

## **My Point of View?**

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When I was first asked to write a short piece about being a librarian with a disability, I thought this would be a breeze. I am in a wheelchair. I have worked for the Nashville Public Library for more than 31 years. I should have plenty of fodder. But after thinking and thinking about this topic, I have come to realize that I really don't have much to say about my experience as a "disabled librarian."

I graduated with a B.A. in English in 1970 and a Masters in Education in 1972 from the University of South Florida. USF was one of the very few accessible colleges in the U.S. in 1966. Both my parents were teachers, and I had always planned to do the same work. But my job search in the schools was frustrating. Few schools were accessible, and even fewer were willing to take the risk of hiring a handicapped teacher.

I applied other places, but nothing was working out, until I applied to the public library in Tampa. Jobs were scarce then, and one of the more common reasons for rejection was over-qualification. (There was a story going around back then about a store manager at a fried chicken restaurant who had an opening for a cook. He had eliminated all the applicants with B.A.s and Masters Degrees, narrowed down the applications to only Ph.D.s and was making his final decision according to their astrological signs!) The library personnel manager told me that they were experimenting at one of the branches by putting all the books on the lower four shelves, They would see if I could handle the work physically (primarily shelving, working the circulation desk, etc.), and if I could, I had the job. I worked there about a year, and loved it.

When I moved to Nashville, I interviewed for jobs at the publishing houses and universities, but superstitiously kept the library "in my back pocket." I had no money, but wanted desperately to be independent. I put off applying to the library and kept it as my last option, because if they turned me down, I knew that I would have to give up, return to my small hometown in

Georgia, and LIVE WITH MY MOTHER! (She and I both agreed that would be bad, very bad.)

When I finally applied to Nashville Public, I learned there was a new service in the works. The WPLN Talking Library, a radio reading service for print-impaired individuals in Middle Tennessee, was being developed. I had earned extra money reading for and tutoring visually impaired students in college. I had the required degrees. They had a CETA position that paid a little over minimum wage, and I was thrilled. They offered me the job, and I took it.

Thirty years later, I am still here. I have gone through a lot of changes. In the 80s I earned my M.L.S. at Vanderbilt. I have over the years moved from assistant program manager, to program manager, and am now the manager of the Nashville Talking Library. But as I look back, I cannot see how anything would have been substantially different had I not been disabled. There have been a few issues about accessibility: what to do when the elevator broke; early accessible bathroom stalls with curtains rather than doors, etc. Overall, I think that a sense of humor, concerned supervisors, and supportive co-workers have made the way successful and meaningful. And as I look back, I see that the key for me, as for almost everyone else, is getting the job, and then proving oneself. I am still grateful that the Public Library made that possible.