



Voices
OF OUR REGION
THE DISABILITY CONNECTION

Interviewee: **James Powell**

Interviewee Number: **31**

Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg, Judy Barricella**
& Tony Buba

Date of Interview: **May 30, 2008**

Voices of Our Region
Jim P.
May 30, 2008

Today is Friday, May 30th. And we'll just start with you saying your name and giving us some family information, where you grew up, kind of leading into the present.

Okay.

And you can start whenever you'd like.

Okay, my name is James Powell. I'm from Forest Hills, PA. I'm 51 years of age.

Were you born in Forest Hills?

I was adopted so I don't know exactly where that was but I ended up in Forest Hills.

When you were little?

Yeah, when I was an infant.

So pretty much you've grown up there.

I've grown up in Forest Hills, right.

Are you married?

No, I'm single.

Lived in the same house?

Yeah, I moved away and came back. Keep on coming back. I own the house now. I take care of my mom.

So your mom and dad, or just...?

No, just my mom. My dad passed away when I was 10 so.

So how did you involved with Working Order?

Well I'm dyslexic and I'm trying to do photography because that's my passion. And somebody suggested that Working Order was here and they could help me try to start my own business. So that's why I'm here. So they're helping me. It's going slower then I

think both of us want but it's going. There are some hurdles I have to overcome. But they're helping me.

What kind of photography? Portrait or?

Portrait, landscape. I like nature photography the best. So that's my real passion.

So where were you, is that like a National Geographic kind of photographs or I mean how do you make money taking pictures of nature?

Well, I worked for US Airways for seventeen and a half years so I got to travel out west so that helped. That's what really made me enthusiastic about nature photography because the west is absolutely gorgeous. It's everything you think it is. When you walk into Yellowstone and the first thing you see is two buffalos walking down the middle of the road and everybody has to yield to them that's when you know that you're at the right place. So there it is. Because I went to photography school in the late '70s and then I got away from it and worked for US Airways and another airlines called Presidential Airways in '85. And then when I started to travel again when I went out west. Plus I was a big brother in the Big Brother organization so I was able to take my little brother to Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon so that helped too.

Man that would have been an awesome Big Brother experience.

Yeah, he was a lucky little brother. I took him to Disney World, Universal. So he was a little spoiled.

What did you do for US Air?

I worked in reservations for seventeen and a half years. Until we got outsourced.

Do you know Bobby Bolokovich? (? 3.48)

Bobby Bolokovich? You know that sounds familiar.

He worked in reservations.

There were like 900 of us so it was hard to keep up with everybody.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Churchill which is now Woodland Hills. It was interesting. When I graduated from Churchill I couldn't read or write though.

How'd that happen? They just kept passing you?

Well I was a nice kid and I tried. Of course they told me I wasn't trying hard enough but I kept on going so.

So they didn't identify the dyslexia?

Well one teacher did but people really didn't do much about it really. I was in class where they handed you a Reader's Digest and said read. And they put me in with all the trouble makers cause that was for the kids that didn't care. I'm not saying that they may have had a disability, too, and probably they did and they just didn't realize it either. They just acted out. So I graduated but I couldn't read or write so it was really difficult.

So tell me how the dyslexia manifested itself. Cause I know some people it's reversal of letters and those kinds of things.

Well there was reversal of letters, *saw* was *was* and *was* was *saw* and everybody would say that was wrong. And I think some of my short term memory isn't as good as it should be because my concentration when it comes to reading is really poor. And my writing is another thing, it's a real issue. So I just decided I'd be determined enough that I was going to hang in there and it's kind of like conquering the mountain. So I wasn't going to sit back. That's good and bad though.

Why so?

Well I think that I have some depression and I think that's part of it too. Cause you're so determined to get there that the price you pay to get there, you pay the piper sometimes. But you don't find that out until you're in your 40s and find out that you can only do that for so long. You can't sustain that intensity. So went to Wilma Boyd for travel and I flunked reservations because I transposed all the letters and they told me never to go into reservations. Of course that's what I did for 20 years. You just try to make it work and you say you're determined enough, you've got to hang in there and make things work.

Tell me a little more about the downside of that though.

Of making things work. Well it causes me to be real anxious and I took panic attacks. And you have to kind of cover up who you were you know. You had to walk around trying to be somebody you weren't and hide away from people. So it was very uncomfortable so and it made me frustrated because I couldn't be who I really wanted to be because I had to be that person that fit what they expected people to be. So there is a down side.

Well growing up did you have friends?

I had friends.

And in school, the bad kids you were in class with, were they your friends?

No. Seventh grade was probably my worst year. It felt like it was all out war against Jim. You know, they'd get in my locker and destroy my gym bag and you know. And the teachers tolerated it too. They used to... When I'd go down the hallways I'd get punched in the back and stuff and kind of like that rite of passage that "it'll make him tougher". Of course I was never allowed to hit anybody because I was six foot. So I never hit anybody but they were allowed to do anything that they wanted to me. My hero was Roberto Clemente. And when Clemente died there were a couple kids that would tease me cause he died. So it wasn't easy.

What to me is interesting is that all you hear this about Churchill High School because of all of people of Churchill from that area would say how great Churchill High School was and now it's Woodland Hills and it's not good anymore and it's so much better if they hear this story. It's really fascinating for me because of all the negativity that people pull their kids out of Woodland Hills and send them elsewhere when it was no longer Churchill.

Well they isolated us. They just put us in our own little corner and just let us sit there, that's all. I mean there are some teachers; I had a great teacher in 7th grade and 8th grade and 9th grade. Mr. Boone, that he kind of took me under his wing and if it wasn't for him I probably never would have gotten through school. He was a really great guy. So, I mean... If any teacher is like him, he had a lot of passion. He got me into football which helped a little bit, so that helped a little bit. In fact because I weighed 250 and in 9th grade I ran track and they used to tease me and I lost, I was 250 and when I was down I was done that season I was 169.

Wow.

(TRACK 2)

So I lost all that weight.

So when did you play football?

Just in 8th and 9th grade. So when I got to high school. It wasn't really my passion. I think the problem was I didn't know what my passion was because I didn't really know where I was really supposed to go. So I kind of lost some of that because I was just trying to be there but I didn't know where I was going. Like a motor boat without a rudder. I just wanted to get to the finish line.

So did you keep up any other sports during high school?

No. No, I got out of sports. I don't know, sports, I mean I like sports but I was, my passion was baseball but Roberto Clemente was something that was just real special to me. You knew that he wasn't just a great athlete. He was a great person and his demeanor, as much as the media used to slam him because he used to complain about his back and everything, you knew there was something really special about that man. Not that he could jump the wall and catch balls other people couldn't but you knew there was something inside him that was more special than what he could do, what you could see. And after he passed away sports wasn't the same anymore. So I guess I was more of a Roberto Clemente fan then I was a baseball fan.

I know when he died, my dad was so upset. It was like a family member died.

Right.

Yeah, it was kind of interesting.

Well that's what my grandmother couldn't understand cause I was what 14, 13 at the time and I was crying. And she said he didn't cry that hard when his dad passed away and my mom said "Well you don't realize that after his dad passed away that Clemente was kind of like his friend even though he never met him." But when things were bad I'd listen to the ballgame and so in a way Clemente helped me too cause when things were bad I can... You know people always say that the only thing constant is change but at least that to me was a rock of stability. Because he was Clemente and that really helped me. And you know there was somebody really good that was doing something really great. I didn't even realize they had a... on PBS they had this story about him and how great he really was and everything he had to overcome as an African American.

The other interesting thing is now everybody just praises Clemente but people don't remember how much the newspapers went after him all the time. The media, they just didn't like him.

They didn't and I think when he got \$100,000 a year they really gave him a hard time about it that he really didn't deserve \$100,000 a year. And today they'd give their eyeteeth for a baseball player that played like he did and was dedicated as much as he did. But he also thought that he deserved to give 100% and when he wasn't 100% he didn't play as much. But they didn't save themselves like they do today. Only pitch so many innings cause you don't want to burn out your arm because you want to get all that money.

So how did you end up in reservations if you were told never to go into reservations?

Well I went to Wilma Boyd and they had an airline call Presidential Airways out of Washington, D.C that needed reservation agents. Of course, like anything with my disability they said go to reservations. What they say and what they do are two different

things. In fact, I was going to get an F in reservations but I talked to the teacher so she gave me a D so I could pass. Everything else I passed. So I went to reservations in Washington and was hired... Because they had a Presidential Airways started in Dulles. And we went to training and of course I didn't do well on the test but the one instructor knew that I was doing well. She could tell that I knew what I was doing even though the test wasn't as easy as, she said, "You do a lot better than what your test shows." And then I worked there for two years and they actually made a coordinator for awhile so I put the flight information in and kept the logs on the passenger and load factors of the aircrafts for the five cities we were in and did help desk and had people that were sent to Portland, Maine and they wanted to go to Portland, Oregon and found out they were 2,000 to 3,000 miles away and they wanted to know why and it was our fault because we didn't tell them that it Portland, Maine and not Portland, Oregon. And I had a chance to bring a couple of planes back to the gate because we forgot some people. That's when you could do that. Had this lady call me from the airport and go, "I'm at the gate and you just left me." And I called operations and you hear the guy swearing and then the plane would go back to the gate and pick up these people. It was funny cause when the computers were down I was writing down all the flight information on chalkboards to keep everybody updated. One time I had American Airlines, cause we used Saver System, and I'm putting all the flight information in and somehow there was a glitch and our flight information was going on to the airports in Dallas and so they were getting our flight information and go "what are you doing putting that on?" and I said "hey, don't look at me I just work here." So they figured it out. But it was a lot of fun because when you're fighting, because United actually came in right after us and crushed us within like five years or six years. But there was a lot of enthusiasm and the new people would make mistakes but as long as you learn from your mistakes. So it was a very good educational, so it was like us against the world. Our president was one of the Vice Presidents of Peoples Express so we got the old education on upstart of an airlines and how we're going to beat the big guys and of course we know that deregulation doesn't work. But it's funny cause the chairman of American said the other day that deregulation doesn't work and I'm like I could have told you that a long time ago. But they still try to make it work. So it had a lot of upsides and a lot of downsides. When I was at Presidential Airways there was a gentleman. His first name was Al and he was an ex-priest so I don't know what the story was and he helped me and he was very nice. And we had a Presbyterian pastor that did interim work for when pastors moved. So he was on one side of me, Al, and the Presbyterian minister was on the other side and sometimes I'd get frustrated and go "oh, damn" and then I'd look at both of them and say, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. Forgive me." So then I'd get this dirty look and said "okay, okay". But we learned a lot. We learned about, at that time you had to be at least 60% full of load factor to break even, now you have to be 90% with the fuel and everything. Well I don't know about 90 but it has to be really high because with the fuel you can't make that up. So they're having a hard time. But it was fun.

Are larger planes just at the same at cost effectiveness as the smaller ones, do you know?

Well it depends how far they travel because your short haul routes are going to use more fuel than the long haul ones. And that was one of the problems with US Airways because we were all short haul. So they had to have a higher load factor because of that. I mean if you're going from here to California it will be, you have to make it worth, taking off and landing uses more fuel than flying.

I guess with gas rising so much wouldn't you just have smaller, little planes?

Well I think that's part of it; that could be part of it. I haven't been in since that.

And I don't know anything, so.

Which is nice but there's pros and cons on that too. Well now that corporate guys took over for the airline people it's a different ballgame altogether, because there's no customer service in the airline business. Cause the last few years I worked at US Airways they just wanted them on and off the phone as fast as they could. They had a line for dividend miles, sales, and shoppers. And if the shoppers called on the sales line and they waited for 45 minutes and came through and they were on the wrong line we had to transfer them (**TRACK 3**) back over and they had to go on hold again. And people that had problems, a guy I had who was allergic to peanuts. No a mother called in, this was back in the early '90s and she said her son was really allergic to peanuts and if there were any peanuts in the cabin he would go into anaphylactic shock. And back then you had to scream and yell, not scream and yell but. I called catering and call customer service and make sure there wasn't any peanuts and they didn't quite get it that if somebody opened this bag somebody could actually have a reaction. Of course now they do, but back then. But there's always a clause that if somebody brings peanuts on we're not responsible at the bottom so. And people that were claustrophobic they had a hard time because the one guy said that he wanted to be up front because he was claustrophobic because when everybody stands up to get off the plane he takes panic attacks. Sometimes you could help people and other times you could try to be advocate for them and it's like "too bad this is what he gets and that's it". So it was interesting work. Sympathetic but, you know, business is business.

So now you're out of the airline business?

Right.

So where did you go to school for photography?

It was called Ivy School of Arts. So they're out of business now but I think they were in until like '80 maybe '81. So it was interesting.

My sister went there.

Oh, did she really? How about that.

She went there and her husband.

How does dyslexia work with photography? There's no (? 2.02)

Well not when I'm looking at pictures there isn't. It's just the written word. But I think I get a little tired when I'm taking pictures but it's more I think pacing yourself. It's more of doing what you know, you know what you need to do but there's not somebody on the other side in way saying you've got to go faster. That was the one thing bad with the airline industry. Even though it was indirectly, we were never quick enough for them. Because they were always downsizing and cutting reservation centers because they used to have 11 reservation centers at one time and they were down to 3 and you're trying to pick up all the slack even though the internet was there. You know. You were never fast enough for these people.

I'm sort of curious about how you managed to put all that stuff into the computer and all the stuff you just talked about with the dyslexia. Did it take you longer, how did you do that?

The one thing that helped me a lot was that when I recapped things I always read back everything so that way if there were any mistakes they would catch it and I would say "oops my mistake". After a while it started to make me sick because I couldn't keep up any longer. I used to get angry at myself because it's just like, you know, it felt like you were in this race you could never win. I got into the airline business so I could help people and at the end it was more, no matter what you said you made somebody upset.

It wasn't your fault. It was really the airlines because they kept changing rules.

Right. But you get on the phone. There was one idea that they had that when you got answered the phone the first thing you asked them was which credit card will you use. Before they said one word and I don't know what genius came up with that but that used to really make people mad. It was like insulting. It's like I haven't even asked you where I'm going or anything and you want my credit card. So we didn't... I don't think that worked very well and a lot of people wouldn't even do it because a lot of people felt too uncomfortable with that.

I know I would have those, but it wouldn't be just US Air it would be other places too when you'd call and they'd ask for your credit card and I'm like "Why? I didn't order anything. I didn't do anything yet." And it is, it's offensive. It's really offensive. So how did you discover Working Order?

I was at Allegheny East and they got me a job coach and they suggested that I come here. So that's how I'm here. But they've been real helpful. The only thing is I'm not, I still take panic attacks. I have atrial fibrillation too which doesn't help.

What is that?

My heart just goes like 180 beats a minute. They don't know why but it does. I take medication but it seems like when I'm under a lot of stress it breaks through. So it's kind of like I'm trying to do this but then I'm scared because if I get under stressful situations then it breaks out and I end up in the hospital. At the end of US Airways I had, I still have like an outstanding bill of \$6,000 from hospital co-payment that I haven't paid yet. And that's the thing, it's like how do you jump in feet first, which I don't think if I had the atrial fibrillation I think I'd be doing more. There's that commercial on about people that have heart attacks that they have them working out and stuff so they can, because they're afraid. But with atrial fibrillation they never let me do that because the insurance never covered it; so it's like well take this medicine. And even with the dyslexia it's the same thing. I'm trying to get program called Word Cue that helps me with my spelling so I can be more proficient but they won't pay for it.

Who won't pay for it? The insurance?

OVR.

What's it called? Word Cue?

Word Cue, right. And what it does is when you're spelling it spells out like words. And then you can see it and actually if you point on it, it will tell you what it is.

So it prompts you?

Right.

(? 7.08)

Exactly. So that way I can be quicker and it's less stressful. But they said you have to get a job first and then they'll pay for it. Well that's kind of like putting the cart before the horse.

What about Dragon Dictate?

You know what, Dragon Dictate, it's cumbersome in a way because I can be more proficient with Word Cue I think. Because I can recognize the word when I see it, it's just the spelling. And it can work in different, if you have like different Windows, different applications, it can work for all of those where Dragon can't do that. Because I

know a girl that has a disability that works for Highmark and she's being let go because she's not fast enough and Dragon doesn't work with their program.

What does she do that they're letting her go? That's terrible.

She's customer service at Highmark but she's not fast enough for them.

So what's OVR doing for you?

Not much. Steve Shindler is my, he's really good it's just not him it's the people above him. And I was on the Advisory Board for OVR in Harrisburg for years. The Governor appointed me but it still doesn't do any good.

Wow, that's so interesting. Did they buy you camera equipment or anything?

No. They did pay for Working Order for awhile but they're not doing it now. So they're helping me a little with my reading. The problem with my spelling is or even with reading is that when I read for awhile then I fall asleep. And I don't know exactly why because I've never had anybody explain to me why but it's just like I get exhausted. And I had to do all kinds of things even in reservations just to keep myself awake. It's just like the concentration isn't there. Like I'm real intense at the beginning but by the end of the day that intensity is way gone.

Well because you use a lot of energy trying to do it.

Right.

Anybody would get tired out.

And that was the other thing when I was young they used to give me eye therapy for dyslexia. You know you're supposed to look at revolving... so it was kind of set up to fail anyhow because after I did the all the eye therapy I was supposed to be able to read and do all this stuff and (**TRACK 4**) and now we know it doesn't work but back then that was...

Well they still do eye therapy, it's changed from when you were a child. Much more sophisticated but not necessarily for dyslexia but for other...

Well I'm sure it helps a little bit but it's not like put all your eggs in one basket and then that would solve all your problems. And I get frustrated too because I like to be more intense and I like to do more and it just seems like I don't have the energy anymore. It's like the little engine that could but...

But you're taking medication. Do you think the medication slows you down a little?

I'm sure it does and I think the medicine for my heart slows me down, too. Of course they won't say that but I think those things have... Part of it is I can't be as intense as I want to be to a certain extent. But also I'm trying to find a way to make easier. That's why I like Word Cue and it's hard to explain to employers that I've got this software and I need this to be able to be productive. And they look at you like, you know, you got the plague. It's like "well we can't do that".

So where did you see Word Cue?

I went down to TRCIL and there was a professor from Pitt there and he's the one that knew about it. Because I went to Life's Work for Project for Freedom and they put me up there but I couldn't spell and I told them that and they paid all that money. That's why OVR is mad at me because I didn't, well I can't spell. And they'd instant message each other and it's not like in the old days where you could go over and say this is this. In the airlines they abbreviated everything so you could get away with it. It's just like "well okay". And then they wanted to put me in a call center. I don't want to work in a call center anymore because I can't deal with call centers. And now I'm in this class. Marty suggested I go to Life's Work for customer service in its call center and I said, "I'm not going to work in call centers because I can't deal with it."

What do you think was the most challenging part of your life so far?

Just trying to fit in. I always felt like I was out of the loop and trying to fit in was real hard.

What's something that you are most proud of?

Being a Big Brother and helping somebody else that, you know, needed a little pat on the back. But he helped me, too, because even the traveling out west. I always wanted to do that but that gave me a good excuse to do that. It was just the fact that you could do that. It was just the fact that you could show somebody that a lot of people even that have good educations don't always go out and see the west. We've been to the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. We took a whale watching out of, I think it was Port Angelo, and we had some rough weather and everybody's getting sick overboard and my little brother starts singing the song from "Gilligan's Island". I said "I don't know if that's appropriate now!" And this little 4 hour trip took us like 12 hours to get back because we had to run behind all these islands and stuff to keep out of the middle because it was a low pressure area that came in and the waves were... And then we went to Yosemite in March one year and we're going up the switchbacks up the Yosemite and the weather was getting bad and it's starting to rain and when we got to the top of the hill it was all ice. And there are no guardrails when you go up there and he yelling "Oh we're going to die!" And there's fog and when we got to the top you couldn't see and there's snow piled higher than your car and that's the only time I said "Jim, quiet."

How many years did you do that, Big Brother?

Nine years.

Nine years with the same kid?

Yeah. I was a Little Brother because they matched me with a Big Brother and I wanted to give something back because I knew how important it was.

Still in touch?

Yeah we are. I talked to him the other day.

How old is he now?

He's 26. Yeah, they get big fast.

Wow that was nice. You gave him a wonderful experience.

Yeah we had a good time. Plus we got to go to, we got some Pirate tickets and Steelers tickets a couple of times so we got to do that. And I went to his little league games. So we had a good time.

Was his mom involved at all?

Yeah, she was real supportive. She's the one that wanted him to be in the Big Brother organization. So she was real supportive. And his grandmother.

That's nice. That's really nice. I think we've got all the key questions, didn't we?

At the time, did you go to digital?

Yeah, I went to digital.

What kind of cameras?

D20. Or 20D, sorry.

What's that?

They're up to 40D now in the 5D so...

What's the make?

It's a Canon.

Those are very expensive.

Yeah they're expensive. When I went to photography school, you never thought film would go away. I just happened to sit in on a film maker's class and they were talking about all the high tech equipment and I said, "When I went to school if you had a motor drive you were really cool." Now that's all... You know.

You had a what?

Motor drive. So you could just keep on pushing and the shutter would go. Now that's nothing. The only thing I don't think a lot of people get dyslexia even though they know about it. Cause US Airways helped pay for some of my classes for reading but once I was able to read better they thought that that was it. They didn't realize that there were still other issues that I dealt with. And they never really addressed those. It was like "We did our part so..." And it's hard to find support for dyslexia I'm finding out. Because everyone has their own different ideas but they're not all... at least what I think is going to be more beneficial for me. So the fact that I'm still looking. I'm looking for a support group. 'Cause I, I did... [laughter in background] That's okay. I'm just used to being on the other side. I helped start a support group in the early '90s for awhile but it fizzled out. Cause I was still learning. I mean I know more then I did now. There's a lot of people I found out that had dyslexia and they wouldn't talk about it. People would call but they would never come because they were too ashamed of who they were. And that was another thing is that I was really ashamed of who I was, because I felt dumb and stupid.

Have you thought about working with some of the universities in the athletic departments because there are a lot of ball players who are dyslexic and I don't know if the coaches know how to deal with it.

I never thought about it but that would be great.

It's something to think about. My wife works at the academic media centers with the University of Pittsburgh and some athletes are.

There's a lot of talented... People with dyslexia are very talented but they just don't, you have to do it a different way that's all. Because when you go to school and you're supposed to do X Y and Z and everybody's supposed to do that but if you have to do a different way to do it they look at you like, you know, you're not allowed to do it that way because you have to do it my way. This is the way everybody did it for 99 years and you have to do it that way. But if you can't do it that way then there's something wrong with you; it's not the system.

It must really put your problem solving skills to work.

Yeah it does to a certain extent.

What year did you graduate high school?

1975.

So the right to education (TRACK 5) was just a year old back then. When we got the Right to Education Law the school district had to put the child in the least restrictive environment and they had to help you with whatever your deficits were.

Right.

But you just missed that.

Well I don't think even though, my 5th grade teacher is the one that found I had dyslexia but nobody ever really followed through for it. It was just like it was a whim. In fact when I was in the one class with all the trouble makers I made them put me back in the regular English because it was just a waste of my time. Even though the English I was in I wasn't able to keep up but at least I felt like I was learning something. The other class, you know, they just, I wasn't really learning anything. When I graduated I wasn't really proud of it. Everybody was like "Hey, I graduated" and I was like, "Well I'm out of here. Where am I going to go?" I wouldn't call it a milestone. It was a... I survived. It was kind of like getting out of jail. I made it through the system. It wasn't where I felt I had anything to build on. But that's the most important thing and I know people realize and they have more information that it's really important for people with children with disabilities that they are able to get the right information and it comes in all different kinds of ways. I don't think there's one right way. When I worked for Presidential Airways I had this lady that called me once and she was making reservations and during the conversation she goes, "You have dyslexia" and I was surprised because, you know... And I said, "How do you know I have dyslexia" and she said, "Because you're reading backwards." Her name was Sally Smith. She started the Lab School in Washington, D.C.

Well I'll be darned.

And by just making a reservation she knew I was dyslexic. But she was on the other side of town. She asked me if I would like to come for night classes but the way my schedule was I wasn't able to go. But she was very, she was very smart and she's the one that taught kids with dyslexia by acting things out. You know, if you couldn't read it, we'll act it out. And they learned as much as somebody that read it. So there are all different types of learning. So I think people with dyslexia, and there are a lot of very smart people that I think there's different ways to go about it. Just because you can't read the

book doesn't mean that you can't understand it by listening to it by tape, acting it out, going to see something in person. They'll get the same and once they have it they have it. It doesn't go away, it's just the way that they take in the information.

I thought I heard that Albert Einstein was dyslexic.

Yep.

He didn't start reading, he didn't even start speaking until he was five.

Right. And Henry Winkler is dyslexic. Jay Leno's dyslexic. So there's a lot of... Cher. They guy that owns Virgin Atlantic Airlines, he's dyslexic. Kinko's. The guy that started Kinko's is dyslexic.

What made you decide to be involved in our project and telling us your story?

Well, I think there's a lot of adults out there that feel ashamed for not being able to do the things that people expect them to do and people are called dumb, stupid. I've been called retarded. "You don't care; you don't try hard enough." And that's not the case at all and they're just as frustrated because they can't do it as the people that are telling them that. And then they blame themselves because it has to be them, it can't be the rest of the world. And the fact is that they're not and they deserve to be treated nicely and respected. And there should be a better way for people to get information because even though we're supposed to be a high tech society and have all this information it's still very hard for people. And even people that teach it don't always get it right. And there are always biases and people look down on you for all kinds of things. And that's just life. That's never going to change as much as we'd like to have a perfect world. But those people need to know that they are fine and they should try to keep pursuing what they want to do in life. They should never give up because they're worth it.

You're absolutely right.

And that's the one thing I promise myself that if I had to go through, I'm going to call it Hell, if I had to go through Hell then I'm going to make sure that the next person it will be a little easier. Unfortunately I can't wave a magic wand and solve it but if I could just let people know that they're okay and not to give up on themselves. Because I think people do. I think there's a lot, I mean not just for dyslexia, other disabilities, drug problems and self esteem problems. People write these people off. Even my Big Brother got mad at me because I just didn't get it. And it's not his fault, it's just people didn't know. Don't give up on yourself.

But it's tough as a teenager to make them understand that because they do get down on themselves and they say "I'm stupid" or whatever. But you just have to say,

“Don’t give up. No, you’re not stupid.” But they don’t believe, because you know you can’t tell teenagers anything. They don’t believe you.

I know. I have a niece and nephew that think they know everything. My niece is 11 and she thinks she knows everything in the world. I said “It must be nice to know everything in the world.” But no it’s true. It’s hard to be a teenager. That’s probably the hardest thing in life to be is a teenager. Any time but today especially. Because everybody wants to be popular and then if there’s something else that’s wrong with you, not really wrong with you just different... Thank you. And it makes it that much harder. But between the children that need to know that and the adults that have already been through the system. I heard on the radio this one time that there was a man and a lady that bought a house and the lady kept, she paid all the bills. And I think she was getting Alzheimer’s and she quit paying the bills and the house went into foreclosure. And at the same time the gentleman was building an addition on the house and they couldn’t understand why the gentleman didn’t realize that. But I know why. He was probably dyslexic or had a learning disability and his wife took care of all that for him but he didn’t tell anybody else. And they couldn’t understand that he was so dumb that he let his wife do that but I know why. If you didn’t know about learning disabilities you’d just call the guy really stupid and dumb ‘cause he didn’t... But his wife took care of that and he probably didn’t know how. But he was probably really handy with his hands and he was able to do things with his hands so that’s how he made a living and he probably made a very nice living being able to do that. People don’t realize those things.

You said you have a niece and nephew; do you have brothers and sisters?

I have a sister.

Is she younger than you?

Yes, she’s two years younger. But my niece and nephew keep me busy.

Do they live near you?

Yeah. If it wasn’t for them I don’t know, I... They’re the greatest.

You know I was just thinking about where people take pictures. Disney. When you said Disney. You know when you go through Disney World there’s always a photographer like “Can I take your picture?” You go on the Disney Cruise, walking on they take your picture, You’re on there they take your picture.

I remember one time Disney, Kodak was one of their sponsors way back in the 60’s. “In living color” and all that stuff. So they capitalized on that big time.

(TRACK 6)

Well thank you very much.

Well thank you for giving me the opportunity, I really appreciate it.