



Voices
OF OUR REGION
THE DISABILITY CONNECTION

Interviewee: **Patty Toth & Julie Donley**

Interviewee Number: **20**

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

Date of Interview: **May 16, 2008**

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Patti Toth

May 16th, 2008

Judy: So how old are you Patti?

Patti: No, ma'am.

Julie: Sixty?

Patti: No, ma'am.

Judy: Where do you live?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: A group home.

Judy: In Washington?

Patti: At my house.

Julie: At your house. Your house.

Judy: Who do you live with?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: Julie Ann and you.

Judy: Just two of you?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: She loves my dog.

(Patti mutters)

Julie: Shady.

Judy: What are you going to do today?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: You're going out? Me and you? This is our special event for today.

Julie: How long have you lived at the group home?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: A long time?

(Patti mutters and snaps)

Julie: Why don't you sing Blue Velvet for us? Do you want to sing Blue Velvet? Go ahead. You're allowed. You can do it.

(Patti sings)

Julie: When you were a little girl, that was your favorite song.

Judy: You like to sing?

(Patti mutters)

Julie: You're doing good.

(Patti sings again)

Judy: Patti, who's your best friend?

Patti: Her.

Athena: So, how did you guys meet?

Julie: When I became an employee here at UCP we had an instant attachment.

Athena: How long ago?

Julie: Eleven years.

Judy: Been in the group home all that time?

Julie: Yes.

Judy: Never an institution?

Julie: I believe she was at Western Center.

Judy: Do you have any sisters Patti? Or brothers?

Julie: A brother. What does your brother do?

(Patti stomps and says “pfffp”)

Julie: He rides a motorcycle.

Judy: Oh, does he?

Julie: And it hurts your ears. You love your mom. She’s at home.

Judy: Does she live in Washington?

Patti: Yeah.

Judy: And your brother?

Julie: Your brother has a baby. You have a nephew. You have a picture in your room and you kiss it all the time.

Judy: Haha.

Julie: Your dad is in Heaven. Your grandma and your dad are in Heaven.

Patti: Aww.

Julie: She expresses herself well and if she can’t get you to understand she’ll use gestures or her own signs. We were at a bake sale one time and someone walked by and they had a Superman symbol on their shirt and she was trying to say to me Superman but I couldn’t understand what she was saying. So she kept going “shhhh, shhhh” like signing Superman and I still could not understand what she was saying. So finally the boy walked by with the Superman shirt on again and she grabbed my arm and she pointed to this guy in the Superman shirt and she was saying “Superman. Superman.” And finally I was like “Oh, Superman. I get it finally.” But for the longest time she was trying to do everything she could do to get me to understand Superman.

Judy: Is it just two people at the group home?

Julie: Yes, one of her roommates recently passed away. There used to be three.

Judy: Was that traumatic for her?

Julie: It was. She had a hard time afterward. But she does have a concept of when people pass away they go to Heaven and she can verbalize that.

Judy: And does she come here everyday?

Julie: She's in the seniors program. Once people that attend the day program and they reach the age of 60 they go to seniors program which is a little more laid-back and geared towards older.

Judy: Is there live-in staff at the group home?

Julie: Yes. 24 hours a week supervision. A few years ago she was having a lot of problems with her gait and ambulation and a lot of fear when she was walking. She was reaching out for objects and was afraid to walk from one spot to another and actually dropping down to the floor and scooting and then we got her this walker and it did absolute wonders. And it pretty much enabled her to be able to walk again. She has some vision depth perception issues so the walker was an absolute God-send as far as enabling her to be able to walk again on her own. I think Patti has a wonderful quality of life just because she's so happy. I wouldn't want anyone to feel sorry her and people do have that mindset and I hear that a lot being in the field that it takes a special person to do that but it's just something that you do because you want to do it or you're driven to do it. And it's people like Patti who make my job so easy. Why are you making your mean nurse face? You're making scary faces. We play little games all the time and I have her make faces. I have her make a happy face and a scary face and her mean nurse face and I was running out of options one time and I asked her to make a stressed out face and she kept stretching and I said, "No, not stretched, stressed." And she had absolutely no concept of what stress was and I was absolutely amazed that she had no idea what stress was and I thought wouldn't that be absolutely wonderful.

Judy: What a blessing!

Julie: To have a life where you have no concept of what stress is. Patti, what's our favorite thing to do together? What do we like to do? Everything. We've gone on vacations together.

Judy: Did you?

Julie: She has a lot of empathy for others. I remember one time there was something wrong with me. I forget if I had my shoulder in a sling or my arm in a sling but Patti was absolutely distraught. She was so upset and constantly attending to me and I had to keep reassuring her over and over again that I was okay, that I was okay because she couldn't get past the fact that there was something wrong with me. The reason that I wanted to do this was because Patti's one of my absolutely best friends and she can brighten anyone's

day. I mean, you can be in a bad mood or when I am in a bad mood all I have to do is spend 5 or 10 minutes with Patti and she can turn a rainy day upside down. I guess I feel really at a loss for words when asked specific questions about why things are special or different in my regards to my relationship with Patti because I just kind of think of it as normal or every day because that's just the way it is. To me it's not exceptional or different because she's a part of my life like my family or my friends and this is not any different.