



Interviewee: **Deborah Bobeck**

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Debbie Bobeck

My name's Debra Bobek. I grew up kind of like in Lawrenceville but I also grew up in Butler. We lived on a farm. We raised animals and we had a lot of gardening. I went to Slippery Rock University. I have a twin brother, David. I'm 54 right now. Deedee's younger than I, then we have a younger brother. Denise and Dale look like the twins because Dave is very dark and I am very light. I live in Sharpsburg now. Since 2000. What else?

So tell us a little about your disability.

I hit my head, April 28, 1985. It was a brain tumor and by hitting my head I precipitated the leakage and consequently that was a head injury. And so they operated two times. Once was to find out what it was and the second time was to put a shunt in. And because I had a bad doctor, you remember? He put a wrong shunt in and over the years I've had multiple problems. He put a cardiac shunt in instead of a neurological, he hit the optic nerve, damaged the cerebellum, and did something else. There's four ventricles and he hit the fourth ventricle which causes a whole lot of inner cranial pressure which I keep filling up in the brain with fluid so I have inner cranial pressure continuously. I hit my head at Zayres. There was a pyramid rack. I had seen doctors over the years because I had headaches but nobody would do anything. If they would had just did a CAT Scan or an MRI, back then I don't know if there were MRI's, or an EEG they would have picked it up but nobody picked it up. And by me hitting my head blew up the tumor, precipitated the leakage. So thank God I hit my head, they saved my life. I was 35 years old. I could be married June 22nd, the following month; a month and a half later. We went to college together. He owned Cranberry Floral. We were going to set up home in Slippery Rock because my dad had 25 acres there. Everything was set, the wedding, the what do you call it? The bridal shower was over, my gown was ready, everything was ready for... I'm thinking "oh I'm going to have this brain surgery." After I hit my head I went to Doctor. The next day he said "Let's get a CAT Scan." Got a CAT Scan. He called me at work and said, "You better sit down. Medically you should be dead or in a coma." The tumor was a fourth of the brain. So it's like taking this and that's how big it was. So what it did was push the brain that way so it messed up the optic nerve, and here was the cerebellum, so he took part of the cerebellum out. We have four ventricles, he damaged the fourth ventricle. So that's why the brain got screwed up. That's why I've got impulsivity. You figure the frontal lobe, yeah I'm impulsive. So I'm telling you before I got out of Harmarville for aggressive behavior, that's how bad the head injury, before my head injury I wasn't like that. See to even keep moving my eyes sets the cerebellum, sets the fluid off in my head. I was a phys ed person. I played a whole lot of softball. I can't run or jump anymore because my eyes go crazy and I blame it all on what that doctor did. So you've got all that anger built up in you. It's like I broke my hand in November. I punched a wall. You know, how do you get rid of all that. How do

you just get rid of all that. I didn't have that before I had my head injury. So I do art. I write for kids' stories.

Tell me about the wedding. What happened?

He walked out, said see you later. Walked out, said see you later. I called up there it was in June a couple of days before the wedding. Harmarville left me out for my wedding day. I wasn't allowed any time. I was a month at Central Medical and then six weeks at Harmarville, but the wedding date they let me out of Harmarville for my wedding day. Big deal. But everybody from my wedding party came to my house from my side. I went upstairs, got my wedding dress, rolled it into a ball, and threw it underneath my bed. All the bridal girls came. We had a little get together and it was like a somber time. What was I going to do, you know I was sad. So after I got out of Harmarville I couldn't walk. I was in a wheelchair for almost a year. And then we went up there and got all my stuff that was up there, up to his house. Because the wedding stuff was up there and put everything in the truck. He never talked to me again. Never talked to me. Then I'd get little cards in the mail "Love, Herb. XOXOXO." Now what kind of game was he playing back and forth? Then my grandmother died and then he sent flowers. At one point he came down to the house and he had sent me these purple flowers and I'm thinking "What's going on here?" and people said. "Debra, he's trying to get back together." And I thought "No, you can't. You can't. How can you?" And that was the end of Herb. I wrote a book. It's called "There is No End, Only a Beginning". It's three years of my head injury. It's in there, that's it right there. And throughout that whole book it talks about Herb. And just a couple of years ago a whole bunch of girls, a whole bunch of us were just sitting around and we were drinking a few drinks, you know. And they dared me to call him and I called him and I said, "Herb, this is Debbie." And he goes, "Hey, what's up?" He was so boring I thought to myself I could not live with that man. My life is so exciting now. I could not live with him.

So then you went through a lot of therapy?

Lots of therapy. Years and years of therapy. Memory training. Rehab Institute, St. Francis, Mercy. Memory, memory, memory. That's how all the children's stories started by memorizing words. Robin Roberts, lots of counseling to control the anger, control the memory, control all kinds of stuff. If I tried to get a job, where did I go, to Pitt. I went to Pitt to do some research and then I had a seizure and knocked over all these racks and they said I should have told them because if I would have told them that I had a head injury they would have worked with me. And then I went back to the Rehab Institute for some more memory training and then they said my highest potential which filling grocery bags in a grocery store. So I thought that was pretty ignorant. I think that's in the book, I'm not sure. Just putzied around, did the flea market, flower arranging, stuff like that. So I do a lot of flowers for Christmas, Mother's Day and Easter. We sell them on the corner. I can't do any money, no numbers and that. I'm very, very bad with numbers. I keep a telephone book. I can't even remember anybody's numbers. I can't do change.

You drive and I know that's sometimes difficult.

It's been revoked a couple times. Because of visual problems, because of seizures, because of balance. But I have a good lawyer that helps me and I keep going back for retesting and get it back.

You're on medication?

I won't take anything that's going to alter my brain. Cause if it alters my brain then I can't think then I'm not going to do anything that's going to do that. They gave me Topomax. Topomax helps, works with the inner cranial pressure and they had me on 200mg and that was starting to mentally slow me down. I'd rather deal with a little bit of headaches then be tranquilized.

So Debbie, you practically raised your nephew right? But he's lived with you for a long time. How many years?

Since he was a baby. Two years old. He makes sure the gas was off, he locks the doors. He's company. We don't cook as much because you have to remember that stuff is on. We do a lot of cereal. He does a lot of cooking. Macaroni and cheese.

So when did you start working with Working Order?

I think it's been about eight years, ten years. Maybe longer than that.

But, you were doing your stuff before you started working at Working Order?

I've only been doing art for like three years but children's stories is what I started doing. That's my passion, writing. Phyllis and I, we corrected the grammar and then we took them up to Print Tech. We had them printed out. Then when I had garage sales flea markets we would sell the book for \$5.00 and people bought them. So I did one called "Lost in the Strip" and I had 25 of them and when I had my art show I sold 22 of them. I have over 250 children's stories. I have poetry. I have crazy writings. Yeah, I've done a lot of writing.

So how did you start with the art?

I went to "Everyone's an Artist". They said we help people with disabilities and I went in there and said, "Can you help me? I have a head injury and I write." And they said, "Can you do any art?" "I can do art." And they said, "Bring us some." I brought them some. I said, "Will you help me get my stories published?" And they said "Bring us more art and write about it." I brought them 100 pieces and 100 writings and they said, "Let's have an art show." We had an art show, opening night I had, you remember? 200 or 300 people show up. People were lined up to come in. I said, "What about my

writings?" They said, "Well you were successful at the first art show let's do a second art show." I says "Okay" and did a second art show. They said "You've got to do art and write" and I said okay. I did it and had another 110 pieces. I said, "Are you going to help me get my stories published?" So nobody helped me get any stories published. I'm still writing. I'm still writing, I'm still writing.

4128 Butler Street. It's for people with disabilities. It's a very good place but now Milestone runs it and in order to go there and do the art you have to be a Milestone participant. As a disabled person, there isn't a place for a person with a disability to go and to show their art unless you're a Milestone participant.

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What's been the biggest struggle for you in your life?

Figuring out my medicine. I always take it wrong. Money's hard, figuring that out. Financial things are hard. Temper, temper is hard. I used to have Northern Area, you know about them? They would call and say they were coming over then nobody would show up. Then they sent this one girl one day. She ate my bananas, she ate my poptarts, she drank the little drinks out of the refrigerator. Get out. You know. I sent her home. Then this one girl comes. She's aggressive, she wants to argue. Get out of here. I won't argue with her. They sent one girl with a bandage one day. It's hard for me to bend down and do the tub so I need that. Then she wants to fight. I don't want to fight with you. If I ask you to do something, don't try to be aggressive with me. If you don't want to do it don't do it. Or they'll sit there and say, "Your house is immaculate." Just do my bathroom. Or they want to talk. I don't need anybody to sit and talk with me, you know. I don't need, what do you call it, friendship. You came here for a job. This one used to come and wear a bandage around her knee and then she'd say, "My leg hurts." and not do anything for two hours. You're getting paid to come here and do work. They wouldn't do anything. They wouldn't take any extra work. See like that stressed me out because you know. For two weeks they've been calling to come but I've been so stressed out because of how stupid they are. This one girl came. She's like all cut up. I'm like "What happened?". And she goes, "Oh, my boyfriend like cut me up." I'm like "What?". She said "I've been in jail for fighting." And I said, "You have a record?" and she goes "Yeah, I have a record." I'm like are they allowed to send people like that to

your house? And I called over there and I asked them, this Chris. And he goes, “Oh yeah, depending on what type of record they have.” And I’m thinking “Wait a minute, this isn’t right.”

What are you most proud of?

I want to say getting out of Harmarville. I hate Harmarville. And they revoked my license once and I beat them. I overruled Harmarville. Having the art show was important. Living independently is another one. Being independent. But you need help.