



Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... Isaiah 40:31 [nrsv]

Wings

A FAITHLETTER FOR, BY AND ABOUT UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES

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FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D'Archangelis

A story recently circulating on the Internet tells of Shaya, a child with a learning disability, whose father is giving a speech at a fund-raising dinner for the school his son attends.

According to the story, the father cries out at one point: "Where is the perfection in my son, Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?" Answering his own question, he says: "I believe...that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child."

He then goes on to tell about the time he and his son encounter some boys playing baseball. The father, though fully aware of his son's limited athletic ability, asks the boys to let Shaya play. He thinks it would give Shaya "a comfortable sense of belonging" to be part of the game.

To the father's amazement, Shaya is accepted by the team that happens to be losing by six runs in the eighth inning. By the bottom of the ninth, however, Shaya's team scores several runs and now with two outs and the bases loaded with a possible winning run on base Shaya is to come up to bat. How would the team react? The story continues:

Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it.

However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's teammates came up

to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch.

The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya and

his teammate swung at the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first! Run to first!" Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide-eyed and startled.

By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood

what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!"

Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third!" As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya, run home!"

Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate, and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as if he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team. "That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

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Let me begin by saying, I don't believe a word of it. The tale of Shaya is a prime example of the cyber-genre of stories that seem to proliferate like fruit flies on the Internet—competently but anonymously written and way too full of contrivance, artificiality, fortuitous happenstance, and sappiness to be true.

Such stories usually irritate more than inspire me. They are invariably put forward as true, a pretense which only makes me feel manipulated (though I love the stories about blind dogs that save their owners from drowning and have no doubt about their authenticity). So right off the bat (so to speak), the story bothered me.

Okay, so what if the story is made up? It's still a good story with a lot of profound truths, right? Well, maybe. Take the notion of God's perfection. The father says he doesn't see God's perfection in his son but does see it in the reaction of others to his child.

I really have problems with his emphasis on perfection. If the father insists on holding up his son to some standard of divine perfection, it's no wonder he (the father) is in such

(SHAYA continued on page 2)

### SHAYA AND THE BASEBALL GAME: A Tale of God's Perfection

### E-WINGS NOW AVAILABLE

An alternative e-mail version of *Wings* is now available. Especially convenient for those with sight impairments who have "reading" devices on their computers, it's also neat for those who find handling paper-and-print pages difficult. *E-Wings* is posted via e-mail in (at this point) plain text format with no graphics or layout design and includes all articles, announcements, and other items appearing in regular *Wings* issues. To be put on the e-mail list for *E-Wings*, contact Jo D'Archangelis at [JODARLIS@aol.com](mailto:JODARLIS@aol.com). *Wings* also has its own website at [www.satcom.net/mariposa/find\\_wings.html](http://www.satcom.net/mariposa/find_wings.html) which features selected articles from back issues, 1995-1998.

(SHAYA continued from page 1)



despair. I personally can't find any human being who measures up to absolute perfection—physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. So that his son is not perfect in some way is ultimately beside the point, for none of us is perfect (duh).

The father is saying that because his son is mentally disabled he is somehow outside of God's "perfect" creation and therefore God's image fails to be realized in

him. This is not just an indictment of God; it expresses a

pro-foundly negative reaction to his son. By only seeing "perfection" in how others respond to Shaya, the father is both robbing his son of inner worth and denying the power of God's grace in his life. The consequences of the father's own narrow-minded reaction to his son as Shaya grows into adulthood are, I think, potentially tragic for both of them.

Moreover, our ideas of perfection are just that—*our* ideas of perfection. Maybe God sees perfection in a completely different way than we do. Or maybe God had something else in mind besides perfection in creating the universe, and we're just too hung up on the notion of perfection to see it.

That phony baseball thing bothered me also. I know, I know, the kid is probably never going to be aware that he did nothing on his own and that the whole thing was faked and he's going to go away happy, and the other kids

are going to go away happy (or at least pleased with themselves), and the father is going to go away happy because he sees his son as having brought out "God's perfection" in others.

But as a person with a disability, I find the whole baseball charade an example of pure condescension. Having a "comfortable sense of belonging" wouldn't be worth the price to my self-esteem, particularly since any sense of belonging would only be an illusion.

Shaya as himself—a mentally and physically inept little boy—was not acceptable to the other boys; he had to be tricked up into becoming something "normal" (or even better than "normal," a game-winning home-run hitter!) to belong. Even then no one could say he "belonged" in any meaningful sense of the word.

The idea too that we severely-disabled persons are put here on earth only in order to provide opportunities for the Temporarily Able-Bodied to do good, exercise charity, and make brownie points for their ultimate salvation is highly questionable. We are not merely means to someone else's ends, no matter how desirable those ends might be. We are not merely objects of charity.

We are all, disabled and able-bodied, put here on earth to do good to each other, to provide assistance

where needed, to help each other realize our capabilities. What we give and what we receive may not always be perfectly equal. Nonetheless, I believe that all of us, including children like Shaya, have something to offer to others.

According to the Bible, God uniquely reveals his works in persons with disabilities.\* This probably makes no sense to people like Shaya's father. But it makes perfect sense to those of us who don't measure a human being's worth by his or her ability to hit a ball with a bat or answer the \$1,000,000-question on "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire."

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*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (John 9:1-3 NRSV)

KNOWN TO GOD By Judy Higgins

My name is Judy, and I am a wheelchair user. I am often referred to as "wheelchair," "the disabled," "cripple," or just "you"! When I was a child everyone I knew gave me a nickname, even my family members and teachers. It seemed that no one cared to use my real name, and for many years I felt discouraged and undervalued. I believed I was invisible and that no one could love me, including God, who had millions of other people to care about. How could God notice me, let alone know my name?

God says in Isaiah 43:1, "I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine" (NRSV). God knows all about names! I learned that God not only knows everything about me but also calls me, answers me, is beside and in front of me, behind and above me. God holds me lovingly in strong and protective hands.

Through reading the Bible, I have learned that God not only knows my name but has made me for himself and loves and understands all that I am. This is true for each one of us. Jesus, who has the name above all names, died for me and for you. We belong to him, and our names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

From *The Upper Room* [September/October 1994]



A non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions

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CHARLIE By Joanne K. Irwin

I turned up my coat collar to December's crisp evening air. I hadn't noticed the cold while Kathryn and I walked from the Performing Arts Center to the subway. "I feel like it's Christmas now," Kathryn announced, "with the cold weather and tonight's Messiah-Sing-Along. Everything feels right." As if by reflex, we both averted our gaze from the scruffy man in his wheelchair some fifteen paces away.

"The 'Hallelujah Chorus' is good for that," I replied.

The updraft signaled our train's arrival. We briskly stepped toward the open doors.

"What are you doing?" an indignant voice bellowed. "Get over here and help me!" Startled, Kathryn and I turned towards the remark's source; the man motioned us to assist him. I shot a glance at Kathryn. She winced, noting the man's unkempt white beard and the three plastic grocery sacks tied to the back of his chair. I shrugged helplessly. We crossed the platform, grasped the handles of the stranger's wheelchair and pushed him toward the Fremont train.

Once on the train, we locked the brakes on his chair and scanned the car for two empty seats a safe distance away from our ill-kempt companion. His stained corduroy suit-coat was frayed at its cuffs. The plastic grocery bags suspended from the wheelchair handles held tattered sweaters and mismatched pairs of socks. As my mind cataloged these details, my eyes maintained the search for distant seats. I found none. Reluctantly, we sat in the only two remaining, those beside this homeless man.

Oblivious to—or perhaps ignoring—Kathryn's and my hesitance in sitting near him, he immediately launched into an animated monologue. "Name's Charlie. I got evicted from my apartment last night. Ain't got no place to sleep. I'm trying to get in the shelter in San Jose. Thanks for pushing me on. Cold, ain't it?"

Our forty-five minute train ride seemed more like ten with Charlie's rapid-fire tales of lost jobs, evictions, war injuries, and a hundred other hardships. "There are three ways to put money in your pocket," began his fourth sermon. "You work, you steal, you beg. Me, I'm an old cripple. I ain't got nobody hiring me to work, and I'm too scared to steal. So I done better to rid me of some pride and and learn me how to beg. And that's how I been

living, begging."

When we reached the end of the line, Kathryn and I escorted Charlie to the elevator reserved for handicapped use. After our descent, we wheeled him to the San Jose bus. "Reach into my shirt pocket. Take out the dollars there." Assuming this was bus fare, I timidly reached into this stranger's T-shirt pocket and handed him the crumpled bills I found there.

"Keep it," he commanded.

"No," I blurted. "I can't..."

"It's yours," his eyes insisted.

"These are your last three dollars. How will you eat?"

"Someone'll give me the money I need tomorrow. You take it."

"But I don't need it," I stammered.

"Then give it to someone who does."

"But..."

I left that evening with three dollars in my hand and one clear thought in my mind: I have so much to give, yet such a tendency to keep. By insisting I take his three crumpled bills, Charlie forced my eyes open and set them searching for those who needed three dollars more than me. On the train



platform, I thought I was the one doing Charlie a favor, but clearly he was the one to wheel me in the right direction. I needed a push to give rather than keep.

From *Alive Now* [November/December 1996]

Those who are disabled comprise one of the largest minorities in the United States—some 54-million persons

Those who are disabled have one of the poorest rates of voter turn-out in the United States

23.5-million did not vote in the last presidential election and 9.2-million are not even registered



You have a choice
You have a voice

Register and Vote

For a guide to accessible polling places, see the National Organization on Disability website at www.nod.org. Also check out the the League of Women Voters website, newly-redesigned for

A BARRIER CAME INTO VIEW

As I approached
A barrier came into view
Insurmountable
Impenetrable
Impassable

I looked beyond
And in the distance I saw
People of God
A church in prayer
Praising and singing
For God was there

There was no flat roof
No friends to lower me
To the feet of Christ

Once again I looked
At the barrier
Insurmountable
Impenetrable
Impassable

I looked to heaven and said
Lord this barrier is keeping
me from worshipping you

Then the Lord spoke to his
people

My church is for all
Allow all to enter

But the people said
We need a new building
We need money
We need time

Once again I looked at the
barrier
Insurmountable
Impenetrable
Impassable

Lord I pleaded

I know my child he replied
They have ears but hear not
They have hearts but feel not
They have eyes but see not
They have hands, talents
and skills but do not

Then I asked my Saviour
So who is it that's disabled Lord
Them or me

— Tina Marie Heron —
April 2000

Heron, wheelchair-borne with spina bifida occulta, is a wife, mother, disability counselor, and member of an Anglican charismatic community in Yorkshire, England.

IMPRESSIONS OF CEDAR GLEN

By Delvia Logan

Editor's Note: The Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat For Persons With Disabilities was held on May 19-21 at Camp Cedar Glen near Julian, Calif. The Reverend Wilbur Johnson, retired United Methodist minister and post-polio survivor, was the retreat leader, speaking on the theme, "We Are Somebody Special." Delvia Logan, a first-time participant, wrote down her impressions, some of which are given here.

The purpose of the retreat was to validate and refresh the spirituality of those of us who are disabled. Part of the retreat was spent in crafts, eating great food, and talking with each other. The other part was listening to spiritual lessons given in informal talks by Rev. Johnson.

A poem/sermon written by James Weldon Johnson in 1927 on the creation of the earth was read to us; it captured the intense passion and commitment that religion should inspire in us today.

The placement of the planets around our sun is complex, and the earth's position is in a perfect orbit for our

environment and its inhabitants. Rev. Johnson felt that was a divinely-driven decision. He stressed the untapped power everyone has that could be used to solve our society's present and future problems.

Many of the campers took advantage of the walking trails in the camp early in the morning. This was one of my favorite activities during the weekend despite increasing arthritic and balance problems in my legs, knees and arms.

Those who are non-disabled often view individuals who are disabled as less than equal. The combined brainpower of our group was

extraordinary. The acceptance of each other made the sixteen participants feel important.

I look upon my disabilities as a gift that adds to my awareness of life. Life can be difficult for those who are disabled in a non-disabled world, but my disabilities in many ways have simplified my life and made it easier to take responsibility.

Stellar Blue Jays were everywhere and the last of the spring wildflowers in bloom. The lilacs were out of season, which was a disappointment to many of the campers. I am a "rockhound" and found many specimens local to the area.

Many of us felt the struggle to gain acceptance in the church was based on the non-disabled members' fears and lack of knowledge about different disabilities. My own health is getting worse, and I wonder if a person with my type of (invisible) disabilities can find belonging in organized religion. Does our church have a place for people like myself within its definitions and concepts of the "family"?

That weekend I discovered that God does love me as I am today. He looks beyond the disabilities and sees the spirit inside.

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The 2001 Earl Miller Spiritual Life Disability Retreat will be held on the weekend of June 8-10 at Camp Cedar Glen. Retreat leaders will be Bill and Gigi Tell.



"A Faithletter For United Methodists With Disabilities and Those Who Care About Them"

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