next day when his doorbell rang. Standing in the doorway was the man he had met the previous afternoon. It turned out the man was Burns McFarland, president of Health One, a company that seeks payment for hospitals from insurance companies.

"He asked me for a resume. He had heard about me from a friend and was impressed when we talked. Before I knew it, he was asking for an interview, and here I am now," Chad said.

McFarland saw potential in Chad and hired him as director of research and development. Chad works from his home, relying on a technologically-advanced computer and phone system designed to meet his needs.

"Chad has some limitations, sure, but it was clear to us from the beginning that through the course of his life he has done more than most people by means of effort, heart, and courage, and that's exactly the type of person we want with our company," McFarland said.

Chad gathers information and conducts studies on hospital research. He also deals with media contacts and customer satisfaction.

"All my life I have wanted a job where I knew I was making a difference, and this is exactly what I have here. Our company helps not just hospitals but customers as well, and knowing that I am giving back gives me a sense of accomplishment," he said.

Chad began his work at Health One in October.

"I am happy with my life. I have a great job. I am living at home. I am with my family. I have my friends close by," he said. "I may have physical disabilities, sure, but I am exactly the person God wanted me to be. I am making a difference in this world, and that's all anybody can ask for."

Chad believes in looking ahead to the future. With a shortened life expectancy, he intends to make the most of the time he has left.

"I know that I will never be able to walk again in this life, but I know I will in the next," Chad said. "Without God, I would never be able to live each day. With him, I can overcome."

Toxic Noise

Disabilities generally can not be cured. However, sometimes they can be prevented or delayed. Hearing loss is one such disability, and one way it can be prevented is by reducing the noise that can do lasting damage to hearing. The following excerpt from the book Psychology by David G. Myers (8th edition, Worth Publishers, 2007, pp. 216, 218) is reprinted with permission by the author, a professor at Hope College.

-JV

Decibels are the measuring unit for sound energy. The absolute threshold for hearing is arbitrarily defined as zero decibels. Every 10 decibels correspond to a tenfold increase in sound. Thus, normal conversation (60 decibels) is 10,000 times louder than a 20 decibel whisper. And a tolerable 100 decibel passing subway train is 10 billion times louder than the faintest detectable sound. Although our vision system can tolerate a stimulus a trillion times more intense than a barely noticeable glimmer, our hearing is not so forgiving. Prolonged exposure to sounds above 85 decibels can produce hearing loss.

At the highest perceived frequency, hair cells can turn neural current on and off a thousand times per second! As you might expect of something so sensitive, they are, however, delicate and fragile. Blast them with hunting rifle shots or headset sounds and the hair cells' cilia will begin to wither or fuse.

Modern life is noisy. Traffic roars. Factory machines clatter. Jackhammers tear up pavement. To escape into more pleasant sounds, runners stride to the beat of intense music on their headsets.

All this noise causes a problem. Brief exposure to extremely intense sounds, such as gunfire near one's ear, and prolonged exposure to intense sounds, such as amplified music, can damage receptor cells and auditory nerves (Backus, 1977; West & Evans, 1990). Ironically, even health clubs and fitness spas which commonly blast 100+ decibel music may be damaging their patrons' hearing health. Hair cells have been likened to shag carpet fibers. Walk around on them and they will spring back

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with a quick vacuuming. But leave a heavy piece of furniture on them for a long time and they may never rebound.

As a general rule, if you cannot talk over a noise, it is potentially harmful, especially if prolonged and repeated (Roesser, 1998). Such experiences are common when sound exceeds 100 decibels, as happens in venues from frenzied sports arenas to bagpipe bands. And if we experience ringing of the ears after exposure to loud machinery or music we have been bad to our unhappy hair cells. As pain alerts us to possible bodily harm, ringing of the ears alerts us to possible hearing damage. It is hearing's equivalent of bleeding. People who spend whole days behind a power mower, above a jackhammer, or working in a loud nightclub should definitely be wearing earplugs. "Condoms or, safer yet, abstinence," say sex educators. "Earplugs or walk away," say hearing educators.

Noise affects not only our hearing but also our behavior. On tasks requiring alert performance, people in noisy surroundings work less efficiently and make more errors (Broadbent, 1978). When the new Munich International Airport opened, reading and long-term memory scores improved among students near the now closed old airport and became slightly impaired among children near the new airport (Hygge & others, 2002). People who live with continual noise in factories, in homes near airports, and in apartments next to trains and highways also suffer elevated rates of stress-related disorders: high blood pressure, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness are common (Evans & others, 1995).

Several laboratory experiments have explored the psychological effects of noise. In one such experiment, David Glass and Jerome Singer (1972) tape recorded the chatter of office machines and of people speaking a mix of languages. Workers completing various tasks heard this noise, played either loudly or softly, at either predictable or unpredictable intervals. Regardless of the conditions, people soon adapted to the predictable noise and performed well on almost every task. However, those exposed to unpredictable loud noise later made more errors on a proofreading task and reacted more quickly to frustration.

The conclusion: Noise is especially stressful when unanticipated or uncontrollable. That explains why the unpredictable and uncontrollable blaring of someone else's stereo can be so much more upsetting than the same decibels from your own. If only our ears had earlids!

Joanne's Story

I was born in 1950, the second child of Mr. and Mrs. Venhuis. In 1951 my parents decided to move their young family to Lethbridge, Alberta. There they had three more children. Life was good; we children were reared in a loving Christian home, and all of us found Christian partners.

I loved the Lord deeply throughout my life. I enjoyed the simple things in life, a walk in the park, a Sunday afternoon drive with my husband, the joy of raising our three children. My life seemed complete. I thank the Lord for all these blessings. But sometime things don't go the way we want them to go.

In June 2005 I was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. What a shock it was for my husband and me! We didn't know much about this disease, but we soon found out. We were told that ALS robs one of all motor skills. If no cure is found, in time it will take away my speech. In the end, I will be unable to move or to communicate. The life span for people with ALS is three to five years. I hope that the new medicine I receive will slow the progress of the disease somewhat.

In June 2005 I was still able to walk with a walker. Now in February 2006 I am completely helpless. I can't operate my electric wheelchair any more. I sit in my chair all day long. My husband and son were my main caregivers for the first few months. In August 2005 I received home care to help me with bathing, dressing, and so on, but more help was needed. That's when Pastor George Koopmans stepped in. Now the ladies of the church clean the house and cook meals every week.

I am so thankful for my pastor and church family. I am surrounded with love and compassion. The greatest force in my life has always been my Lord and Savior. Without him who can stand? I don't know how much longer I have here on earth, but this I know, I am not alone. The Lord is always beside me, and he upholds me. He gives me patience and strength to endure. Soon I will meet my Savior face to face. What a day that will be! No more pain or sorrow. My body will be made whole again. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Till we meet again, in Christian love,

Joanne Feenstra
Medicine Hat, Alberta

That All May Worship

When people are asked why the church exists, one of the most common answers is, “That all may worship.” Not a bad answer when it flows from living out both the great commandment and the great commission. However, when we take a look at the make-up of the church today, the number of God’s people with disabilities seems to be very limited. And when you do find such people in the church, they are often sitting alongside family or alongside a caregiver. Seldom are people with disabilities heard reading the Scripture passage or helping serve the Lord’s Supper, much less preaching. If this is the case, we must ask ourselves what it really means when we say, “That all may worship.”

Revelation 7:9 gives us a beautiful picture of what heavenly worship will be like: *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.”* However, to get the full effect, we must consider the later part of this verse: ***standing*** *before the throne and in front of the Lamb.* In effect, what we are looking at is a multitude of God’s people standing before the throne of grace because they have been healed!

But that is a picture of heavenly worship. What about now? Those whom Christ called to himself in many cases were the less than perfect in the eyes of the world. And yet they were invaluable (not disabled) in his love. To truly live out both the great commission and the great commandment, we too must see the value and the resource that God has given us in the disabled community_not as disabled, but rather as the image of God, perfect and complete.

Allow me to tell you a couple of stories.

- My wife, Valerie, and I have three precious children: Adriana, Jacqueline, and Marc. The latter two were born with cerebral palsy. One day I took Jacqueline to breakfast at McDonald’s. A man ran to her, and on his knees he said to me, “Can I pray for her?” Before I could say anything, Jacqui answered, “Yes, but can I pray for you?” The man looked a bit confused, and then said once again to me, “Do you know what it says in Isaiah 53?” Once again Jacqui responded. “Yes, that Jesus died for my sins, and that I am healed.” At this point, the man was in tears. But he addressed me once again and asked, “What is wrong with her?” And once again, Jacqui responded before I could say anything. Her response was beautiful because it was so honest, innocent, and trusting: “Nothing is wrong, God made me this way for his glory.” Nothing more needs to be said. She is perfect just the way she is. And even in a wheelchair or in a walker, she praises God with body worship.

- The other story took place last December, when the disability support group Special Families United had its Christmas party. All those in attendance were gazing at the individuals who greeted the group. Marilyn welcomed all of us and Paloma read a passage from the gospel of Matthew. But what touched many people that day was the fact that both girls have cerebral palsy. They were actively involved in this time of celebration and of worship!

This is what it means “that all may worship”! Regardless of our physical or mental condition we can come before the Lord as one church healed by his blood.

—Rev. Jose Rayas

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Mr. Dykstra's initial indignation over the excessive cost of a basketball game ticket for his friend Andrew changed to acceptance of the inequalities when he determined that "management has ensured there is seating available to accommodate wheelchairs." Where is the indignation about the inequality of the ticket price? Is it fair that Andrew pays more because he uses a wheelchair? Mr. Dykstra became "downright angry" when he discovered that the subway station did not have an elevator that would allow Andrew to access the subway station. He eventually concludes, though, that since people with disabilities "can use the bus system to get to any part of the city they want, is it really outrageous that they can't use the subway?" How would he like it if he was barred from using the subway? Would he feel the same if he was the one who was discriminated against? Isn't the subway a public service, and isn't Andrew a member of the public?

For two hundred years black Americans struggled under the yoke of slavery. As recently as the 1960s there were separate entrances to buildings for whites and blacks. There were separate services, separate seating areas, separate working areas. Finally, in the late sixties, integration was legislated forcing the white majority to acknowledge that black people deserved equal treatment and consideration. Similarly, is it fair or just that all restaurants are available to the able-bodied but those with disabilities are relegated to the other restaurant just around the corner? Is it right that there are separate entrances for the able-bodied and disabled? Is it right that some areas of a business are barred to me but not to you?

The American Declaration of Independence says "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Where is the equality when I pay two-and-a-half times more than you to attend the same basketball game? Where is the equality when I cannot use a public service that you take for granted?

Life is getting better for people with disabilities. As recently as two years ago a person using a wheelchair had no way of getting around the city of Yellowknife except by the goodwill of friends or neighbors. Today we have an accessible bus that is part of the city transit system. The National Building Code of Canada and the Americans with Disabilities Act regulates building construction to make buildings accessible to all. Ramps, wider doors, and wheelchair-accessible toilet stalls all make life easier for those with disabilities.

All these changes are the result of someone saying, "That isn't right!" Of someone feeling empathy with the daily struggles of the disabled. Of someone's righteous indignation at the inequalities of life. To be aggravated only by a twelve-inch step in front of a supposedly accessible hotel is not good enough. This wonderful creation in which we live must provide equal opportunities to all people, regardless of their ability or disability. We need more righteously indignant people who will not rest until what is good for you is also good for me.

Yours truly,

Cornelius Van Dyke
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Letters are welcome in keeping with the purpose of Breaking Barriers. They may be edited for style and length.
—Rev. James Vanderlaan

BREAKING BARRIERS

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