



**Voices**  
**OF OUR REGION**  
**THE DISABILITY CONNECTION**

Interviewee: **Mary de la Cruz**

Interviewee Number: **18**

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

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Mary Delacruz. Originally from Cleveland. Born and bred there. Big city girl. And had kind of like an interesting start because when I was born. My mom's doctors told her that I'd probably only live for 3 days.

Interviewers: And you lived beyond 3 days.

Mary: Yeah.

Interviewers: Amazing.

Mary: Isn't it?

Interviewers: And when you were born what did they diagnosis you as having?

Mary: Cerebral Palsy. My mom really didn't have a good job, so she put me up for foster care. But, I still saw my mom on weekends and stuff, so, it wasn't like it was total. I still had contact with her.

Interviewers: Your mom was a single parent?

Mary: Yeah. My dad didn't really have too much to do with us, you know. She took him to court for, you know, the child support, but... He's big child supports were like maybe \$15, \$20. Looking back on it, it's probably just that because she got the aid...aid from Crippled Children's that we got my medical stuff and whatever else. Maybe but, you know, as far as any contact with him, I only met him once. I mean I had a chance to meet his side of the family like, when I was really young. I would say it was about 10, 11 or something. Maybe not even then. But I was more comfortable with my mom's side of the family. And that in itself is unusual because from the time I was born till about '67, '68, nobody knew I exist. I was the world's best secret. But after '72 I, like I said, moved in with my mom full time. So, that's why I said, you know, you know my mom got me just, at probably the worst time, you know. Everything is peachy keen with the kids when they're small, you know. Then you get that, you know. So it's like, there was a lot of stuff she didn't want me to do. Don't come in the kitchen because you can't cook. Or, you know you're going to hurt yourself if you try to do this and that. So it's like, oh my, give me a break. I think, the more people told me don't do it or I can't do it. It's like, okay, I'm going to do it anyway. That's basically the way I do things. I don't like people making exceptions for me, except, you know, the obvious ones. It bugs me when they try to make exceptions, like, what you think I'm handicapped person? Hey. Forget it. Eventually my mom realized that there is stuff I can do, you know. But, being raised as an only child had its drawbacks. Because I really wasn't too outgoing when I

got to my mom's. My big thing was, you know, weekend, okay fine. Homework on Friday night. Then I'll just stay in my room watch TV, play records. Big social life. Don't even worry about what the other kids are doing.

Interviewers: Did you go to regular school?

Mary: I was in special ed from kindergarten through junior high school. But up until high school, that's where I went to school. Then I went to a normal, you know, quote 'normal school.' So that was fun. But in between there when I like was trying to figure out who I was, you know, and stuff, I had two real good friends. Their names Mike and Michelle. They lived in the neighborhood where my mom and I moved. My mom met her and said, 'You know, Mary needs somebody to be at the house when she comes home. Could you, you know, come up?' So she would come every day, you know, wait for me to get up and off the bus. I always say, 'She's not my best friend, she's my sister.' We did all the kinds of stuff. And after a while when Michael came into the picture, they dated, you know. I will call him like my big brother. They married each other. They had three kids. Dating was different. I think I actually dated more 'normal' guys than handicapped guys. Not that I had anything against it, but, like to have like one or two, you know that, maybe three that I dated that were handicapped. So I always joke around sometimes, 'You know, I'm an equal opportunity dater.' You know. When I was working. I was still in Cleveland. I volunteered with Jerry Lewis Telethon every Labor Day. And you know, when you're there for the whole shift, you know, you talk to a whole lot to people. He seemed okay but, you know, I mean I'm not going to discount somebody because, you can tell they have some kind of, you know, mental or physical disability. I mean, you know, that would be like, you know, me turning on me. I can't do that. I tried to just, you know, be as normal as possible. So it's just like okay, fine. We talked and, you know, and we dated and in the beginning it wasn't too bad, but it got bad.

Interviewers: And then you moved out of your home and moved in with him?

Mary: Yeah. And it was, you know, it wasn't really that far of a move because where my mom and I lived at that point. I was actually a two family house that it was like renovated to the one place was a real small studio apartment. And if you went through our kitchen, the back door, and the hall way, you could actually go over to this other little apartment.

Interviewers: Ohh.

Mary: But it was a move that my mom realized, okay, yeah. She can live on her own. She can clean house. She can do this and that, you know, because that one of the things my mom would say, 'You can't live on your own. Who's going to take care of you? How are you going to clean up?' But in the long run she found out, you know, I can do it. Him and I had our fights.

Interviewers: Did he ever hurt you?

Mary: Oh, yeah. He did. He'd pick me up in that same fight. Hold me like a battering ram, and rammed my head into the door.

Interviewers: Ohh.

Mary: Even if he didn't do anything more to me physically, you know, it just got to the point where I started cutting. And it wasn't for suicidal reasons it was just, I felt better once I did it, you know. It was just that release. I felt better. We got into some financial stuff and I was after him to give me the money and he went to get money from my mom so I would get off his back and he murdered her. With a baseball bat.

Interviewers: Ohh.

Mary: And...

Interviewers: Is he in jail?

Mary: Yeah. He got 20 to life.

Interviewers: When did that happen, Mary?

Mary: Sixteen...16, 17 years.

Interviewers: Seventeen years ago?

Mary: Um hmm. They even had me as, like a suspect for, you know, for a while. Anybody that knew me and my mom, knew that we fought like 99.9% of the time. But like I said, I acquire all that because of the way things started. I ended up here in Pennsylvania because my mom's side of the family is here. You know, trying to get a job up here, you know, that's always fun. I mean, how, , how do you do it? All your references and all your experience you got from a whole 'nother state. How many people are actually take your resume, read your resume, make all the calls. But they did. I worked at the Red Cross up in Beaver, actually Brighton Township. I worked there for about 12 years until they downsized. I was doing that still while I was going back and forth to court and what not.

Interviewers: You guys don't have paratransit up here do you?

Mary: We have the Dart bus. But the Dart bus only comes to Midland three days a week. And they say they can't come more because Midland's a rural area.

Interviewers: Well, Mary, what...Who has had the biggest influence in your life?

Mary: Probably Michelle and Michael.

Interviewers: What's been the hardest thing for you throughout your life?

Mary: The hardest thing throughout my life. I don't know. You know, I mean, when it was school, it was trying to prove to people, that I could do what everybody else did in school. When it came to working, it was proving everybody wrong that the best alternatives for me were either county workshops or to find a guy, get married, have a, you know. Have the whole nine yards. And now that I'm here, I don't know. I still kind of miss not being with a whole bunch of other handicapped people where you can just cut up and, you know, say things that are politically incorrect. I mean I have friends here but they don't know me like those that, you know, like, everybody in Cleveland knows me. And that's, you know, that's what I kind of miss here.

Interviewers: What's been your greatest triumph?

Mary: My greatest triumph. I think my greatest triumph has been being published as an amateur poet, both with poetry.com and also with into England. Nobel Publishing. I got a couple of poems published with them, so. But I want to top that and I actually want to be able to find some place where I can get paid for it.

Interviewers: Is there anything that you want to say on this tape that you haven't said yet?

Mary: Just that I think it's a good idea. I think that, there should be more opportunities so that we can get the word out that we're not as different as everybody thinks and even for rural areas, you know, to somehow find a way to make things more convenient for everybody. When I talked to a couple of my uncle's friends, who are politicians, and they were like doing the new court house. 'Oh, yeah. We're going to make it accessible.' Yeah. Well, if you need help, you know, call me. Or if you go like, when you go to the malls, you know, they're supposed to be accessible. But how do you get there? And that's what I was trying to tell these people down here. It's like, hey, you should get in touch with the people that you know. You could find out the people in Beaver County that are disabled. Get a hold of them. Have them test it out. That's what I tried to, you know, that's what I'd like to see.