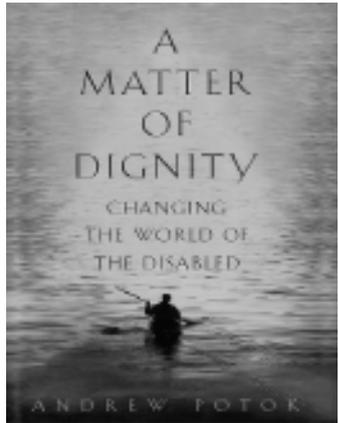


# A Matter of Dignity

by Aidan Harte, Guilderland High School



*A Matter of Dignity*, by Andrew Potok, is as much about living with a disability as it is about ignorance. Unfortunately, these two terms are often inextricably connected. Potok's book does not concern itself with disability legislation or groundbreaking laws as much as it does with the daily lives of individuals with disabilities. Using his gift for the written word, Potok is able to show the reader that a person's life with a disability is often not centered around accessibility or lobbying, but on simply existing.

Potok himself has a disability. He is afflicted by retinis pigmentosa, a group of diseases that causes slow, but progressive vision loss. With the onset of retinis pigmentosa, the individual may simply have poor night vision and be disorientated in the presence of bright lights. However, as the disease worsens, it eventually may lead to "tunnel vision" and complete blindness.

Retinis pigmentosa is particularly emotionally jarring. As Potok explains, "Just when I have come to terms with the vision I have left, the dying process continues and a new period of adjustment begins." Throughout *A Matter of Dignity*, Potok explains his gradual devolution from sight to blindness. He also explains what it was like to suddenly enter the world of the disabled, and be judged by the same stereotypes that he used himself. While Potok has not completely come to terms with his disability, the reader sees that he has taken significant steps towards doing so.

*A Matter of Dignity* is a book in which average people are illuminated by their tremendous occupations and poignant stories. Just two of the people that we meet in this book are Peter Lang, a guide dog school manager of instruction and training, and Dave Loney, a prosthetist. These individuals I found to be the most inspiring - not necessarily because of their amazing accomplishments, but simply because of who they are.

Peter Lang works at The Seeing Eye, a facility in New Jersey which trains seeing eye dogs. Although Lang originally studied to be an accountant, he discovered his

inspiration and true calling in training these helpful dogs. Potok's own seeing eye dog, Tobias, is a graduate of The Seeing Eye, and Potok, with the help of Lang, explains the extensive training and testing that a guide dog must undergo before graduating. Potok also reveals his thoughts on guide dogs and dealing with blindness. We learn that acquiring a guide dog is an important step for a blind individual, because it signifies both their lust for independence and their acknowledgment that they need help. He does a wonderful job of explaining this to the reader.

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"Blindness has contributed to my shyness and reclusiveness, a timidity of unnecessary contact. I often want only to blend into the conspicuousness of blindness."

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Another inspiring individual is Dave Loney, a prosthetist. Although not an amputee himself, Loney works long hours, hand-crafting prosthetic limbs. Not only is he a successful and inspiring prosthetist, but he lends his help to Third World countries, who are often in desperate need of aid. Loney explains what life is like for amputees, who often take years to overcome the psychological barriers that an affliction such as this presents.

A Matter of Dignity, by Andrew Potok, is truly a wonderful book. Through his eyes, the reader witnesses what life is like for an individual with a disability, and the wonderful people who are changing the way people think about disabilities.



# MEMBERS OF THE DISABILITIES AWARENESS EDITORIAL BOARD HONORED AT CEREMONY

Members of the Disabilities Awareness Newsletter editorial board were honored this year at a special ceremony held at the Executive Mansion in Albany on June 4. Ten of the members joined winners of the disabilities awareness art and essay contests to receive awards presented by Sheila Carey, Executive Director of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, and Gary O'Brien, Chair of the Commission on Quality of Care. Awards were also received by ten schools participating during the past year in the Commission's three-part disabilities awareness curriculum. A Certificate of Appreciation was awarded to Susan Purdy, school nurse/educator at West Sand Lake Elementary School, for starting the disabilities awareness curriculum on mental health. Micki Leader, mother of former Newsletter editor Justin Leader, received a Certificate of Appreciation for the many volunteer hours she has spent assisting the Newsletter staff.

Traveling from every area of the state, the students who were being honored had an opportunity to view the winning art and essays which were on exhibit for the day in the Mansion. During the ceremony, Liam Harte, the current Newsletter editor, presented flowers to Mrs. Carey for her help and to Mrs. Leader for her ongoing support of the Newsletter. The members of the editorial board who participated as judges in the art and essay contests were anxious to meet each of



the winners in person and to congratulate them on their efforts. The luncheon following the ceremony provided the editorial board members with a chance to talk with the winners and their families and encourage them to stay involved in disabilities awareness work. One of the new editors of next year's Newsletter, Frances Ford, a senior at Bethlehem High School, first became

interested in working on the Newsletter when she came to the disabilities awareness ceremony six years ago to receive an award as one of the winners in the annual essay contest. She learned about the Newsletter at the ceremony and immediately volunteered to serve on the board. Frances and her new co-editor, Jessica Schubmehl, a senior at Bishop Maginn High School in Albany, are planning a summer get-together for old and new board members and are anxious to follow up with students they made contact with at the ceremony.



# AN INVISIBLE ILLNESS... OR SO IT APPEARS

by Michelle Schamberg, Spring Valley High School

Have you ever awakened after a full night's sleep and were too exhausted to get out of bed? And it wasn't because you were feeling lazy or just didn't want to, but because you physically couldn't? Hard to imagine, huh? I, along with thousands of other teens, know exactly what it's like - we all suffer from the illness POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome), as well as CFIDS (Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome).



For roughly three and a half years I have had to live with lightheadedness, joint pain, muscle aches, unrelenting fatigue, tachycardia, swollen glands, and head-aches. Having POTS has been difficult, as I am unable to remain upright for any prolonged period of time. It may sound tedious to mention all of these symptoms, but like most illnesses, there is more than one specific part of the body that suffers.

Unfortunately, a YPWC (young person with CFIDS) is routinely categorized as being "school phobic" or a "hypochondriac." Negative statements are made about us proclaiming that we are "faking it" or it is "all in our heads." It is frustrating, especially for adolescents, when hearing these things; it implies that we want to be sick which is definitely not the case! I would love to be able to do the things that my friends do which may be as simple as participating in after-school activities or hanging out at the mall. I am not the average sixteen-year-old, as I am homebound and limited in what I can do and where I can go.

The hardest part to deal with, for me, is not being sick; it is the suspicion and lack of understanding about my disability from people in my community that is the most disturbing. For example, if I am feeling up to getting out of the house for a little while with one of my family members, I am chastised for being seen out, how I look, and what I'm





doing. Many people are of the opinion that if I am well enough to be out, than I should go to school and function normally. People's ignorance has been, and continues to be, the largest obstacle that I have had to face. I never expected that people would be so cruel and uncaring, but, at the same time, their cruelty and lack of caring has forced me to mature. Thus, it has enabled me to grow into a much stronger individual. I believe that this quote by author Anne Rice truly expresses the reality that difficulties in life present: "It's an awful truth that suffering can deepen us, give a greater luster to our colors, a richer resonance to our words. That is, if it doesn't destroy us, if it doesn't burn away the optimism and the spirit, the capacity for visions, and the respect for simple yet indispensable things."

I know that in time I will be healthy again, and will be able to accomplish my goals and aspirations. I hope that people will be more accepting and considerate to those who are different from themselves. I want them to realize that even though something can't be seen, it doesn't mean it isn't there. Maybe people should try to "look" a little harder.

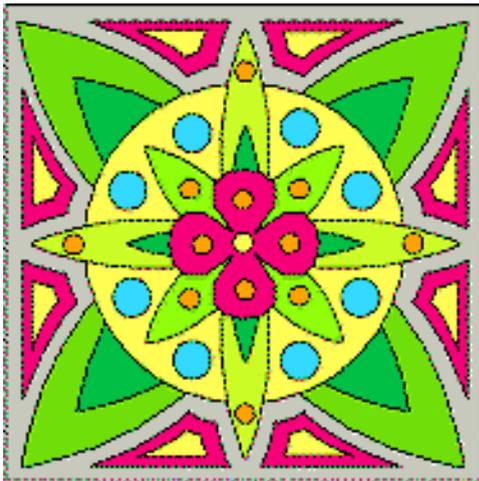


# A FAST MOVING KALEIDOSCOPE

by Elena Anadolis, The Renaissance Charter School

Imagine living in a fast-moving kaleidoscope, where sounds, images, and thoughts are constantly shifting. Feeling easily bored, you may be helpless to keep your mind on tasks you need to complete. Distracted by unimportant sights and sounds, your mind drives you from one thought or activity to the next. Perhaps you are so wrapped up in a collage of thoughts and images that you don't even notice when someone speaks to you.

For many people, this is what it's like to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD. They may be unable to sit still, plan ahead or finish tasks. To their family, classmates or co-workers, they seem to exist in a whirlwind of disorganization or wild activity. Unexpectedly on some days and in some situations, they may seem fine. This leads others to think that persons with ADHD can actually control their behaviors.



ADHD affects three to five percent of all children. Boys are more affected than girls. It cuts across all ethnic groups, levels of education and degrees of intelligence. It was believed that this was only a childhood disorder, and that one outgrew it during adolescence. It is now known that only about a third of the ADHD population outgrows it and two thirds have it throughout adulthood. ADHD is not a learning disability or a language disability or dyslexia, although someone with ADHD may also have these disabilities as well. ADHD is also not associated with people having low intelligence.

ADHD can interfere with one's personal life just as it does with one's academic or job performance. To make friends you have to be able to pay attention. To get along in a group you have to be able to follow what is being said by the group members. We can all have empathy for someone whose life is like a kaleidoscope since we all live in a very fast-paced culture. Many of the symptoms of ADHD are common to us all at times. You may even recognize some of the symptoms in your own behavior. But while our experience allows us to relate to the person with ADHD to some degree, it is not the same thing as having these symptoms all of the time. We need to think beyond our experience and try to understand this mysterious condition and how it affects the person who has it.

Most people who discover they have ADHD, have suffered a great deal of pain. The emotional experience can be filled with embarrassment and humiliation. By the time the diagnosis is made,

many people have lost confidence in themselves. They have been repeatedly misunderstood. Many have consulted with numerous specialists, only to find no real help. As a result many have lost hope. It is a real, and sometimes crippling condition that requires diagnosis and careful treatment.

Individuals with ADHD may have forgotten what is good about themselves. Once the diagnosis has been made, the next step is to learn as much as possible about the condition. The more you know, the better you will be able to construct your treatment to meet your own needs. You will then be able to understand your life story in terms of ADHD.

People with ADHD need more assistance with organization skills. They have to learn tolerance and greater impulse control. Sometimes a tutor or a coach can help. Friends can be helpful as well. Doctors might prescribe various medications. There is no one recipe for treatment of ADHD. Each case presents its own problems and requires its own solutions.

Counseling is sometimes suggested for people with ADHD because of problems with self-esteem, anxiety, and depression that may have built up during the years. The medications that are now used in the treatment of this disorder can dramatically improve the quality of an individual's life. When the medication is effective, it can be truly life-changing. Medications should be used only under medical supervision, and as part of a treatment program.

Disabilities are not always visible but they can still be as real. It is important to take a closer look at behavior which may be troubling to us but which is even more frustrating for the person with ADHD. Remember that fateful lesson you learned on the first day of kindergarten: judging persons by their appearance is wrong.



# Monkeying Around

by Jessica Schubmehl, Bishop Maginn High School

Often, when people think of animal helpers for people with disabilities they visualize some type of dog. However, there is now a new species that is coming to the aid of people with disabilities - monkeys.

The idea for monkey helpers occurred to Dr. M.J. Willard, a behavioral psychologist, while she was assisting an individual who was then recently paralyzed from the shoulders down in a car accident. Willard thought that an animal with hands, such as a Capuchin monkey would be able to easily do most of the simple tasks that these quadriplegics were unable to do for themselves. She knew that these monkeys were known for their dexterity and friendly dispositions.

Dr. Willard discovered she was correct in her hypothesis when the Capuchin monkeys proved to be very well suited to be trained as monkey helpers. The first monkey helper was placed with a man in 1979. This first match was so successful that monkeys were soon placed all over the country, with hundreds of people having every imaginable disability.

In less than one year, one of these spectacular monkeys can be trained and placed with someone who needs assistance. Training a monkey to be helpful is not easy. Each monkey receives individual instruction for 30 to 45 minutes, five or six times a week. Although each monkey is trained the same in the beginning, as the progress goes on, individual monkeys start to perfect the things they do best. The monkey's good behavior is reinforced with treats, toys, or play. When the monkeys are not responding to instruction, they are sent to their cage, but they are never punished physically. The specific talents that the monkeys possess are used to match them with the person they would best suit. In the end each monkey is custom trained to fit a particular person's needs.



Of the 250,000 people who are quadriplegics in the United States, an estimated six to twelve thousand are appropriate candidates to receive help from the highly motivated monkeys. The monkey helpers are meant not to replace, but to supplement, the work of family members or paid attendants who bathe, dress, feed, and otherwise attend to their needs each day. Human helpers are always the first choice. But these trained monkeys can do so much to improve the life of the person with a disability. Their ability to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities put them in a special category. Now when you think of "man's best friend," imagine a monkey and not just a guide dog.

If you would like to find out more about these amazing monkeys then you can go to [www.helpinghandsmonkeys.org](http://www.helpinghandsmonkeys.org). At this website you can find out more about the monkeys, how to contribute to the Helping Hands fund, or even how to help train a monkey.



# MY FEELINGS

by Sarah Nettleton, Fairport High School

You never think about my feelings.  
You always talk down to me.  
You are always saying bad things about  
me when I am standing right in front of  
you.

Because you say bad things about me no one likes me.  
I try hard but you don't care.  
You think because I can't talk with my voice that I am stupid.  
I can think.  
I can feel.  
I can learn.

I just have a body that doesn't work right.  
You can't see my abilities.  
You only see my disabilities.  
You should learn to treat people with  
disabilities with dignity and respect.

Dignity and respect.  
Dignity and respect.



# I'M NOT SCARED

by LaJoan Donley, Redemption Christian Academy

I am a young adult with a serious disease,  
But I'm not scared.

Type I diabetes is the doctor's diagnosis,  
My pancreas that contains my beta cells  
Was attacked.

Cells that were supposed to protect my immune system  
From germs decided to attack.  
It's so scary, but I'm not scared.

Over 151 million people,  
700,000 in the US alone  
Including me.

One out of five people  
Have a family member with diabetes.  
Therefore I just keep the thought in mind  
I'm not the only person with this disease.  
I am not scared, it is just reality.

All odds were against me  
Because diabetes runs in my family.  
However, the problem did not occur  
Because of gene mutation that planted the seed within me.  
Scientists have studied environmental factors  
Such as viral infections, rubella, and mumps  
That could have triggered this offset in my body.  
It does affect me, but I'm not going to let it take over me.

It affects my body.  
I'm sometimes thirsty  
But I don't want anything to drink.  
I get tired, my vision is blurred,  
And the numerous headaches I receive

Get on my nerves.

I am going to live  
A long and healthy life  
And will have fun

As if this disease did not come about.  
This is not a threat to my life,  
It's a chance for me to shine.

I'm a young adult  
With a serious disease,  
But I'm not scared.





by Marquita Massey, Redemption Christian Academy

If you have never heard of Tamika Catchings, you better get to know her. She is one of the most electrifying female basketball players in the world. The unique thing about her is that she is hearing impaired. Most people without a disability couldn't accomplish what she has achieved. Tamika's athletic ability was passed down to her. Her father, Harvey Catchings played 11 years of NBA basketball in Milwaukee and Philadelphia. Her sister Tauja was a 1996 Nike/WBCA high school basketball All-American. Tamika was a three-sport athlete during her two years at Duncanville High School in Texas. She competed with the track and volleyball squads. Her basketball team received national recognition. They also received national ranking in the final USA Today poll of 1997.



As a child Tamika did not wear her hearing aid consistently because kids teased her. Like many children who need some form of accommodation, she was embarrassed to use it even though she needed it. In 1997 she signed with the University of Tennessee where her coach, Pat Summitt, encouraged her to wear her hearing aid. Without it she could not pick up certain sounds and with it, she was able to hear well. With encouragement, Tamika finally overcame an important barrier (other people's negative attitudes) and started wearing her hearing aids. She said that it was difficult, but she had to do it. Now Tamika's family members and friends are talking about how much her communication skills have improved.

At the University, Tamika was voted freshman of the year. She also won a NCAA national title that year. During her next three years the Tennessee Volunteers fell short but she was picked in the 2000 WNBA draft. The Indiana

Fever drafted Tamika, and she has had a successful record with them. She is truly a role model for others.

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# RONAN TYNAN

by Vaughn Mauren, Bethlehem High School

On March 18, 2002, Dr. Ronan Tynan gave a lecture titled "Living Life to the Fullest," as part of the Oldcastle Inc. lecture series at the College of Saint Rose. After that lecture, no one could dispute the fact that Dr. Ronan Tynan was a man who deserved an audience not only because of his accomplishments, but also because of his insight.

Tynan was born in Kilkenny, Ireland with a lower leg disability. His predicament caused many local people to believe he would have trouble earning a living. To their surprise, he successfully competed in the Paralympic Games in track and field, winning 18 gold medals and 14 world records in 1984. After completing school at the National College of Physical Education in Limerick, Ireland, he was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin, where he was awarded a doctorate in sports medicine.

As a result of the advice given to him by his beloved father, Tynan began voice lessons at age 30. Less than one year later, he won the John McCormick Cup for Tenor Voice. He rose to a higher profile in 1994, as he won the BBC talent show "Go For It." In just another year, he won the International Operatic Singing competition held in Marmande, France.

The first album to Tynan's credit, "My Life Belongs to You," was released in 1998. It didn't take long for it to become platinum. Tynan was approached about joining The Irish Tenors. Accepting the honor, he has continued to perform with them to this day.

The story of Ronan Tynan has given hope to many persons with disabilities, who have to work through adversity, while trying to reach their goals. Tynan has broken the belief that he couldn't go beyond his physical limitation. Along the way he has many mentors, including his father, who encouraged him, but never pushed him. Tynan has always risen to the occasion, and believed in himself, never doubting his ability to do

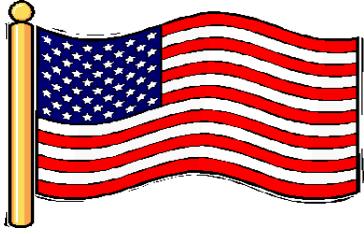


what he was most interested in.

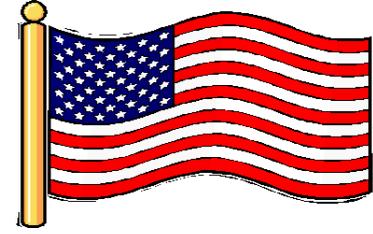
However, Tynan does not speak specifically about his disability. Whether he feels it is more important to focus on one's abilities, or has not yet felt truly secure about his disability, Tynan's reluctance to dialogue openly about his disability is very ambiguous.

To all persons with disabilities, Tynan has given a great piece of advice. The most important thing for someone to do, is to integrate themselves in a normal employment situation, where they can be expected to operate and complete tasks that any abled person could perform. But, there should also be room for mistakes. "Never think that a tunnel is black," says Tynan. His optimistic voice and life are demonstrative of the possibilities of dreams.





# SEPTEMBER 11th



by Liam Harte, Guilderland High School

Without a doubt it would be considered irresponsible to create an annual publication and not mention the most devastating and influential event to take place this past year - the September 11th terrorist attacks. Reckless irrelevance in discussing this topic can only lead to trivializing the event. However, it is important to continue to reflect on what we learned on that fateful day. Some of us learned a little more about the world that people with disabilities inhabit every day of the year.



September 11th made us keenly aware of the horrifyingly vulnerable position that exists for each us when we are forced to deal with disaster. Simple knowledge of the evacuation routes from a building and how to access them should be second nature to all of us now because they literally have a life or death meaning in a catastrophe. But for people with mobility impairments, the lack of appropriate emergency escape routes have unavoidable devastating results. One of the first horror stories I remember hearing was that of a person in a wheelchair unable to exit a building. A friend loyally refused to leave him and they both perished.

This unfortunate occurrence may have been unavoidable, but it raises important issues about accessibility. Securing accessibility to buildings for persons with disabilities has been a hard fought battle. Not until the American with Disabilities Act addressed the problem in 1990 was access to public buildings guaranteed for persons with physical impairments. But the legislation has not been totally effective in making all the necessary changes. There are still many inaccessible buildings and, even worse, inaccessible public facilities. If these problems are not addressed and the laws taken seriously, we can expect more fatalities. What will it take to make our world accessible to all? Each one of us being knowledgeable of the laws and the importance of implementing them is a start to making full inclusion of people with disabilities a reality.

The Disabilities Awareness Newsletter editorial board members met with Marianne Engleman-Lado, General Counsel at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, in New York City this past January to learn more about current legal issues affecting persons with disabilities including their right to accommodations. One of the ways serving on the board of the Newsletter has educated its members (and hopefully its readers) is to arrange for us to participate in dialogues with experts in various fields related to disabilities. Ms. Engelman-Lado presented us with some thought provoking legal conundrums affecting not only people with disabilities but also lawyers, judges and potential jury members. Her presentation helped us begin to develop our own points of view about such legal issues as capital punishment and full implementation of the ADA and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act governing the education of children with disabilities). Access is just one of the many issues we need to become more aware of in order to ensure that people with disabilities can be fully included in our society.

The tragedy of 9/11 can motivate us to think further and share openly with one another about what we can do as individuals to make our world more accessible in many different ways for people with disabilities. One of the goals of the Newsletter is to foster these types of discussions among high school students so that we can all learn what inclusion really means.

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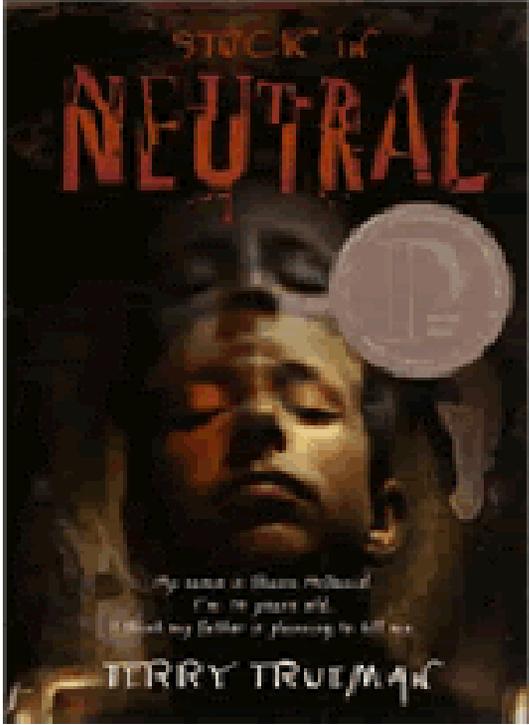
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# STUCK IN NEUTRAL

by Daniel Pepe, Schalmont High School



Stuck in Neutral is the heart wrenching fictional account of the secret life of fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel. Shawn was born with Cerebral Palsy and had very little control over how his body functioned. Unbeknownst to the rest of the world, Shawn has an amazing memory, remembering almost every word spoken to him since he was four years old. Unfortunately because he cannot speak, he is unable to share this special ability with anyone. Due to his inability to communicate, people make the grave mistake of believing that he is retarded and go as far as to say that he is uneducable.

This story illustrates what families go through when a severely disabled child is born. Shawn's disability affects his father so intensely that he leaves his family and contemplates "ending Shawn's pain." Little does

his father realize that Shawn's seizures (the perceived pain) are Shawn's only escape to normalcy. Once Shawn gets wind of his father's plan, he realizes the importance of living but recognizes also that, unfortunately, nobody will ever know him for who he really is. Shawn is like a candle, he appears helpless on the outside, while the potential of great fire and light is kindling inside him.

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"I am pretty sure that my dad is planning to kill me. The good news is that he'd be doing this out of his love for me. The bad news is that whatever the wonderfulness of his motives, I'll be dead."

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The novel is full of touching instances of a family's unconditional love for Shawn, as well as Shawn's perceptions of a distant world. Terry Trueman's novel, *Stuck in Neutral* is a unique approach to what it could be like living with Cerebral Palsy. In addition to an inability to fully control motor function, depending on which part of the

brain has been damaged and the degree of damage to the central nervous system, people with CP may have other symptoms to deal with. Some may experience seizures, like Shawn. Others may have spasms or impairment of sight or hearing. The important thing to remember is that each person is unique and so is each disability. The combination of two unique factors (personality and disability) makes it impossible to describe someone exactly. You have to meet the individual first and discover an understanding for yourself. I would highly recommend reading this book because it has something for everyone in it including suspense and the struggle every young person faces to be "just like everyone else."



# SUNY ALBANY DISABLED STUDENT SERVICES

by Aidan Harte, Guilderland High School



The rights of individuals with disabilities have been secured by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, passed in 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. As a result of this legislation, students with disabilities are eligible for reasonable accommodations on the campus and in the classroom, in an effort to level the academic playing field for all.

One of the leaders in this area is the University at Albany. According to Learning Disability Specialist Carolyn Malloch, this New York State University "has few physical barriers; the University at Albany is very accessible [for students with disabilities]." The Disabled Student Services program is run by Nancy Belowich Negron. Negron has been at the University for twenty-eight years. Twenty two of those years have been spent as the director of Disabled Student Services.

"When I came here in 1980, there were only 88 students with disabilities... it's grown significantly since then," Negron explains. The Disabled Student Services functions as both a resource and advocate for students with disabilities. It provides academic support services, develops community resources, and educates both faculty members and students. It also successfully hosts a pre-college summer orientation and mentor program. Currently, there are roughly 400 students with disabilities who are involved with Disabled Student Services.

The Disabled Student Services also hosts an annual Honors Convocation, a reception recognizing students with disabilities for their academic achievements. They also sponsor a High School Achievers Luncheon. Carolyn Malloch is a relatively new addition to the University. She was hired because of the growing need for a service that helps students with learning disabilities perform at the highest standard. She founded the Learning Disabled Student Services program last March. The goal of the Learning Disabled Student Services is to assist students with these disabilities in a wide variety of areas. Malloch often writes letters requesting appropriate accommodations, which often include extended time on exams, non-distracting test locations, text readers during exams, taped lectures, and extended time to complete

assignments. Individual counseling is also provided. "We develop study skills, test taking skills...one-on-one appointments are the most useful," Malloch explained.

So far, the Learning Disabled Student Services has been extremely successful in aiding the 150 students that have requested help. Their average GPA is 2.7. However, Malloch recognizes the need for improvement, "I'd like to see more activism on the part of disabled students." She plans to continue to expand this program in the future.

The Learning Disabled Student Services works in tandem with the Disabled Student Services to successfully maintain one of New York State's most progressive universities in the area of disabilities awareness and accommodation. Hopefully, they will maintain their level of prestige and success in the future.



# Supreme Court Debates Death Penalty

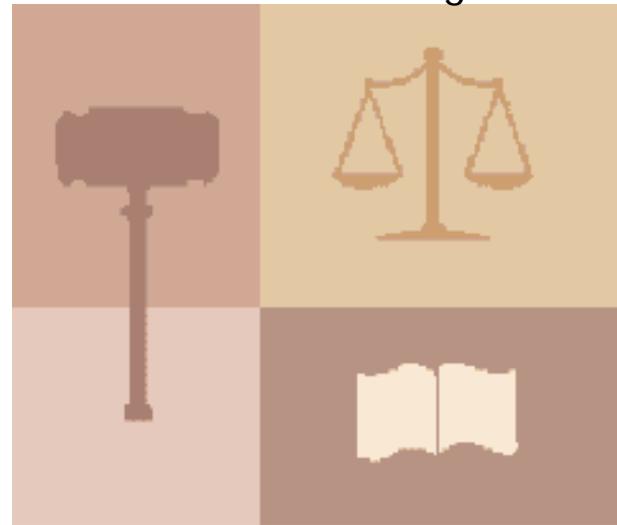
by Matthew Cushing, Albany Academy

The phrase "cruel and unusual punishment" has held many definitions throughout history as man has become more and more civilized. The Eighth Amendment, which guarantees citizens' protection from cruel and unusual punishment, has evolved a great deal since the inception of American government. The Supreme Court's recent ruling on the Atkins' case has increased the Eighth Amendment's scope to protect individuals who are mentally retarded from execution.

In the Atkins case, the Supreme Court decided that a "national consensus" against execution of offenders who are mentally retarded does indeed exist. In making their decision, the Justices used the approach, unique to the Eighth Amendment, that cruel and unusual punishment is defined by a sense of what communities perceive it to be. A majority of the justices agreed with Justice Stevens who wrote, "The practice...has become truly unusual and it is fair to say that a national consensus has developed against it."

However, the major criticism of this case is the Supreme Court's interpretation of the local norms of communities. Only 18 of 38 states actually prohibit the execution of persons who are mentally retarded. Three justices dissented on the Atkins' ruling criticizing the validity of this "national consensus" because it failed to even cross the 50 percent mark. On the other hand, if we include the 12 states that prohibit execution of anyone at all with the number of states of persons with mental retardation, the total is now 40 states, a clear majority.

This is not the first time this issue has come before the Nation's highest court. In 1989 the Justices - while overturning the conviction of John Paul Penry on a



technicality - upheld the constitutionality of executing those with IQs below 70, concluding that the practice does not necessarily violate the Eighth Amendment. At his trial, Penry was unable to read or write, name the days of the week or say how many nickels made a dime. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor concurred with the majority and held that no national consensus existed against executing people who are mentally disabled. When Justice O'Connor wrote her opinion, no states had provisions specifically prohibiting the practice. With the reinstatement of the death penalty in NYS in 1995, persons with mental retardation were excluded. This group has also been exempt under Federal law since 1988.

At least 300 of the more than 3,000 inmates currently on death row have IQs below 70 which is the standard cutoff for determining mental retardation along with limitations on daily living and communication skills. The difficult task that the Federal Government must focus on is to assess the criminal culpability of these persons. And, once this culpability is assessed, somehow incorporate it into the penal system.



# A View from the Fun Side

by Kyle Derkowski, Shalmon High School

Shopping for cool additions to your never-ending collections is fun. Playing video games, watching movies, roasting marshmallows, and swapping music all come under the same category. Cruising down the ramp at school may be your idea of a great time, however for me this everyday lifestyle is far from fun. But when you have a great attitude and lots of friends, nothing really bothers you all that much. Not the chair, not the SMA.

SMA, Spinal Muscular Atrophy, is the number one genetic killer of children under the age of two. It is an inherited disease that effects voluntary muscle movement like crawling, walking, head and neck control. There are four types of SMA. Type I is the most severe. It generally strikes children between birth and six months of age. The most visible sign is weakness. Children with SMA Type I generally have trouble sitting unaided, breathing and they may have a weak cry.



The type I'm most familiar with is Type II which is the intermediate form of SMA. Symptoms develop between 7 and 18 months of age. SMA II is less severe than SMA Type I. Individuals with SMA II are often unable to sit unaided and some can even stand with support. They are prone to respiratory illnesses and often use electric wheelchairs. Type III is the mildest form. Symptoms generally begin after 18 months but are known to surface anytime right through adulthood. People who have Type III SMA may stand but often need a wheelchair.

Type IV is the adult form of SMA. Symptoms are mild and may show in hands, feet or

tongue and may spread to other areas of the body.

It's *what you can do* that's fun-not what you can't do. Making plans for the summer is fun and that's just what I'm doing.



# WHY IS EVERYONE LOOKING AT ME?

By Frances Ford, Bethlehem High School

It's Monday morning. Karen is at work, cutting vegetables for the salad bar. Everyone is talking about the weekend. Suddenly Karen's head and hands begin to shake. She can barely keep from cutting herself with the knife. She begins to sense that everybody thinks that she is strange. Then again, Karen herself feels that she is strange. For months she has not been able to speak above a whisper and often finds herself shaking. Ever since Karen was a child she has had feelings of anxiety followed by worthlessness. She could never speak up in class and found it hard to make friends. Now Karen feels even more self-conscious because again her anxiety is so great she is not able to speak above a whisper.



Karen is suffering from Social Anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, which involves extreme self-consciousness and anxiety in social situations. This disorder can greatly affect an individual's professional and social life. It may become difficult to go to class, social events, or work. Common fearful situations are making eye contact, being introduced to someone, returning items to a store, and working with others. People with social anxiety may worry about an event weeks ahead of time. Even if they overcome the fear and go to the event, during and after they are concerned that everyone is judging them. This extreme anxiety makes it hard for people with this disorder to make and keep friends. It may be hard for them to get a job because even an interview can be anxiety provoking. There are also physical symptoms associated with social anxiety, including profuse sweating, difficulty speaking, stomachaches, blushing, and shaking. These symptoms lead to feelings of embarrassment and the fear that others are staring at them.

Social anxiety disorder usually begins in childhood. Children who have social anxiety usually have trouble making friends and can find school very stressful. Many times parents think that this is due to shyness and that their children will eventually outgrow it. Yet, social anxiety is not something people simply outgrow. Left untreated,



it can worsen during teenage years. Adolescence is a stressful time for many children, but it can cause extreme anxiety for a teenager with social anxiety. The pressure of schoolwork, making friends, and social events can cause an adolescent to become depressed. The individual may also turn to drugs or alcohol to deal with negative feelings.

The encouraging news for individuals with Social Anxiety Disorder is that there are ways to control and minimize its effects. Psychotherapy is a very effective approach. Through various forms of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), people learn how to cope with the situations that cause them anxiety. Some techniques that are taught include preparing for a conversation ahead of time, going out with someone with whom they are comfortable such as a friend or family member, and imagining that they are in a more relaxed setting. In Karen's case, a four-step approach was used. First, whenever Karen thought something bad about herself she wrote it down; second, she apologized to herself for saying it. Third, she would ask herself why she said this negative thing and if it was necessary. Finally Karen would replace this negative thought with a positive tone. Eventually Karen began to think more positively about herself. She no longer worried about what others thought of her and her anxiety decreased. After several years of therapy Karen regained both her voice and her confidence.

While therapy alone is sufficient for many individuals like Karen, others require the addition of medication. Generally, it is the more severe cases of the disorder that call for the use of such medications as Ativan, Xanax, and Klonopin. These medicines can greatly reduce the anxiety people with Social Anxiety Disorder experience and allow them, over time, to enjoy the very situations that they normally fear. It is critical to remember that medication, by itself, is not a solution. It should always be part of a program that includes regular therapy.

Social Anxiety Disorder can have an extremely negative effect on a person's life.

The fear and anxiety a person with this disorder feels can significantly limit what they can do. Without the proper treatment, an individual may find it impossible to participate in the experiences that are most meaningful and enjoyable. However, with therapy and when needed,

medication, a person struggling with Social Anxiety Disorder can lead a happy and productive life.

