

# Invisible Children

REPORT OF THE  
Joint Conference On Children, Images and Disability  
HELD ON 1 MARCH 1995



Edited by Richard Rieser  
ORGANISED AND PUBLISHED BY  
SAVE THE CHILDREN AND THE INTEGRATION ALLIANCE



# Invisible Children



Rakes Progress Hogarth No 7.9



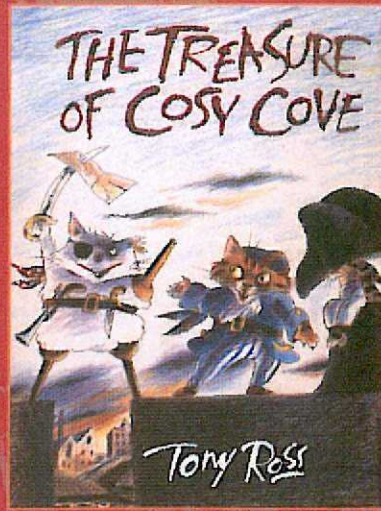
The Cripples P Bruegel.13a



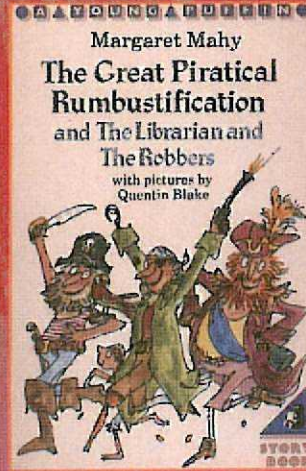
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Treasure of Cosy Cove Tony Ross 1989.21



The Great Piratical Rumbustification and The Librarian and The Robbers with pictures by Quentin Blake.22



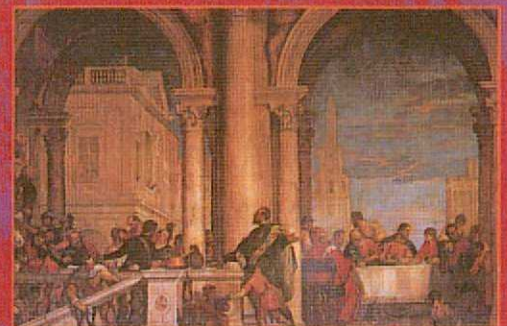
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REPORT OF THE  
**Joint Conference On Children, Images and Disability**  
HELD ON 1 MARCH 1995

Edited by Richard Rieser  
WITH SUSIE BURROWS

ORGANISED AND PUBLISHED BY  
SAVE THE CHILDREN AND THE INTEGRATION ALLIANCE

ART DIRECTION AND DESIGN BY  
CAROLINE GRIMSHAW

## ■ Foreword

When I was asked to write a foreword at first I was flattered, then terrified. What would happen if I used the wrong term to describe someone's disability? Surely there were others more suited than I was. Then I realised it was at people like me that the conference was aimed. People who needed enlightening.

I was very happy to be asked to attend Invisible Children. But, in retrospect my initial reaction was smug. Deep down I believed that I knew the needs of disabled people. By attending the conference I was supporting a cause that needed attention. I didn't feel I needed to be educated; I thought I was already familiar with the issues.

How wrong I was. All the speakers were excellent. Their openness and honesty struck me and they were incredibly informative. What came out of the conference was an eye-opener. I was shocked to see how disability was often used as a metaphor for evil in books, television and film. We even saw examples of Hollywood adaptations of traditional children's stories where the scriptwriters had given the evil character a disability that had not been there before. Having myself read some of these books and seen some of these films as a child I know how children may sub-consciously associate disability with evil and the other common stereotypes we saw portrayed. This clearly continues in all forms of media aimed at adults.

As adults we can do something to prevent indoctrination of this sort. It was very encouraging to hear people in positions of "power" who wished to start to change this: television commissioner's, children's book publishers etc. For without doubt it is with children that we have to look to bring about changes, to let them have positive images of disability.

In my line of work I read a lot of scripts. Before the conference, in the few scripts that contained disabled characters I realise now that I just accepted their portrayal and didn't question whether it was accurate or not. I realise now that the portrayal of disabled characters should not just be left to "issue" based films such as 'My Left Foot', 'Rain Man' etc. but there should be disabled characters portrayed in films as they are in society, as individuals in their own right.

It is vital for awareness to be raised. People came out of the Conference optimistic, knowing that there is a way forward. This success has continued with the 1in 8 Committee, being born out of the Conference, dedicated to improving the media image of disabled people.

DIXIE LINDER PRODUCER SARAH RADCLYFFE PRODUCTIONS

## ■ Foreword from Save The Children

Save the Children welcomed the chance to work with the Integration Alliance to organise the Invisible Children Conference. We believe that all disabled people have a right to full and equal participation in social, economic, educational, cultural and political spheres of life. For the children and families with whom we work this means working to remove barriers which prevent the integration of disabled children into local services and enabling families to exercise choices in all aspects of their lives. Save the Children believes that the negative way disabled people are often portrayed in images available to children and young people re-inforces discrimination and contributes to the barriers which exclude disabled people and deny choice.

The chance to work with the Integration Alliance in organising the Invisible Children Conference was an exciting opportunity, although given the number and variety of image makers we were inviting it sometimes seemed a daunting task. We were impressed by the commitment for change that came out of the conference. We now look forward to the positive recommendations which were made being put into action to achieve real benefits for all children.

JOYCE CONNOR ON BEHALF OF SAVE THE CHILDREN UK DEPARTMENT  
INVISIBLE CHILDREN PLANNING GROUP

The Integration Alliance is a national membership organisation controlled by disabled people, and open to anyone who wishes to campaign for the repeal of the law which requires Local Education Authorities to segregate children with 'special educational needs' by use of compulsion and prosecution of parents who do not comply with such placement. The Alliance believes that this law is preventing the restructuring of schools and support services which is necessary to build an Inclusive Education system, as well as causing unnecessary anguish to families. Part of the struggle for inclusion is changing the image environment of, and attitude towards, young disabled people.

THE INTEGRATION ALLIANCE  
UNIT 2, 70 SOUTH LAMBETH ROAD, LONDON SW8 1RL 0171-735 5277



# Invisible Children

## Joint Conference On Children, Images and Disability

### ■ Rationale

Almost from birth onwards children are exposed to images of humanity in all its form and diversity and soon positive or negative values are also communicated. These collections of attitudes can be woven together and presented as a stereotype. These are often associated with certain visual images. They have little to do with real human qualities but can form the basis for strongly held prejudices against disabled people.

**SINISTER OR EVIL** Historically, impairment and disfigurement has been viewed in many cultures as a divine punishment for wrong doing or as a representation of evil. Although no longer believed by most people many children's stories still equate good with looking good and bad with disabled, ugly or disfigured. The classical tales of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Anderson are full of such characters e.g the witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' or 'Rapunzel' or 'Rumpelstiltskin'. This theme has been developed in children's films and literature. J.M.Barrie's 'Peter Pan' has a vengeful Captain Hook that Spielberg made more frightening in 'Hook'. In Collodi's 'Pinocchio' the Fox and Cat end up disabled as a punishment for their wrong doing.

**IN COMICS** In Comics the 'baddies' are often deformed or weird looking and with the exception of the 'X-Men' the heroes are all super fit or strong and handsome or beautiful. T.V.Cartoons have drawn on these images and reinforced the idea.

**PITIABLE AND PATHETIC** Disabled people are often shown as pitiable or pathetic for example Clara in 'Heidi', Tiny Tim in 'A Christmas Carol', or many images on Charity posters. We often die or are cured. We cannot be shown just being ourselves.

**BUTT OF JOKES: FIGURE OF FUN** Being seen as a figure of fun because of difference is common e.g. 'Mr Magoo'. People of diminutive stature are often portrayed as clowns or laughable as in The Time Bandits and this can lead to name calling and bullying.

**INVISIBLE: JUST NOT IN THE FRAME** Most commonly disabled people do not feature at all. Most books, comics, films and TV programmes which are aimed at children have no representations of disabled people. When we are portrayed we are unlikely to be shown as just part of life. We are more likely to be stereotyped or boring.

**TOYS AREN'T US** Toys too follow this pattern. Everyone is perfect in form unless they're baddies. Pirates will have either a hook, an eye-patch or a wooden leg and sometimes all three. Monsters and Aliens, even Mini Aliens, have many weird forms as do witches.

**THE OUTCOME** The result of all this is for non-disabled children to be scared of disabled people and for disabled children to feel they have no part to play in life.

**CAN THINGS CHANGE?** Things can change. Thirty years ago there was very little representation of Black people in children's books. Where they did feature, the portrayal was usually racist. Now this is not considered acceptable.

**DOES ALL THIS MATTER?** Yes it does. These images help to build up and reinforce negative attitudes to disabled people which translate into discrimination in life. There are very few good portrayals.

#### CONFERENCE CHILDREN'S IMAGE MAKERS TO SET A NEW AGENDA

We believe the time is right to bring together children's image makers and set a new agenda of inclusion in a non-stereotyped way. We want to invite Authors, Illustrators, Publishers, Animators, Cartoonists, Radio, TV and Film Makers, Advertisers, Computer Game & Toy Manufacturers, to come together with disabled people to make that agenda in an exciting one day conference.

DECEMBER 1994.



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## Please note

ALL THE IMAGES ARE NUMBERED AND THESE NUMBERS CORRESPOND TO THE NUMBERS IN THE TEXT.

COLOUR IMAGES ARE ON THE INSIDE FRONT, INSIDE BACK AND BACK COVERS.

THEY ARE DENOTED BY THE PREFIX 'C', IE. (C6).





# The History Of Disabling Imagery

RICHARD RIESER

RICHARD RIESER IS A DISABLED TEACHER, CHAIR OF INTEGRATION ALLIANCE, TV CONSULTANT, WRITER AND PARENT.

I want to start by setting the scene on why we are having this conference and what we would like you to think about. There are four speakers after me who are going to go into detail about other things. We called this conference because for a number of years many of us have been worried, as Disabled People, about our lack of representation in the media. In fact in nearly every programme that we see, every book that we read, every paper that we pick up, every comic that we saw as children, we are absent, except when we are used in what we call a stereotyped way, not as we are, but as society has grown to think disabled people should be treated and portrayed. I am going to develop those

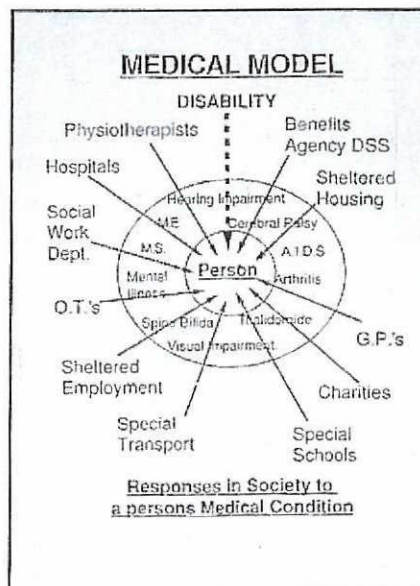


Disabled people facts and figures. 1

ideas in a minute. Let's look at how many disabled people we are talking about first so that we can get some idea. These statistics (1) came from the Government after about six attempts by disabled people to get their own civil rights legislation. You may be aware that the fourteenth attempt is currently underway in Parliament. Now we are not going to be talking about that today and whether that Bill goes through or not. We hope it does and we hope that people will be pressuring their MPs of all complexions to vote for the Civil Rights Bill and vote down the Government's Bill. Whether that happens or not, there will still be a huge residue of the way that people think about disabled people. This we all get, disabled or not, from our conditioning in the societies we grow up in, which is why we called this the Invisible Children Conference.

There are, according to Government statistics, 14.2% of the population who have an impairment. I want to use the difference between **disabled** and an **impairment**, which is a loss of function, either physical or mental. Loss of part of your body, or loss of the use of part of it, or not being able to use part of your mind in the way that other people use their minds, is an **impairment**. We are **disabled**, not by that, but by the problems that society creates for us. It hasn't designed itself, it hasn't organised itself, to include us, and the only way we can be included is by behaving like non-disabled people. So in these statistics the question they asked people was, "What things do you find difficult?" Now, most disabled people spend our whole lives overcoming things, because things are designed in the wrong way. So this is a great under-estimation of the number of disabled people in the United Kingdom. At the bottom here we have a figure which shows that **two-thirds** of disabled adults, of working age, are currently unemployed. It's not just Civil Rights that are going to change that, it's attitudes and the **attitudes that people have towards disabled people are very much coloured by how they see them represented**. So I want to go on now to talk much more about that.

We are, of course, fighting as disabled people and we welcome allies in our struggle to change things, but we have to go back to see what it is



Medical Model. 2

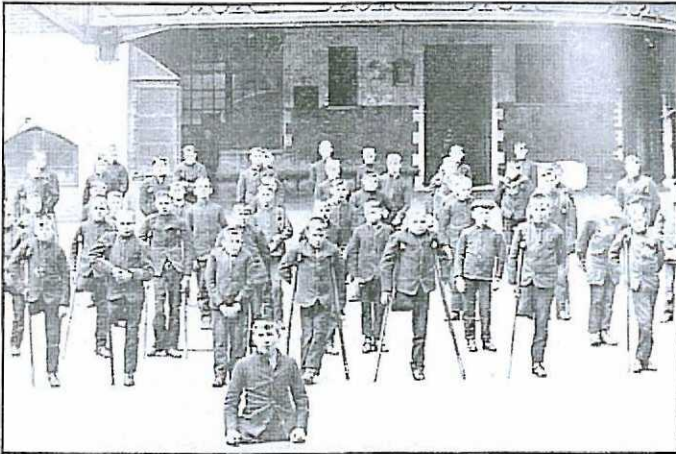
that we are fighting. (2) This diagram is in your pack. It is called the "**medical model**". This is not anything that you will find out there but, it is a way of looking at our experiences as disabled people and the way that we have been treated, certainly over the last 150 to 200 years. We feel that we are at the centre of this



## Setting The Scene

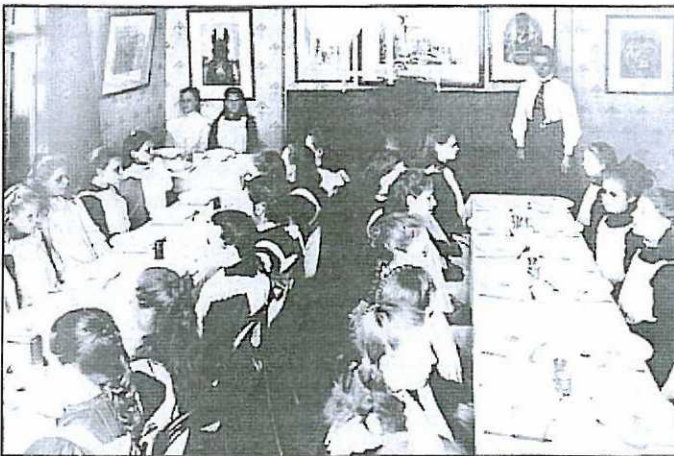
great system that is seeking to alter, change and cure us, to make us the same as non-disabled people. We are identified by a diagnosed difference, our impairment. A great deal of time and money is spent on trying to change us and make us fit in. Some of that is important, because without it some of us wouldn't be alive, but a great deal of it is an absolute waste of time and money and actually creates huge gaps between us and everybody else.

In education, for instance, for many years in



Barnardo's Elm Court 1900's. 3

this century and the last, if you were a disabled person you were sent to a different school (3) (here physically disabled), for no other reason than it was decided that physically disabled children, children with learning difficulties, blind children, deaf children, should all be sent to separate education.



Blind School West Norwood 1908. 4

Here is another one (4); blind girls all being educated together in a very strict regime, and the strict regime was a lot about training because it wasn't thought that many of us were capable of doing the things that everybody else could do. The culture that we are in, we often feel, characterises us in a number of different and false ways. These are what we call **stereotypes**, which are bunches of attitudes that structure the way that people think

about us. You've got the **super-cripple or triumph over tragedy**. I often think of myself as that, trying to do things I find ridiculously difficult, when I could actually ask someone else to do it. As a Polio survivor I was brought up to do that.

We were brought up, to overcome our 'disability', not to say "sorry I can't do that, I don't want to queue up here for dinner for an hour", or "I don't want to go round the supermarket, I want someone to actually go and fill my basket." Unfortunately there isn't anybody to fill my basket, so one just does it. It has a terrible effect, both on your body, trying to make it do things it won't do, and also on your mind. It is not a very healthy thing!

Another stereotype is that we are often seen as '**our own worst enemy**'. 'It's really all our own fault', 'if only we'd stop grumbling', 'with a chip on our shoulder' and 'what are we complaining about after all?' **Evil or sinister** I shall come back to. It is a very basic and strong one. We are often **laughable**. We are also seen as **objects of violence**, that it's alright to have a go at people. There has been a resurgence with the new fascist right in Europe, a resurgence of attacks on disabled people, just because they are disabled. So that is still on the agenda and is still something that is happening for groups of disabled people. It can often be less than an attack. It can be unkind words that are said to you. These are violent in the sense that if someone shouts out something that is offensive to you in the street, that is a violence towards you. Nobody asked them to do it. They just feel that it's alright to say these things. We are often seen as **pitiable and pathetic** which I am going to say more about. We are of course, **non-sexual and don't have relationships**, although we are 840,000,000 in the world and many of us have children, families and relationships and some of us don't, in exactly the same way as non-disabled people. But we are seen as the ones that don't.

We are often a **burden** and, at times of economic stress, that becomes more so. In Germany in the Third Reich there were whole films made by propagandists there to show how we were a burden on the state, the 'useless eaters', (5) and

we should be got rid of. In the end we were. That argument is coming forward again in this country at the moment with cut backs in the welfare state. There was a



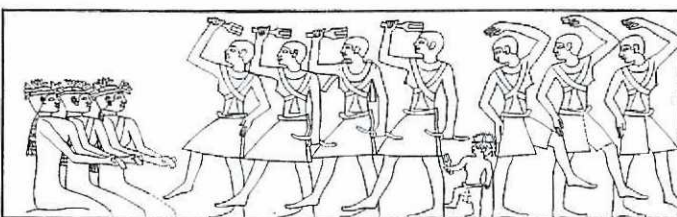
Figure 36. "The Prussian Government Provides Annually the Following Funds for: a Normal Schoolchild (125 RM); a Slow Learner (573 RM); the Educable Mentally Ill (950 RM); and Blind or Deaf-Born Schoolchildren (1,500 RM)." This illustration depicts the burden of maintaining the socially unfit. From *Volks und Rasse*, 8(1933): 156.

Prussian Government ad 1937. 5



poll on television the other morning about how many people thought the doctor was right to kill off two disabled kids. 85% of people in Britain thought it was fine. Well, that is part of the history, part of the conditioning that we are up against. I want to go into some of these things and go right back to the beginning of 'western civilisation' where we supposedly started. I'm being western orientated here, I am aware that there were much more sophisticated cultures in other parts of the world and I can't say what their attitude to disability was, some were better and some were worse but, in our culture, which largely draws on the Greeks and Romans, the Greek and Roman attitude was the body beautiful which is personified here by this slide of a **discus thrower (C6)**. The cult of the body beautiful was put into practice, particularly amongst the patrician classes, the ruling classes in Greek and Rome. Aristotle wrote 'that you should take your child off if they are imperfect and get rid of them'. And you didn't become a child until 7 days after you were born, so this allowed time for this to happen. It didn't always happen as parents do love their children and so quite a few disabled people got through, but in the representations on vases and tablets, sculptures and so on, you will find very, very few disabled people.

There were a few odd exceptions. The blind seer who somehow had this extra sense that could find out about things. There were Dwarves, or little people or people of diminutive stature, who were venerated in ancient Egypt and you can see them in hieroglyphics (7), but apart from that, generally we had a pretty bad time in the first civilisations. Then

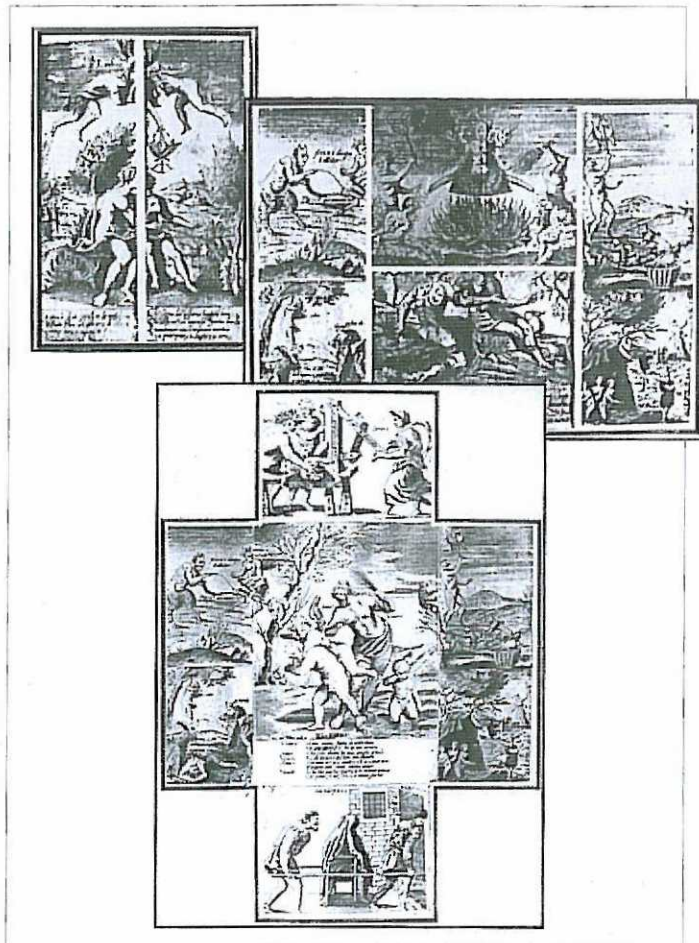


Dwarves in Ancient Egypt Tombs Giza. 7

after that, things didn't go too well in Europe. It declined after the Romans, if we can call it declined, to a sort of feudalism, and until later with the Renaissance, we didn't have much going on in terms of imagery that we can identify. I will go back to some of it in a minute.

The next period which sees the body beautiful as very important is the Renaissance and here (C8) we have the **'Duke of Urbino'**, there are several well know paintings of him. He is always shown in profile. Why? Because he had a facial disfigurement on the other side and so you will never see him full frontal, he's always on the side.

He has his land and his wealth to show his status which, of course, is what pictures were used for. Hogarth in **'The Rakes Progress'** (C9) shows that there is a moral question here, that at the end of the day you err far from the good path and you will be punished, the Divine punishment. Here he ends up in the Bedlam madhouse where rich people paid a few pennies at the weekend to come and



The Dangers of Love. Transformation print 1600. 10

laugh at the inmates. There are many, many examples in the cartoons and drawings of the Renaissance period and, going right back, of disabled people actually being the product of moral judgements. (10) **'The Dangers of Love'**. You have two lovers, this is from 1600, and then the next part of the cartoon is the Devil pouring burning oil



Lazarus and Dives. 11



## Setting The Scene

on them and they have become cripples. Why? Because they were lovers.

There are many Biblical references. This is Lazarus who, shown here in a medieval church sculpture(11), according to the Bible, is much more likely to get to Heaven than Dives who is a rich old person shown eating a lot of food. Dives won't give him anything and so an angel takes him up to heaven. But the Bible faces two ways. The **Book of Leviticus** says that if you are a disabled person you can't be a priest. But charity is an important thing. Penitence. Here (C12) we have a group of **penitent 'cripples'** trying to get alms and, if they wander around long enough, feeling humble enough, then maybe they will make it in the next life. So it's a very strong message that is coming across. Here (C13) a **leper with his bell**. One easily forgets in this high technological age that we are in, what it was like to live 200, 400, 600 or 800 years ago. People didn't understand any of the things that we understand in terms of where disease came from, what you could do about it. For example they didn't understand that dirty water caused cholera. Disabled people were often scapegoated for the ills of society as in this Breugel painting (C13a) "**the cripples**" where the fox tails denote wrong doing.

Plague – there were thousand and thousands of people wandering around Europe beating themselves, the flagellants, to try and make

Susan is just like any other 10 year old...



but she lives under the shadow of diabetes.

**THE SHADOW OF DIABETES**

**BRITISH DIABETIC ASSOCIATION**

31 Queen Anne Street London W1M 0BB Telephone: 01 323 1531

The Shadow of Diabetes. 14

themselves more holy so they didn't get the Plague. That was the thinking that people had, so if you were different you were somehow marked. This comes right through to the present day. We have here a charity advert (14) '**the shadow of diabetes**'. This girl probably didn't even know she was in a shadow until she found herself up on the billboards of England for three years. She probably thought

she was just injecting with insulin everyday and that was alright but now she is suddenly living in this shadow. And to make quite certain that the

religious message is there, if you look at any medieval church on the outside are the deformed ones, **the gargoyles**, and on the inside are the perfectly formed pictures around the crypt. Witchcraft got linked in with disabled people in 'The Great Witch Hunts' of 1480 to 1680. The '**Malleus Maleficarum**' – '**the Hammer of Witches**' (14a) – has whole sections

## MALLEVS MALEFICARVM, MALEFICAS ET EARVM

hæreticū fiamēā conterens, EX VARIIS AVCTORIBVS COMPILATVS, & in quatuor Tomos iustē distributus,

*PRIMO DE PROBIS FACTIS DEMONVM, veritatē, praestigias eorum deservit, superstitias Stragemagorū ceremonias, heredes eorum cum illis conjunctis, & exaltatione magice tam peccata sicut dignificatione, & punitione compelluntur. Tertio praxim Exorcismorum ad Damones, & Stragemagorū maleficia de Christi fidelibus pellenda, Quartas vero Actum Dæmonum, Benedictionales, & Exorcismales continent.*

TOMVS PRIMVS.

*Indicet Actorem, caput, & resimpson dicitur.*

*Libro excellenti, in dicitur post modum expogit, & cuius accesse 179*

*Demonum & Complementum artis exorcisticae.*

*Pro sua utilitate in quibus Physicis, vel dæmoniacis fuerit spiritus, necesse est ut*

*Leahici cop. 10.*



Sumptibus CLAVDII BOVREGAZ, sub signo Mercurij Galli. M. DC. LXII. CUM PRIVILEGIO ALCIS.

Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches. 14a



Woodcut Three Witches, Earl of Rutland. 15

in it on how you can identify a witch by their impairments or by them creating impairments in others. We have a diagram here from an original testimony, (15) – a woodcut, which clearly shows one of the witches using crutches. There were three witches who were hung after an Oxford trial, one of them was put on trial because she was a disabled person. This comes through in the folklore of Britain and Europe. Here we have an illustration from the original Grimm's Fairy Tales; the witch in '**Hansel and Gretel**', (16) deformed, ugly and disabled with a stick. If you go into any newsagent you will probably find this book for children,





Hansel and Gretel. 16

'Hansel and Gretel', courtesy of Ladybird (C17), the witch with the crutch and so on. So, from a very early age children are fed this diet – one of the very first books that they may ever see. Or a bit older; Long John Silver – pirate (C20), or Captain Hook in 'Peter Pan' (C18). All these disabled pirates that we have don't really fit with history

because pirates had a system of simple social security long before anyone else. They had common shares in the common purse so, if you got injured during the course of your endeavours, you would retire to a tropical island with as much money, drink and, presumably women, as you wanted and you were unlikely to go on trying it as an impaired pirate. Yet what we find is that in the 19th century a number of writers become obsessed with pirates being disabled. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that Robert Louis Stephenson was himself a disabled person, and had to give up his chosen career and go and live in a warm climate because of his lung condition – who knows? (C19&C20).

He certainly wrote some other books that leave us with horrific images, 'Jekyll and Hyde' and 'Black Arrow' which also have disabled people in them. He obviously had some hang-up about it. We find this with a number of writers who seem to do this. Of course, the impaired pirates go on and perhaps for young children it is one of the most



Dick Tracy cartoon. 23

poignant images of disabled people. They will have eye patches, hooks, prostheses. Here we have a cat with three wooden legs (C21) 'The Treasure of Cosey Cove'. This came out recently. Another one with pirates with all three impairments is Quentin Blake's 'The Great Piratical Rumbustification' (C22).

This goes on. You may have seen this with your kids over Christmas – 'Dick Tracy' (23) you notice how all the baddies were disabled, deformed or had speech impairments, and all the good people were beautiful, blonde or handsome and dressed in lovely white clothes? A very powerful image seen by millions of children and their families.

Or take the film 'Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'. I took my little boy to see it last year. I went home and checked several editions of Mark Twain and none mention Pap having a leg iron, but Hollywood gave him a leg iron for extra measure. He was a nasty character, sure, he beat up his kid, he drank but he wasn't disabled. Hollywood thought he should be.

This goes on with science fiction and the cartoons that most children watch every Saturday morning on their televisions. This is the 'X-Men' (C24). Of course Professor Xavier is disabled himself. He creates these 'X-Men', who are mainly women, and they fight the mutants who are too



Henry VIII Jester, William Somner. 26

ugly for humankind to accept. Except Callisto (C25) who has only got an eye patch but she has made herself the leader of the mutants and they live underground, a bit like Vincent in 'Beauty and the Beast' in the subterranean New York, if some of you have seen that one.

We have also been figures of fun. Here (26) is Henry the VIII with his jester, William Somner, a disabled person or, as they were called then, a



# Mr. Magoo



Mr Magoo. 28

hunchback, of course a figure of fun. There are many others and the obligatory dwarves in the court pictures, all to make people laugh (C27). But have you ever thought why Snow White finds the dwarves outcast in the forest? (C27a) Today we are still doing it, people are laughing at 'Mr Magoo' (28). In 'The Vicar of Dibley' they think it quite alright to make jokes about blind people. That programme went out only a few months ago. It's still with us in very much the same way.

Or we are a symbol for people without power.



Louis XIV cartoon Romeyn de Hooghe 1701. 29

Here's **Louis XIV** being challenged by Dutch sea power (29). Louis XIV didn't use crutches but he is drawn here as if he did because France is losing its power. In 1700 you might accept this. In 1991 **The Guardian** was doing the same thing (30). 'Britannia, Britannia rules err um err um the waves' Britannia wrecked in a wheelchair. And there we have some women down the bottom, some of whom are on this platform, saying "the Guardian's got it wrong, women in wheelchairs are powerful". And eventually they took it down. No one is immune to this ideology and imagery.



Disabled women protest December 1991. 30

What doesn't come across is the fact that over the years disabled people have been struggling their whole lives, not just now. This is in the 1920s, when unions of disabled veterans were formed all over this country, had sit-ins, occupations, in order to get the legislation which the Government is about to take away, the so-called 3% quota system and the registration of disabled employees. In the 1920s and 30s there were literally hundreds of thousands of First World War disabled veterans with no rights at all in this country. So the first disability movement in this country was there and we owe them a great debt. (31)

Other parts of the world are more positive. In **Nicaragua**, disabled people were part of the people's revolution there. This was a popular poster at the time (32). We want a different model, we call it '**the social model**' (33) and we'd like you to think about it today. The problem doesn't rest with us as disabled people, regardless of our impairment, whether we are blind, deaf, hearing impaired, whether we can't walk, or walk with a stick, whether we have a hidden impairment, e.g. diabetes, heart condition, you name it there are thousands of them: that isn't the problem. The problem is that most things are designed not for us, most images don't include us and most attitudes are formed by fear of us because of unfamiliarity. It is those things that have to change. In particular, here today we are looking at how you, as creative



people, all engaged in creating images which are very, very powerful, will be able to change things so that we can go forward, not just as we hope with legislation but also changing people's minds and attitudes. This is something that doesn't happen by legislation. It happens by positive images, by strong images, and we really just want to be part of everything (C35).

Here is a picture of someone with no arms getting married, cutting her cake (C34). We'd like to see images like this-not as curios or freaks, just as part of life because disabled people, this may be news - I'm sure not to people here - are sexual, they do have sexual urges. D H Lawrence had it wrong in 'Lady Chatterley'. Maybe he wrote it because he himself was dying of tuberculosis at that time and couldn't make love to his beloved Frieda - that was the time he wrote that book - but it isn't really good enough to use his hang-up in not coming to terms with that, to label disabled people as non-sexual for everybody else.

We want to be children enjoying life(C36 & C37), we don't want to be pitiable and pathetic, we want to be part of our families, just part of society. We want to be in stories but we also want our experience to be part of everybody's experience (C37a). This is a painting called 'Broken Column' by Frida Kahlo (38). We have something to add to the human condition, something unique which is that we live in the world but we are different from other people. We have to deal with things, we don't want to be pitied but we do want people to listen and learn from what we have to say.

Thank you.



Demonstration of blind workers 1936. 31

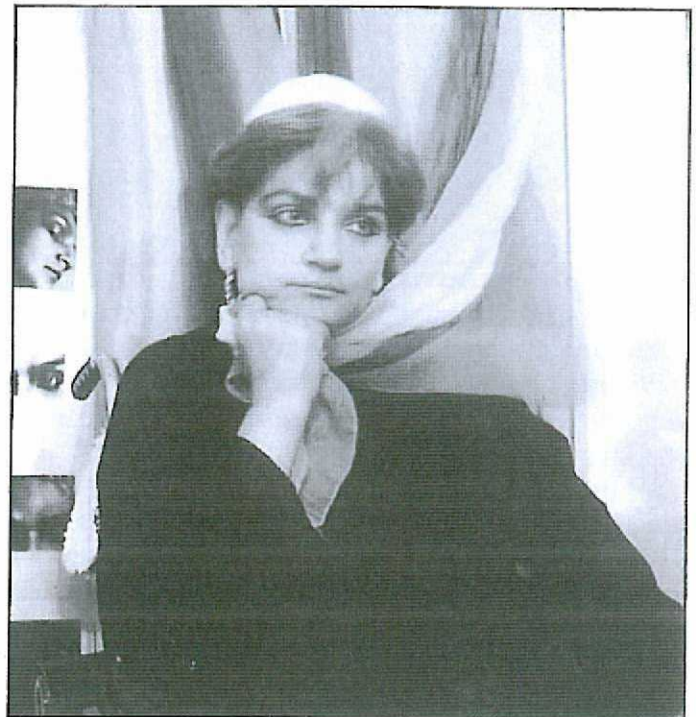
## SOCIAL MODEL



Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.

(Disabled People's International, 1981)

Social Model. 33



'Self Portrait' Samana Rana. 37a





## What's Wrong With Wheelchairs?

LOIS KEITH

LOIS KEITH IS A DISABLED TEACHER, WRITER AND PARENT.

I am going to talk to you about children's literature and I have to confess I am giving a very partisan view, for reasons which will become immediately obvious to you.

I grew up in the 1950's and like most girls of my age, my staple reading was books like *'Little Women'* and *'What Katy Did'*, the 'domestic dramas' of the Victorian age. Whilst my brother had adventure stories about desert islands and war, I had books for girls which contained the clear message that lively mischievous girls must grow up into sweet submissive women. I didn't notice that disability and illness is central to these stories but this isn't surprising since neither do the hundreds of literary critics who have written about them.

When I began to re-read them with my daughters a few years ago, I looked at them differently. They loved the stories as much as I did and for the same reasons but they brought a new knowledge too. Their mother uses a wheelchair. None of us sees me as a poor invalid who has to be taken care of but all of us realise that I am not going to get up and walk again like the characters in these books.

In *'What Katy Did'* by Susan Coolidge, tall awkward Katy is a rather unconventional girl who wants to be good but is always getting into trouble. She has no mother and her father, Dr. Carr, is a kind man but hardly ever at home. She is full of energy and "there were always so many delightful schemes rioting in her brains that all she wished for was 10 extra pair of hands to carry them out!" Katy is no Victorian namby pamby, her ambitions are to "head a crusade and ride on a white horse with armour and a helmet on my head".

Then one day, in a cross mood, Katy defies her aunt Lizzie and goes on a swing which needs fixing. She falls off and damages her spinal cord. We know from the beginning that the injury to her spine is one she will 'outgrow by and by' and that some day she will walk again but her father tells her that this may take a good while. In the meantime, Katy has many lessons to learn. She sinks into a fit of dark despair and is saved only with the help of saintly cousin Helen. Helen will never walk again and has already learned the lessons she is about to teach Katy. She tells her that "God is going to let you into his school – where He teaches all sorts of

beautiful things to people..." His school is "The school of Pain and the place where the lessons are to be learned is this room of yours." The lessons are those of Patience, Cheerfulness, Making the Best of Things, Hopefulness and Neatness. (39)

Katy remains in bed for some time. She has her bad days and sometimes becomes discouraged but her "long year of school has taught her self control and as a general thing her discomforts were born patiently. "After two years she begins to use a wheelchair and has grown "accustomed to the invalid life and is cheerful in it." She has been transformed from a boisterous and lively girl to a mature womanly housekeeper supervising the house from her room upstairs and managing the children. Her younger brothers and sisters adore her. Clover says, "Sometimes I think I shall be really sorry if she ever gets well. She is such a dear old darling to us all sitting there in her chair, that it wouldn't seem so nice to have her anywhere else."

There are clear parallels between what disabled people and women are supposed to learn. Katy begins to walk again only when she has lost the "dictatorial elder sister in her manner" and has "none of her old imperious tone". Cousin Helen's final words to Katy are, "You have won the place which you recollect I once told you an invalid should try to gain, of being to everybody the Heart of the House."

*'Heidi'* by Joanna Spyri tells the story of another motherless girl who, at the start of the book, is going to live with her irascible old grandfather in a remote mountain hut. Heidi is a loving child and is idyllically happy with her new found friend Peter, the goats and the beauty of the Alps. But before too long her money hungry aunt takes her off to Frankfurt to be a companion to invalid motherless Clara who is confined to bed and her velvet covered wheelchair. Heidi is desperately homesick and becomes so ill and unhappy that she does not eat and sleepwalks like a ghost. It is only then that she is allowed to return to Dorfli.

Clara is left behind but the two girls keep in touch and eventually she is allowed to visit, carried up the mountain in a sedan chair. Her doctor has permitted her to go because of "the mountains and the flowers and of the great silence up there far above the towns and villages and of the fresh





Katy confined to bed. 39

delicious air." He adds, "no-one can help getting well up there". So the reader becomes aware that it is here Clara is going to walk again.

It happens when Peter, overcome with jealousy at Heidi's attachment to Clara, throws her wheelchair down the mountain where it smashes into hundreds of pieces. He sees the chair as his enemy and thinks that now she will have to go away. But instead Clara sitting alone with a little goat, suddenly feels, "a great desire to be her own mistress and to be able to help others, instead of herself always being dependent." With Heidi's and Peter's help she stands and ventures one firm step on the ground and then another until she can

exclaim "I can do it Heidi! Look! Look! I can make proper steps!" (C40). She can think of no greater joy than "to be strong and go about like other people and no longer have to lie from day to day in her invalid chair." Grandfather's words on seeing her standing are "So we've made the effort have we and won the day!"

'**The Secret Garden**' by Frances Hodgson Burnett is a more sombre book in many ways. Partly this is because it was published 50 years after the other two books in 1911. Mary Lennox is an orphan, unloved and unlovable. "She has a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression." She has arrived from India to stay



in a virtually unused mansion in Yorkshire, Misselthwaite Manor, where she discovers the key to the Secret Garden, unused for ten years since the tragic death of the wife of the land-owner. Through this discovery she learns to make friends with Dickon, a local boy who has a gift with plants and animals. She begins to take pleasure in making things grow and begins to look pretty and happy for the first time. One night she hears crying from far off along the corridor and although she is told by the servants that it is the wind, she doesn't believe them. In this way she meets the other central character, Colin Craven son of the owner, who has been confined to his room more or less since birth.

Colin is impossible. He hates himself and everyone around him. His father hardly ever sees him and the servants must do whatever he tells them. He is certainly an invalid but we soon learn that his fear and illness are self created. He is terrified that he is going to be a 'hunchback' and is sure that he is going to die young. He believes that if one day he should feel a lump, he will go crazy and scream himself to death. Mary is more than a match for his hysterics and temper, and eventually he too is captivated by Dickon and the idea of the Secret Garden. It is here he realises he wants to live. Unexpectedly, they meet up with the crusty old gardener who exclaims, "Lord knows how tha' come here but tha'rt the poor cripple." Colin cries out that he is not a cripple and when the gardener asks him whether he has crooked legs or a crooked back, it is too much for him. There is a brief fierce scramble and then "Colin was standing upright - as straight as an arrow and strangely tall. He walked to the tree and though Dickon held his arm, he was wonderfully steady. 'Look at me' he commanded. 'Look at me all over! Am I a hunchback? Have I got crooked legs?'"(C41) As happens to Clara at the end of Heidi, Colin's father returns and is overwhelmed with delight at the sight of his son, now completely cured.

Like all good children's books of the time, there is a happy ending. But what messages did I (and thousands of other girls over many generations) gain from these books? We learned: 1) Disabled people have to learn the same qualities of submissive behaviour that women have to learn; patience, cheerfulness and making the best of things.

2) That disability can be a punishment for bad behaviour.

3) That disability is curable. If you want to enough, if you love yourself enough, if you believe in God enough, you will get up and walk.

This is pretty strong stuff. The modern young reader is probably capable of reading these books, thoroughly enjoying them as great stories, but screening out old fashioned or inappropriate messages. At least they will do if these values have been replaced by new ones. So many girls who see their mothers working and being strong and who are taught to argue their case and stick up for themselves will probably identify more with the Katy who jumped over the school fence into the next door playground to rescue her hat than with the sweet tactful one.

The problem is that Victorian ideas about disability are not dissimilar to those of the 1990's. The messages in these books, that disability is synonymous with being an invalid, that life is hardly worth living if you are permanently 'confined to a wheelchair' but that if you really want to cure yourself you will, is still part of popular thinking. And with 'special' segregated schooling, most children today have as much contact with disabled children as Heidi or Mary Lennox did and the same ideas about them.

Modern children's writers like Judy Blume, Cynthia Voigt and Susan Sallis (for example in their titles, Deenie, Izzy Willy Nilly and Sweet Frannie (C42) are now writing books where the central character uses a wheelchair at least in some part of the story and try to avoid the old fashioned idea of the miracle cure in favour of a more 'realistic' ending. But the truth is that most non disabled writers cannot imagine a good, strong life as a disabled person and the temptation to get us walking, seeing, hearing again or killing us off altogether still lurks in the collective imagination. I believe that the happy ending or the ending with a clear resolution is important in books for young people, but even in good modern children's fiction, this happy ending rarely shows the ways in which disabled people can and do live strong, happy lives and see our wheelchairs as our mobility not our enemy.<sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup> THIS IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE TALK LOIS GAVE ON THE DAY FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS. (EDITOR) © LOIS KEITH MARCH 1995. AN EARLIER VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN BOOKS FOR KEEPS MAGAZINE, NO. 75, JULY 1992.





## The Parent's Perspective

PREETHI MANUEL

PREETHI MANUEL IS A PARENT, WRITER, TEACHER AND BELONGS TO THE INTEGRATION ALLIANCE.

This is a slightly different perspective. I am a parent of a disabled child and also a writer. Seven years ago, at the hospital when the consultant pronounced my daughter was 'handicapped' (that was his term), it was not just the shock of a parent's expectations that froze me. I could not visualise in my mind anything, any picture, any person that would even vaguely resemble what my little girl was going to be. That vacant image of what my baby was going to grow up to be was one of the biggest traumas of my journey in parenting.

And yet, it need never have been. Disability is a normal part of life. I have learnt that only from meeting other disabled people. In this barrage of images fed to us today in the information highway we are approaching (some say we are already on it), try as you might, but where is the picture of the happy seven year old that my daughter is today? Where is documented the power, the strength, the vulnerability, the sheer humanity of thousands of children like her?

In that cold hospital room I badly needed an image of that reality. I realised that I was suffering because it wasn't there. The fact is, we all need that image too. We don't realise how deprived we all are because of the lack of it. Images of invisible children. As an eager parent I combed the Mothercare catalogue, (C43), pretty pictures all of them but none of the model little children was

disabled. The message to my daughter was clear – they are not very important people and even – do they really exist? The message of the omission is loud and clear. As an ex-teacher and media resources officer, no one need to have tried to convince me of the importance of images in our lives, particularly during those formative years when opinions and ideas are shaped. Children need to identify with people like themselves, they need to feel that they belong, they need role models to look up to, to emulate. As a responsible parent I thought, I'll go and find some books. Some wonderful role models of disabled people. But do you know, after you have read "I have Cerebral Palsy" and "I have Downs' Syndrome" and "Who is Disabled", you begin to see that your child is classified somewhere special of special. Even the equipment manufacturers would rather have a dummy than a real disabled child.(C44)

What is this reality that I was looking for? The reality is that disabled children and their families are striving under enormous odds for an equal place in society. In Lancashire a young disabled boy knocks at the door of his local mainstream school that refused him a place. In London a group of young disabled people are protesting outside the cinema that refused entry to them claiming that they were a fire hazard. Disabled adults are abandoning their wheelchairs and crawling towards the



Viewing the world from a different angle. 43a



## Setting The Scene

House of Commons demanding a Rights Bill for disabled people (C45).

They are chaining themselves to buses they can never ride on, chanting, "We will ride." (C46) A mother travels miles into London to receive treatment for her disabled child and stays in a caravan in the middle of nowhere so that she can afford the trip down. Heart-rending stories. But if I wanted my daughter to be reminded of the empowering reality it seems very likely that I have to be there to capture these images. It seems the media is not moved enough or more realistically, not moved at all. And yet this is the stuff of stories too. The world of imagination from the perspective of disabled people opens limitless possibilities that can take us away from continuing to dwell with the ideas of the privileged and the powerful. It opens up the possibilities of viewing the world from a different angle, exploring new facets of our common humanity which is, after all, what art intends to do (43a). In 1976 in the Soweto uprising (47), this picture was to bring world attention to the horror of apartheid.

People moved to this image but everyone who was involved in producing that image was also doing something else, they were shaping public opinion because no image lives outside a value system. A value system which says, for example, this is unjust, or this is important or look at this – this is beautiful. Producers, directors illustrators, writers, photographers, editors – you are all opinion leaders too. We do know images are carefully constructed and that process of selection is fed by all sorts of prejudices and fears. So who do we have making and manufacturing and disseminating these images is itself a crucial question to ask. We have gone on that road before in relation to including women and black people. The same techniques can be used – involving disabled people, involving disabled writers and those with experience of disability. It means sharing in the power that you each hold onto. Not an easy task, but essential for us to move forward. When the United Nations published its Charter on children it affirmed the rights of the child to enjoy special protection; free from any form of discrimination; to be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among people. In short it states "... that the human race owes to the child the best it has to give." Each of us here today will be contributing to this goal. We cannot afford to forget who we have made invisible. **These are the disabled children who are pioneers (C48), little though they are, they are the pioneers to a different kind of society; one where we learn to accept each other as equal. Let's give them the centre stage space they deserve.**

Thank you.



The first child killed by police in SOWETO 1976. 47





## How It Is On Film And Television

ANN POINTON

ANN POINTON IS A DISABLED TRAINER AND DEAF & DISABILITY CO-ORDINATOR FOR CHANNEL 4.

I want to pick up on film and television parallels with images in literature referred to by Lois and Richard.

First I want to say that the material on moving and still images is vast, but the analysis is minimal, or hidden, wrapped in either yet another book exploring the horror genre or less frequently, medicine in the movies, and in literature implicitly but not explicitly in, say, essays on the use of myth and symbol which usually fail to make connections to the real people that long ago formed and fed the myths.

Another problem is that what work has been done has tended to be about fictional rather than factual representation. When problems are then identified the onus is put rather unfairly on writers and drama producers leaving factual mediators of disability to peddle heart warming tragedy, and the non-disabled definition of courage. The able-bodied view is: disability is indeed a tragic event; that salvation and success for disabled people come from moving into some kind of compensatory 'supercrip' mode and that a key problem is bitterness about their condition.

In cinema disabled people almost inevitably succeed through the good offices of an understanding non-disabled person, who at some

point in the movie will lecture them about stopping feeling sorry for themselves and getting their act together. This seems to be particularly prevalent in war movies.

This theme of salvation by the non-disabled person is an ever-present one. If not horrific, then pitiable and helpless, or both. Frederick Treves rescues the 'Elephant Man', (49) Heidi and the grandfather cure Clara, Mary and the garden redeem Colin; Mandy speaks.

A recent worthy but turgid two-part 'Highway to Heaven' programme featured a lawyer paralysed from neck down, trying to foster a young boy with learning difficulties (or as the Americans might put it, a 'retard') who has been rejected by his parents. All ends happily. The disabled boy gains self respect by achievement through **Special Olympics** training, but it is all made possible by the wise intervention of the able-bodied angel hero of the series.

Whether the messages are 'good' or 'bad' it tends to be forgotten that they are received by disabled people as well as non-disabled people. What is perceived as good for one may not be good for the other. For example, the 'horror' genre. For a cinema academic from Illinois: "These movies are a way of seeing our fears dealt with in a manageable way. It has a satisfying effect in the sense that we have confronted our worst fears and coped with them. We have seen these horrors and we come out okay." An intellectual like Bruno Bettelheim can write: "Those who outlawed traditional folk fairy tales decided that if there were any monsters in fairy tales they must all be friendly. But they missed the monsters a child knows best and is most concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be and which also sometimes persecutes him".

The disabled people, whose bodies are being used in the 'horror' genre or in fantasies whose function is to exorcise inner demons, may well experience things differently.

In this Channel Four Schools programme produced by Colin Izod,



The Elephant Man. 49



who is here today, presenter Mik Scarlett looked at the Ridiculous, Tragic and Supercrip images, but in most of this clip he looks at the Sinister: (Channel Four Schools programmes 'Images of Ourselves' from Off Limits series).

These effects are real. In my late teens I once went for a job as a temporary secretary in a children's hospital. It turned out to be in the psychiatric clinic, and the psychiatrist who interviewed me called me back to say that obviously he could not offer me the job because so many of the children who came there had nasty dreams of goblins and dwarves.

But real impairment is also a problem for the media. Nabil Shaban, a talented disabled actor was turned down for a role in a children's series 'Microman' because the television company thought he might frighten the children. So whilst real impairment is deemed to be frightening, and disabled people whose appearance is discomfiting are in general kept off our screens, such horrific disabled characters as those played by Lon Chaney Snr. have been used to create and perpetuate that fear and sense of the disabled person as an alien or 'other' (50). Chaney turned the representation of impairment into an art form and today would certainly get an Oscar. It is ironic that whilst there are still so few 'real' disabled actors in employment, impersonating one is likely to get one on the nomination list.

This is as much a political problem as an artistic dilemma. Whilst disabled children with multiple impairments are segregated in special schools, and off the streets, it is scarcely surprising that the



Lon Chaney as Quasimodo in the Hunchback of Notre Dame 1923. 50

impersonation of impairment is seen to be a considerable professional challenge.

But surely, one says, things have moved on from say the 70's when 'Starsky and Hutch' could get away with an episode called 'Quadromania'? (The plot – our heroes on the trail of a taxi driver with one arm and one leg, strangling people in revenge with the iron fingers of his prosthetic hand). I would say not. We still have a number of bodily impaired **Bond** film villains eg. 'Dr No' (51); we had 'Dr.

'Strangelove' (52) and now we have 'Hook' courtesy of Stephen Spielberg (C53). And what we do know from one piece of television research is that disabled characters are three times as likely as non-disabled characters to end up dead.

But it also isn't as simple as seeking so-called 'positive role models'. Because we don't unambiguously know what these are – nor indeed will one find convenient agreement among disabled people, whose experience of impairment may be quite different. The sudden traumatic onset of bodily

impairment in adulthood is an experience quite different from that of a condition experienced from birth or early childhood. What is common is that the newly disabled will suddenly experience the same loss of status.

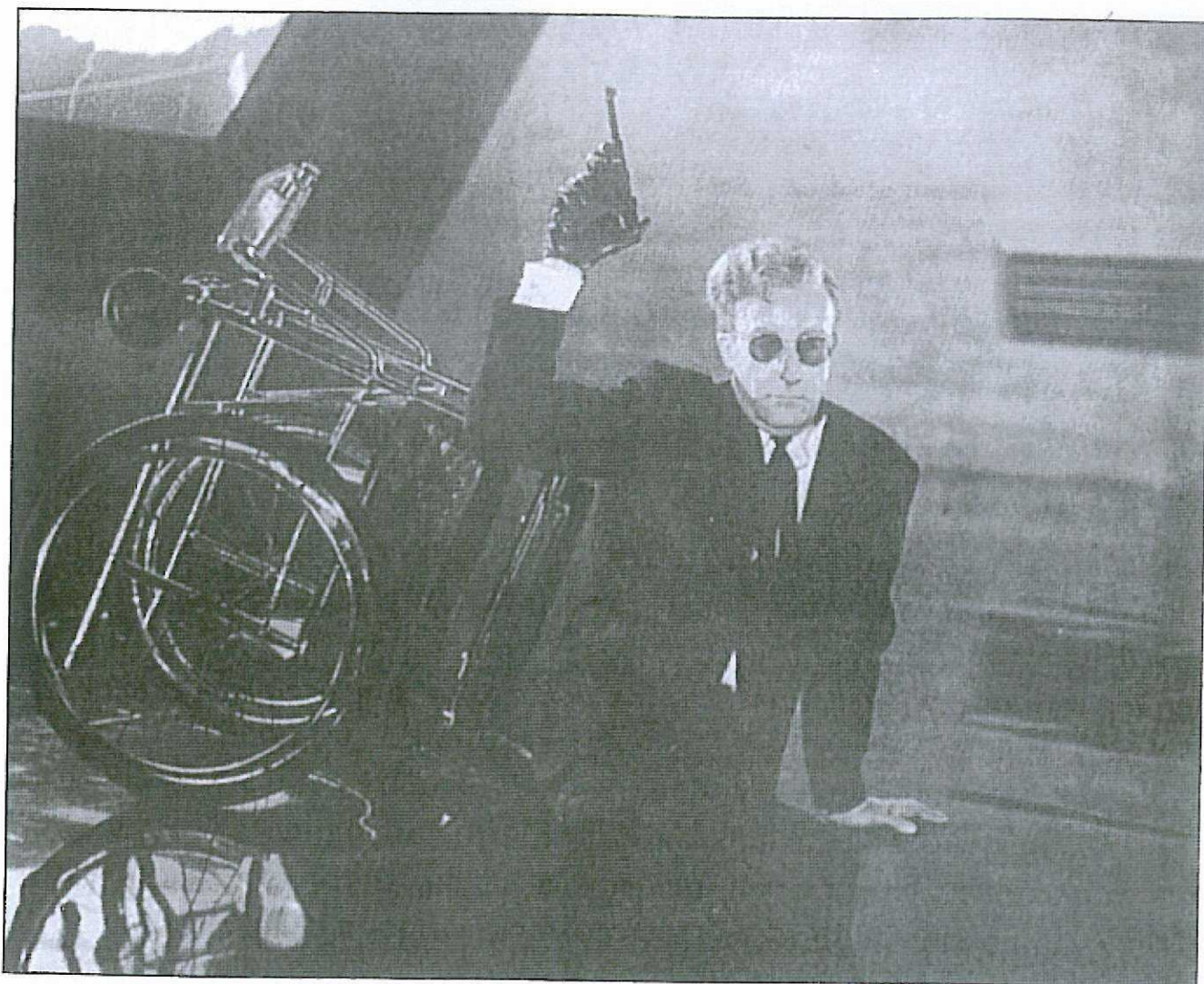
So it's not surprising that many so-called positive images entail the disabled person "overcoming" or forgetting his or her impairment. Often this means accepting gross discrimination with a bright smile. The denial of our experience in a disabling world is irritating, as is the implicit pressure to compensate by being especially good at something. The freedom to be mediocre and not have to compensate for our unfortunate presence would be most welcome.

This non-disabled view often results in good intentions going astray. I have in mind an excellent series of children's dramas from Central Television which featured disability,



Dr No in James Bond 1964. 51





Peter Sellers is Dr Strangelove. 52

but in particular an episode in which the disabled and bullied girl gained popularity by swimming for the school and winning. This is not a helpful solution. Many problems stem simply from making the disability issue the central one. It is often more helpful to build in incidental disabled characters as extras who are simply part of the scene.

Portrayal does not exist in a vacuum. It reflects the power, or lack of power of the disabled voice in the media industry, in our education system, and in society more generally. Recognition of the necessity of presence in the portrayal of women and other cultures is detectable in children's and schools output, but disabled children and adults are still relatively invisible.

So do our children stare in the street because they meet few disabled people – children or adult – in their mainstream schools, ie. is it simple ignorance or lack of experience? Or is it these media portrayals – well intentioned or otherwise?

Of course it is both, and it is from both ends that the problem needs to be tackled.

When the blind man says "it's not my blindness that is the problem, it is ..." (and then

gives a list of external problems about access and attitude) it is the latter problems that get neglected, because the notion of 'loss' in blindness, or paralysis, or 'loss' of visual acceptability is so much more dramatically satisfying and indulges our voyeuristic instincts. It sells papers, and seats in the cinema.

Disabled people have what one disabled film analyst has called an 'inward eye'; a sense of their own body and its relationship to the world. **Why is it this with which writers and producers want to identify and not our 'outward eye' which perceives a whole set of other problems which are truly disabling?**



Coming Home. A rarity – a disabled person's sexuality is portrayed. 52a





## The New Road

MICHELINE MASON

MICHELINE MASON IS A DISABLED PARENT, WRITER AND TRAINER AND A CO-ORDINATOR OF THE INTEGRATION ALLIANCE.

I'm sure you are completely overwhelmed by this point, but I hope you can still listen to my summing up at the end of this morning. First of all I want to say a little bit about why we called you together and why we feel that artists, in the broader sense of the word, are very important to us. Artists have the power to hold up reality so that we can see it clearly and we can examine it objectively. Artists can communicate new ideas very rapidly between people.

**Artists are bridges between what we can imagine and what we already know.** Artists can make us look at old situations from a new viewpoints. Artists can give silent people a voice. No liberation movement, and we feel ourselves to be part of a liberation movement, can succeed without artists. Artists do help to create the future.

**Disabled people feel that we are prisoners of the past.** Superstition and ignorance, have literally trapped disabled people into institutions and ghettos where we have been forced to live shrunken, parallel lives apart from society. We also live in a culture of exclusion and segregation and that is not only about disabled people, it affects every single one of us. We have developed a habit of believing that we can deal with problems by putting them away from us and handing them over to someone else. That every single person – and you are very aware of it as a parent – worried about whether or not they are going to be the next one. Whether they look right, sound right, behave right, whether they can cope, whether they are cool, whether they are in, whether they are attractive, everyone of us can see reasons looming for exclusion. Most people are incredibly hemmed in by the fear of doing something wrong; it is almost as if something in us is to blame for our exclusion and disabled people are often used as an example to prove that to other people. We are like everybody's worst fear and I think it's that for a lot of people who have become parents of disabled children. It's the fear of that child being excluded, rejected and unvalued which is what upsets people; it's almost never the condition itself.

We have grown up in what Richard called the "**medical model of disability**", where professionals have been seen as the experts, and it is often to professionals that the shut-out, non-disabled world

has gone to learn about the 'problem of disability'. **But you are as shut-out of our world as we are shut-out of yours.** Without access to education, to transport, to money or the need to represent our ourselves; the true voice of disabled people has been stifled and ignored. (C54)

**We do not see the image of our real selves anywhere, and we are aware that we are not considered to be part of the audience.** The effect of this must not be underestimated, especially on young people. My own daughter, who is also disabled – and I thought I had done a very good job of bringing her up, thinking positively about herself, surrounded by positive models of disabled adults and so on – quite shocked me when I listened to her describing to her friends at a party, who had asked her why she couldn't walk. She said, "Oh well, you see, my bones and Mummy's bones are softer than real peoples." And I thought it was a mistake and I asked her again and that's what she meant. The internalised view that you are real and we are not has a profound effect on the expectation we have, on what we can achieve in the world.

**We want you to become our allies in this struggle. We want you to help us to break free of this prison and to create a new world where each and every human being has a place and a unique perspective on life – a perspective that needs to be heard. There are many different ways to do this and some of you have already begun.**

I am going to read that again because I want it to sink in: each and every human being has a place and a perspective that needs to be heard. What we don't want is to be seen as alright because we don't have learning difficulties, or alright because we can manage independently, or alright because we are less disabled than someone else. **It is not a competition and if there is one message that disabled people are trying to bring to the world it is that life is not a competition, that we do not have to prove or earn our place here. We have a right just because we are alive.** That is a very difficult message for most people to believe about themselves never mind about us. One of the first things we would like you to do is to seek out disabled artists, the first hand experience is currently completely at odds with accepted myths



about our lives. While the non-disabled community has been busy studying our so called faults and trying to devise methods of correcting us, we have been busy studying you. We have some very important things to tell you about the power of fear over your lives. Autobiographical work by disabled people is still rare, especially those who have been disabled since childhood.

Autobiography by non-literate disabled people including people with learning difficulties is almost non-existent. Outside this room on a small table some where we have collected together a few exceptional examples which are essential reading for you all.

Become aware of the issue and think how that little collection of books can grow (see Appendix 4), and not just books but videos, films, scripts for television, music and theatre. Try and leave behind the idea that the world is not interested in our lives. **Our experience shows us the complete opposite. Children in particular are fascinated by the truth and they have no time for sentimentality or for pretence.**

**Portray the ordinariness of our lives.** Just like you we are incidental characters in most of life's dramas. We're in the supermarket buying eggs.

We are queuing up in the post office, or fetching our children from school; disabled people are everywhere doing unexceptional things, in a mediocre ways. We are bad tempered, we're cowardly, we're silly and confused, just like everyone else. In the immortal words of my brother-in-law: "Children, no matter what shape, size or ability they have, all have the same excuses for not doing their homework." **We come from all classes, all races, all ages, all religions and most disabled people desire nothing more than to get by in a mundane ordinary sort of way.**

**Yet we also need the extra-ordinariness of our situation to be made visible to the world – a situation which is created by oppression and the constant threat of exclusion.** We can be powerful and brave, insightful and visionary. We are able to be carers for others, and leaders amongst our communities.

One of the things that I remember growing up as a young woman with a disability is that I never saw anywhere a picture, story, film, programme or anything which represented disabled people as parents, and even it was almost taboo to think about having boyfriends and that whole thing.

**I think that it is still taboo to think about disabled people becoming parents.** Of course there are hundreds and hundreds of disabled parents. It is almost as if the contradiction in people's minds that people have to be cared for and the reality of us as carers for other people doesn't compute in the brain, it's too much of a jump, so we are just not

there. Certainly, when you go to take your children to school you are not expected. I think that parenting is an ordinary thing which has been largely denied to many disabled young people. We are also carers for other people in many other situations as well and, again, one of the things that I hope we are trying to say to these people is that there is no such thing as independence or dependence. We live in relationship to each other where we depend on people for company and other people depend on us for other things and that is the way that we are as human beings.

**We are not all seeking to become like able bodied people. We are seeking to be proud of who we are. Fighting the fight to expose mistakes that society is making and leading us all down dangerous paths.**

The core of the battle for young people is about inclusion, we often get exclusion. But inclusion can't happen without affecting every single person because it actually requires a change, a change in our value system and a change in how we relate to each other. **The move to inclusion, has been seen as intentional building of community.** (C55) It's leading us down a different path and it's on this path that we need your help. The first thing that we need you to do is to get to know us, to stop distancing yourself from our lives and from the reality as seen from our perspective. At this point, you are our advocates and our representatives. There is a very small number of disabled people who are educated enough, confident enough and who have the opportunity to train to be in the positions that most of you are in. You are essentially going to be the bridges between us and the world out there. The world that we are heading towards is one of collaboration rather than competition, where it is diversity that makes things work not sameness. Where even the most – and I use this word and I don't like it but you know what I mean – 'severely disabled person' has a place and has a role and that role has to be in relation to other people not away from other people. It is something that we will work out together. But we can't work it out together while we are not there, actively part of the change.

I just wanted to finish by talking about one example that I unfortunately couldn't remember well enough to find to show you, but something I saw on television completely by accident, which I thought was an almost perfect piece of work. It was a school's programme on Science and Technology and the purpose of this short programme was to understand all the stages you needed to go through in order to construct a very large 7 foot high construction when you yourself are only 4 foot tall and couldn't possibly do it on your own. There were lots of young boys engaged



on this project and one of them happened to be a wheelchair user. They did a lot of work planning and gathering materials. Then they had to move to a building where they were going to construct their design. When the van came to take them it was inaccessible. The boy in the wheelchair couldn't get in. After some kerfuffle they decided to go without him, much to his fury as he was left there, very angry. When they got to the place they were going to build their design they realised they hadn't got the plan. In fact it was the boy in the wheelchair who had the plan and was the only one who understood it.

So then they thought they better think about another way of doing things and they worked out that if they made two journeys in the van, took out some seats and made a makeshift ramp they could get this boy into the van and in fact they had to because he was an essential member of the team.

So they went back and collected the boy and the plan. The programme ended with the non-disabled children putting the thing together and the boy in the wheelchair was co-ordinating the whole affair. That's how it ended and I was completely stunned by this programme, as it wasn't billed as anything to do with disability at all.

But a very insightful person had made this programme. They had his ordinariness-he just happened to be there in the group of boys in the school making this thing.

They had noticed he was different, in that he was the only one who wasn't thought about when they were going to make the journey from one building to another and also that he was essential to the team. It was alright to make mistakes and it was also alright to correct the mistakes without getting guilty or panic-struck.

Thank you very much.

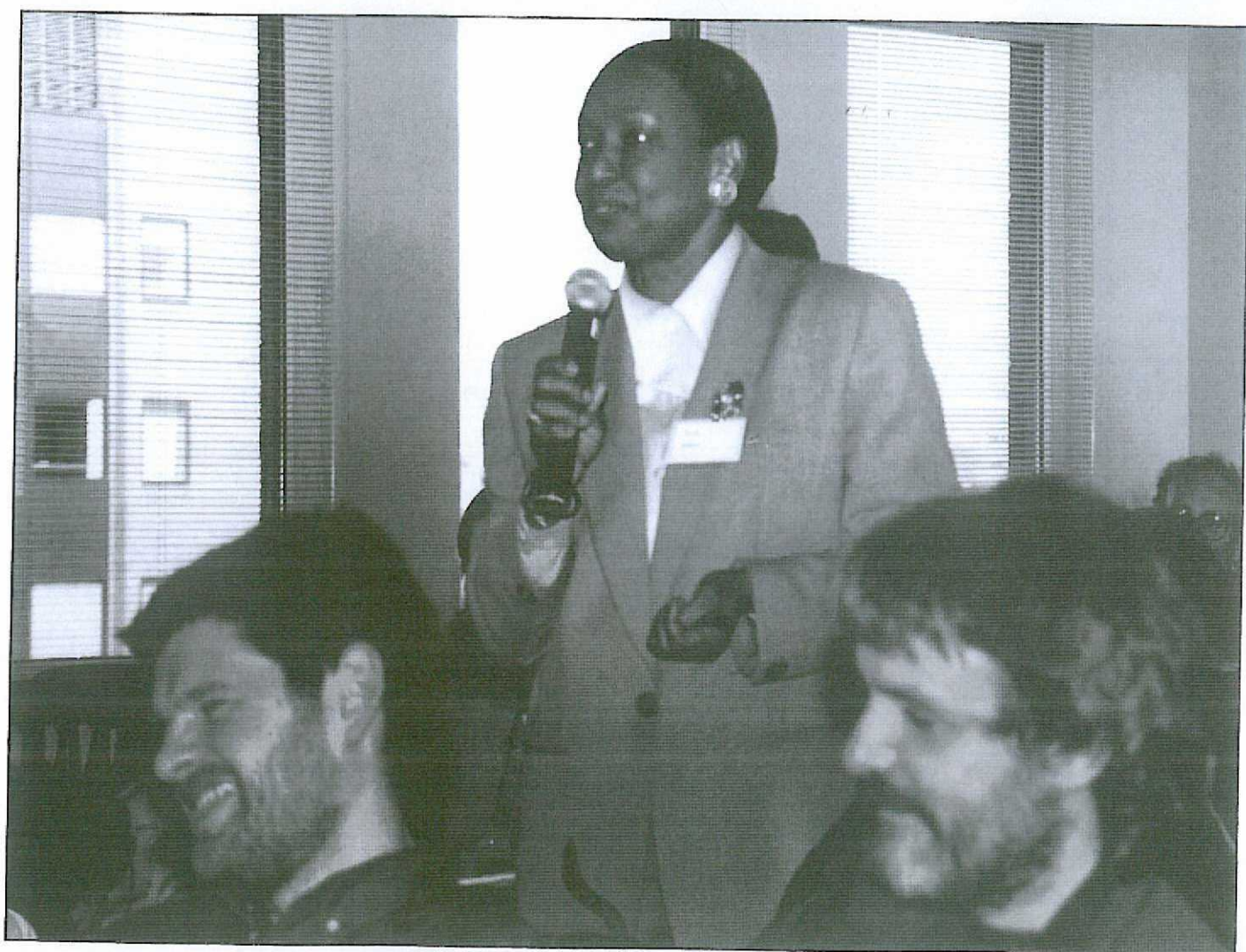


Micheline at the conference.



# Invisible Children

Open Forum Discussion









# Invisible Children

## Open Forum Discussion

BARBARA LISICKI – CHAIR

**MICHAEL ROSEN, WRITER:** I can see and hear from what's been going on just while we've been having coffee, (there was a real buzz going on. I think a lot of people are scratching their heads, myself included,) this morning has been a kind of fascinating and revealing episode. I was just interviewed by someone from Radio 1 who asked me a set of questions that suddenly made me realise all of the things that I didn't know. I was reminded of that by this morning. I mean, for years I have been looking at picture books-say doing the radio programme 'Treasure Island' – I don't think I have ever asked myself the question, "why in all the pictures of children in those books, including my own, has there never been a wheelchair?" Someone will tell me of a book with a wheelchair in it. A woman has just approached me, she said "could I give you a book that one of my children has written?" This child likes my poetry, I hope I am quoting her right, "likes your poetry but wants to know why you haven't included people like me in it." I am left here asking myself the question – why not – and I haven't got an answer really.

My level of comprehension can be explained. They put in lifts at the BBC not so long ago, where they have a sound that tells you what floor you are on, a voice says: '1st floor, 2nd floor, 3rd floor' and I turned to someone next to me and said "they've put that in for deaf people". That is my level of awareness. That is the kind of level that somebody who thinks he is aware like myself could say something like that and then suddenly I went – Oh, well no. And I guess many of us in the room would be in a similar situation – that's what's happened this morning, the images that we have seen and things that people have been saying to us have caused us all kinds of disruptions. The only thing that I would add is that the political context we are in at the moment is one in which, I suppose I could call it the backlash, and nobody has mentioned the word political correctness.

Now, the problem is that at the moment, for anybody to stand up and talk in this way puts them

in a position where it might be that they will be abused, because the mode at the moment is to abuse anybody who raises the issue of rights for anyone outside what is deemed as normal. What we are talking about is a culture of normality. There is a culture of exclusion that people have talked about, but there is of course the culture and the cult of normality that we are all part of. Therefore, over the last twenty or thirty years, when people have raised all the issues to do with race and gender and sexuality, you add in this issue of disability, we face up to what will be a barrage of abuse about PC and political correctness. I will just throw that in as something that we have to take on board because we are not only fighting against, if you like, mainstream prejudice, which I count myself as part of, but also against a much more articulate programme that wants to abuse anybody who takes up these issues.

**SIMON GARDNER, PEOPLE FIRST/INTEGRATION ALLIANCE (IA):** I'm a bit nervous. I was asked to speak about a friend of mine who's been picked up by the police several times, not because of who he is but the way that he is dressed. Because he is not what you would call smartly dressed. He has his shirt hanging out and walks down the road with his hands in his back pocket. He has to walk down the road holding his wallet or his bus pass and the wisdom of the police round Ellsfield isn't very understanding and they pick him up. They stop him and they say, "There's been a robbery down the road, have you done it?" And he says, "No. I haven't done nothing." So he hides in the hedge and they say that if they see him around here again they will take him to the 'Old Bill Shop' sort of thing. He's phoned me up several times now and said to me "I'm petrified – what do I do?" So I say I haven't got a clue and I think "Well, you've got a key worker, a link worker, a social worker." He says "Yes". "Well speak to them they are there to help you." So I said, "Do you carry with you any ID of where you live?" and he said "No" so I said "That might be a good idea because the police should







know the people who are disabled people who live in some places." Which they do, know where people live. So he took that on board and I haven't heard from him for a couple of days, but he seems quite shaken up, but just because our appearance isn't what it should be, we get harassed. If I was to walk on stage with torn jeans and my hair all in a mess and I didn't smell too good then you would probably leave the room and the same goes for him. Just because he doesn't look right he's having a hard time. All he wants to do is live independently. He needs support and I will try and support him in advising him what to do and if he can, tell the police that he hasn't done the crime that they say that he has done.

**CHRIS HARRISON, SURVIVORS SPEAK OUT/IA:**

I just want to share with you some thoughts on the kind of questions that have been put forward already today. I am thinking that in the last ten/twenty years, in all kind of media, despite what's been said, there has been a certain amount of progress made with disability programming, a chance to air views which affect disabled young people and children, as well as adults. But rightly or wrongly, those productions, those programmes, however excellent they are in themselves and, many of them are, are seen as the disability slot. Now that is fine and good and I think that should still be preserved, but my concern arises when thinking of radio and TV, as well as the press; of what happens when we try and get these issues, in this case about invisible children, into the mainstream, and the kind of images, few that there are, that come on to the screen which depict the realities disabled children are currently facing. For instance, a story which was on the BBC local news programme about three weeks ago. They had been through all the serious stuff about the plight of education generally and the health service and goodness knows what else, and then they thought they would end the evening. They didn't have a juicy hospital story that night so they thought they would end it with what I would call an "Ahhh"

story. Basically there is a bunch of charitably minded people in Kent who have purchased a piece of equipment, and everybody's more fascinated by physically impaired people's equipment than the people themselves. You know: "I don't care who your favourite pop group is dear, but your gadgetry gets me going!" That's the kind of mentality that a lot of people have.

This piece of equipment has been purchased by a special school. In this case it's not just to make an impairment specific point as we'd say, but to enable young blind children to play more effectively. You see and hear a little boy who is about four years old being very mischievous, child-like and precocious, which may have come as quite a revelation to some of the audience, that disabled children are quite child-like when they are children. Then you get voiced-over the expert in the school saying what these kids need is this, this and this and then the story ending "Oh aren't they doing a marvellous job?". Now, to me, that was a golden opportunity missed. I'm not saying they have the time and the scope and the space within that programme to get one of us along to launch into a tirade about segregated education necessarily. Although it is worth noting that issues which are I think every bit as important to the rest of you, so-called non-disabled people, as to the rest of us, don't get the same kind of treatment on a programme like that. We are marginalised and relegated to a situation where a journalist, rather than saying, "Oh! Isn't that a marvellous thing that those care staff are doing?" can't at least pose the question with the audience: "Is this the only way and environment in which this little boy and his friends, are going to grow? Is this the way that she or he is going to make sense of the world and his or her part in it or not?"

I personally don't think that is good enough. I think that now we are getting to the stage, despite what's just been said, where it should be incumbent on current affairs journalists to feel that they have a right, if not to include us, to counterbalance those images. To at least get the



audience, even in passing, to question their assumptions. That's all I have to say.

**MARTINE OBORNE, WRITER/ILLUSTRATOR:**

I have written children's books. It has been extremely interesting to be here this morning and to hear what everybody has said. I have given a lot of thought to writing children's stories with disabled children in them. As I try to think of ideas and things, one of the big problems that I find is that when you start writing a story about a disabled child or with disabled children in it, often the subject of disability takes over the story and it becomes a story that is about disability, trying to make some point about disability in the community and disabled children, etc., and I think it's a pity that we can't introduce disabled children into stories in a more natural way.

I find it's quite a difficult thing and I have been trying to ask myself why this is. I think it probably comes back to this problem that we just don't see enough of disabled children in the community. There aren't enough of them in our schools. It is not as easy to address as, say, questions of colour or religion because schools are full of Black children and children with different religions, etc. But I do feel that, until something is done about making children more visible, so they can access playgroups, schools and other sorts of community things where they can get their wheelchairs in, until we really accept them into the community and make efforts to make it physically possible to get them in, it makes it very difficult to introduce them into literature without everyone immediately focusing on them with their disability and disability as a subject taking over everything else.

**JOYCE DUNBAR, WRITER:** One of the things connected with my disability is that half the time I don't know what is going on.

So I make enormous 'faux pas' and this may be one of them, but I take a chance. I am deaf. I'm not profoundly deaf, I'm severely deaf and I lip

read. I began to go deaf when I was five years old and my son began to go deaf when he was five years old. The same thing happened to my mother and my grandmother. I had already written one children's book and I looked around for books about deaf children other than "Johnnie gets his hearing aid". That wasn't going to thrill him at all. There was nothing, nothing at all. There were books about blind children, there is a very good one called "**Anerton Pit**" by Peter Dickenson. So I wrote one and it took me three years and I was thrilled because it was runner up for The Guardian Award and it got brilliant reviews. (**'Mundo and the Weather-Child' 1985**). Now I'm sorry to seem to be flying my own kite, but I had a special reason for doing it. It was wonderfully well received, and it's never been heard of again! I look on these lists of books about disability, it's never there.

I have written a lot of books since, for some of which I'm quite well known, but this book is very important to me for all the reasons that you were saying and I do feel when people like me are trying to do things we should be supported. I've also just done a story for the mainstream, for Ginn Reading series, in which I've managed to get the sign language alphabet in, hoping that children who want to learn it can, and they do want to learn it. Now at the very least I hoped that my book would have enabled me to come out as a deaf person, not as an impostor – a masquerading hearing person. I go to schools often, I'm going to at least four next week, and I talk to 300 people like this and, at the end of the day they don't know that I am deaf. I would like to be able to say that, but I do think that people like me need your support. When we are making an effort and trying to do something please support us because then we will do more and then we will feel that we have achieved something. Thank you.

**GRAINNE MARMION, HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT, RED ROOSTER ENTERTAINMENT:** I am the producer of a TV programme called "The Borrowers".



When I made "The Borrowers" I was asked afterwards if I had made it because I have a daughter who is achondroplastic, which is the medical term for 'dwarf'. I have to say that when I was asked the question I was completely stunned because my reference to my daughter and my daughter's reference to her own life has absolutely nothing to do with a seven inch high family that live underneath floorboards, and I certainly think that the experiences of her life will be entirely different to those of Arietti. However, one of the things that I do find with a daughter, my daughter is now six, is that the most accepting people of disability are children. One of the things that I hope will come out of today's session is that when we want to make changes, we should start with the children because, as one of the speakers this morning said, what children are interested in is the truth. It's an absolute blueprint for us. We can write with their help and their aid, and I think their wisdom, the sort of things that we want our children to grow up with, how we want them to see society and how they in turn, when they are society can actually affect the things more appropriately that we are trying to talk about today.

That's all I have to say at the moment and I hope I can come back a little later on.

**KATH FORD, PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP/IA:**

I've brought along some books written by a disabled child, he's actually my son, and he's put disabled images in his books. I think that for those of you who find it very difficult to put in disabled children, should have a look at these. He's also written a book completely about disabled animals. I am more than happy to get them photocopied for any writer, publisher or television producer here today, I don't mind how many copies I have to do. My son asked me what today's conference was going to be about and I explained a little bit and he said, "Well, if you meet any writers can you tell them from me" (and, it was a message partly for

Michael Rosen as well, whose books he absolutely adores,) he said "for Michael and anyone else, I absolutely love his books but why does he not love people like me in the stories that he writes?" I said "well, I don't think that he thinks badly of you but it's because people have never actually thought of disabled people or children." So he said, "I'll tell you what, take my books along and if they want them they can buy them" and I said "Oh, OK." Then he said "No, I tell you what, don't ask them to buy them give them as presents and then perhaps they will start showing kids like me and even disabled animals in their stories."

So that is what I would like to do.

My son is only eight and I think that his awareness is absolutely amazing. He didn't get this awareness from me. He got it because I now have a lot of friends, adult friends, who are disabled. If I hadn't met those people I don't think my son would ever be aware himself of his own disability or like his disability. He actually doesn't care a damn about it and he's not bothered about it, he feels very, very positive about it. I was very frightened about his disability because like Preethi, when you have a disabled child the hospital really give you the most frightening feelings about your child. Instead of welcoming the child into the world, you are told of all the negative things that can happen. My child has a very, very positive image of himself and I would like you as writers or whatever other institution you represent to actually look at some of these. One is called "**The Pillars of Space**" (C56) and it is particularly important because it is about disabled animals, but he talks about animals being taken in a lift from the polluted world to space.

The lift is very important because my son was in a local primary school and it was totally inaccessible. He was on the point of being expelled because of his disability because the school would not keep his classroom on the ground floor. So I said no way was he going to be expelled, the only way that they were going to get him out was by



the police dragging him and me out. As a result the Local Authority which said they didn't have any money accessed the school, so now it is totally accessible. It has a lift and he's put the lift in his story which I think is incredibly good because he was only seven when he wrote this. He didn't say it was for him but he gave this as an example of the way the animals escaped from a very polluted world. So to finish, please leave your addresses, all of you if you want to, at the reception desk and I will happily send you copies of all the books if you want some idea of how a disabled child feels about his world. Thank you.

**LUCINDA WHITELEY, CHANNEL 4:** I am a commissioning editor for children's programmes at Channel 4 and as some of you here will know, Channel 4 very recently started to commission its own television programmes again after a period of not commissioning its own programmes, or rather not having a children's department.

Channel 4 did commission programmes such as "**Beat That**" which I am sure you will be familiar with. The producer is here today – Luke Jeans.

One of the questions that was very much upper most in my mind when we started to commission programmes was how we could give all children a voice on television. That was very much the theme that ran through both the season of children's programmes that we ran, last September, called "**Look Who's Talking**" and is the thread, the theme that is running through the programmes that we are commissioning now. I wanted really to present another perspective because we are very much going into it with the view that we want children from all around the country in all sorts of situations, with all sorts of different views, to come forward and to work with us on putting these on television.

One of the programmes that we have set up, which is currently running on Sunday morning is called "**Wise Up**" and that is designed very much for children to make their own reports with the help of a producer and a professional crew. The

brief that I am giving the producers that we are commissioning is that they have to access all of these children. One of the challenges that I think the producers are facing is how they do access these children and this actually picks up on a number of different things that have been said, both in the session before coffee and afterwards. We have a lot of children coming forward but I know that the producers have had problems talking to disabled children, perhaps working with them as well. I would be very interested in people's thoughts about how we set up a mechanism or how the producers can work with people who are working with disabled children, with schools, that sort of thing. I am putting that down as one of the challenges that we find and we are working towards. We are not using it as an excuse, we very much see it as something that we have got to work towards and it will take some time.

I am very pleased that Channel 4 is there now to be able to do this, but I am very interested in other people's views on this.

**NEW SPEAKER, WRITER:** I am a writer of children's books too. I would like to echo what's just been said because, I can only speak for myself but I know that I don't not write about disabled children because I don't realise that they are there; I don't write about them because I don't know them. It's a frightening thing to write a book and put yourself out there and there are a million ways that you can be shot down for it. The starting point for me is what do I know about? Well Micheline has told me what to do about that. I have to go out and meet disabled children, so that's fine.

The second thing, of course, is what Michael touched on which is the PC business and the tokenism, and anybody who's been in children's books for the last ten years knows that it is very hard to get this one right. If you have a class of children and you put in a black face you are accused of tokenism and if you leave it out you are accused of racism. So this is a very difficult issue for us and I think that we are just going to have to test



that one and be a lot braver about it.

**MICHELINE MASON/IA:** I just wanted to say that the problem of contacting young disabled people is a very real problem, particularly the diversity of young people, because what tends to happen is that they are congregated in segregated places and there will be young people with a particular view of the world because of that experience. We have taken upon ourselves to help start forming networks of young people who are all over the place, both in special schools and mainstream schools. I think one of your great points of contact is through parents. There are parents' organisations who will probably be the first point of call rather than necessarily schools themselves, who can often be very protective and censor a lot of things that could happen.

**VERNA WILKINS, WRITER/PUBLISHER:** I write and publish lists of children's books (we cover age groups from 2 to 9). I set up Tamarind as a publishing company to give Black children a high positive profile because my children never saw themselves represented positively in children's books when they were growing up. I was very angry, upset, etc., and rather than use that energy campaigning I put that energy into setting up a publishing company. I realised then from what I had gone through that the exclusion wasn't just Black. Just incidentally I put in, writing a book about a Black boy who lost a tooth and a Black tooth fairy came along, his best friend is in a wheelchair. ("**The Tooth Fairy**") He's just there as a friend and he's lost four teeth and he is very rich, as a result.

Now the Spinal Injuries Association saw this book, saw the child in the wheelchair and wrote to me and asked if I would like to do what I did, just including disabled parents because they have disabled parents now. Technology is moving on, science is moving on, the young disabled mothers and fathers are having children, and those children were not seeing their parents or parents like their

parents represented. So off I went, as my son said, "My mother is completely unfettered by reality". What reality I ask? What is reality? Where have we learned what reality is? So I took that on as well and I have just, working with the SIA, produced two picture books, ("**Boots for a Bridesmaid**" and "**Are We There Yet**" 1995) because as a previous speaker said quite rightly, the early years in which personality takes shape, attitudes are being formed, those are the important years. And I'm horrified by the things I learned about disability in the early years, never mind colour.

I had to go up to the SIA and talk with them, share their experiences and feel my own discomfort coming out, and that is where the change starts; when you feel the discomfort you know you have got work to do.

I shocked myself. I also went to schools in London, in Farnham, I live out in Surrey, working in schools, telling the children what I was doing and getting the teachers to work with me. The teachers of those schools were asking parents in, disabled people in the community to come in. I was telling them what I was doing. They were actually looking at wheelchairs, talking to blind people. It was a tremendous exercise and that was working with five year olds in primary schools, five, six and seven. It's wonderful, it's possible, it can be done, and it can be fun. Thank you.

**BEVERLEY NAIDOO, WRITER:** I'm a writer, amongst other things, and I really want to reinforce what Verna has said, because recently I decided to begin to focus in on this area. Very much through a friend who is married to a guy who had a spinal injury when he was about seventeen, and actually spent years in jail with his spinal injury as a political prisoner, and he said to me some time ago that disability is apartheid. It is actually society that disables people and he had a very vivid image that I will just share with you because, as a non-disabled person it really made a big impression on me. He said, "Hold on a minute. You are terribly environmentally unsound. I could have this room



created around me and this whole building created around me in a way which would save many more of the world's resources. I don't need a building this high, I don't need doors this high I could make the doors this high and the whole building this high and save half the resources, then you would be disabled because you would have to bend down to get through." So I set about a set of picture books that is part of Longman book project and I'm glad to say that they've made it to your table, Richard, but what I really want to talk about is a kind of learning process that one has to go through if you are non-disabled. ('Letang's new friend', 'Trouble for Letang and Julie' and 'Letang and Julie save the day' 1994 Longmans. Available from Letterbox Library.) I think that's what Verna is talking about, and really it was myself learning about myself. Of course it is possible. You find people, and I am incredibly, I don't know that grateful is the right word, but I did an awful lot of learning. I went to a project in Haringey, the Markfield Project and from there I went to a school fund which had a terrific inclusion programme and I'm not even sure about the word integration, but inclusion sounds to me far more like what we need. It was the kids who were my informants and who told me about the things that you could do if you had sticks or a wheelchair. When I had done my first draft I went back to them and they put me right on some things.

Obviously at a political and social level of course there should be more disabled people who are in there and are educating us and are the producers. But in the meantime, as non-disabled people I think we really do need to find ways to open up our own ears and eyes and learn. It's enriching for us all.

**CHRISTOPHER PILKINGTON, BBC TV:** I look after light entertainment for children's BBC television and the BBC is very committed to integration. I have a disabled child. My boy has cerebral palsy, so I am aware of that inner voice, I am aware of the world that Preethi described so beautifully and movingly. I

have suffered that agony and continue to suffer it. I, as a programme maker, am very well aware of how important it is that we need help in finding the right positive integration images, and here today we have seven different people from BBC children's television. I would like you to raise up your hands so that people can see who you are, so hopefully at lunchtime today you can nobble them, especially you writers, come up and nobble them. There are people here from drama. There is Stephen from 'Grange Hill' who has a child with Cerebral Palsy in the cast, integrated within the story; Peter Charlton who does 'All Star Record Breakers', or used to do. He now does 'We Are the Champions' and 'Bitza' as well, so Peter's here. We have got Guy from 'Newsround' who looks after the news and current affairs for children's television; we have got two people over there who also look after young people's programmes; so make yourselves known to them. Writers come and talk to us, help us to make sure that what we are saying today really does matter, because we can put things on the television, we can make a difference. It's up to all of us but come and talk to us please. Thank you.

**JULIE WARD, WRITER:** This is a plea for things not to be London centred all the time. I've come from a remote village in the north Pennines to be here today because I have been an ally, if this is a cause, and I believe it is, I have been an ally to the cause for twenty years. I am a writer, I'm a theatre practitioner and I work with community groups and despite all kinds of fads, fancies and funding in media representations, I have perceived, what I believe to be, a policy of inclusion in the work that I do. But I have watched fads and fancies come and go and today seems to me like a moment to seize. Fourteen years ago, no, longer than that, I was involved in setting up an integrated youth theatre for disabled and non-disabled children. When I left that theatre company it stopped, and it should never have stopped. It should have been enshrined in the theatre company's work from then onwards.

It worries me that continually people are doing



things and they are happening. Then as soon as those people walk out the door or as soon as funding patterns change, those things don't happen anymore. I have watched all this go on and change and it really concerns me that this conference needs to mark some kind of turning point. I think that the most important people here today are the people who have power because they are in control of budgets and grants and can make those kinds of decisions. They can say you won't get the money unless you do this. The media, who never pick up stories from outside London, they don't pick up stories which are about marginalised groups. I was also involved as a writer in a writing project for people with learning difficulties seven years ago and I have not been able to pursue that over the past few years. ('Secret Lives' 1989 Yorkshire Arts Circus). I have gone on to do other things. Pat Borthwick is here from NAWA (National Association of Writers in Education), I'm going to be trained next week. I'm going to be doing the same work that I was doing seven years ago. I am doing it because I want to open more doors to myself and the people that I work with. But it is very depressing for me that seven years on that particular area doesn't seem to have moved anymore than it had when I published two books, which I'll wave around, and the media didn't pick up on these at all and it's really depressing. So please, don't go away today without taking note about these things that need to be continued, not just for today but for always.

**SAFFRON BURROWS, ACTRESS. ALAN CUMMING** (actor) very much wanted to be here today but unfortunately couldn't be. Alan has asked me to say something for him. "I have always thought of myself as right on, well balanced and concerned but since thinking about the question of disability and how it is perceived and portrayed within the arts, I realise I have been very blinkered. When I thought of the number of disabled people I see around me in the world, compared to the number that I work with in films, TV and theatre, there is a

long way to go in accepting and integrating people with disabilities, I now realise. To me, the most obvious and the most pressing area for change is to allow people with disabilities to play people with disabilities. How often have able bodied actors pretended to be disabled and how often have the disabled actors pretended to be able bodied? See what I mean? Just as it is now inconceivable for a white person to put on make-up & pretend to be Black, so it should be for someone with no notion of disability to portray someone who is disabled. Allowing the public to believe that someone disabled in 'The Bill' will, before long, pop up in 'EastEnders' fully recovered is very worrying. Real life isn't like that and art is surely, if nothing else, a representation of real life and an exploration of the issues therein. I am sorry I can't attend the Conference today. I am in Los Angeles where playing someone with a disability guarantees two things: 1) an Oscar nomination and 2) the actor will never have been disabled in his or her life. Lots of very talented people have been, the least we can do is encourage the situation where their voice is heard. Thank you.

**COLIN IZOD: SCHOOL'S TV PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR.** Richard and I made the programme 'Images of Disability' which you saw a bit of earlier on and we were very fortunate to find Sarah Plunkett who was the girl with cerebral palsy who was at Northumberland Park Integrated School. She was extremely articulate; in a way that is not easy for disabled children to be because of their segregated education. So I do think that in the end the integrated education movement is a very important part of what we are discussing here today. But also, as a TV producer, the question of casting comes up. I propose that what we really need here is a partnership between those of us who work in the media, those of us who have those concerns – I also have a disabled child, if I can put that badge on my jacket like everybody else has been doing – we need a network, a partnership between us and those people in the disabled



movement who know where the kids are who have the talent to act. It is not easy to put someone on screen, to put someone in front of a camera and, as a director you put your life on the line. There are hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds being spent and your decision in casting is likely to attract a considerable amount of attention, so when you make that decision you are very circumspect about who you choose. Now, I have just finished eight 20 minute dramas for BBC Schools, that's the area I mainly work in. I found some extremely talented youngsters, but nowhere was I able to find (perhaps I didn't look hard enough but I did try quite hard,) kids between twelve and fourteen, who were the kids I was looking for, who were very good actors, and they had to be very good actors for this. I went to Sylvia Young's Theatre School, Anna Sher, there are hundreds of places where you can find lots of beautiful, talented young kids. Part of the reason they go there is because they have that body beautiful idea in their heads. This is the problem that we are up against.

Until the kids get into the schools, till disabled kids are doing drama along with everybody else as it were, there is a very serious and very deep rooted problem. But I think we could propose a network of information where we can find talented actors among the disabled community. I'm talking about kids here because I think I agree with Grainne Marmion that if you start with children then you are starting in the right place. You start with school's television, you start with children's television, that has to be the right place to start. So I propose that somehow or other that partnership should begin to develop.

**SHARON MACE, YOUNG AND POWERFUL/CHAIR NATIONAL DISABILITY ARTS FORUM:**

I would just like to make two points. Firstly, coming back to the point about apartheid, I think the very powerful message for me came from somebody I met at university who had grown up in South Africa, a white South Africa, who worked with disabled children integrated into mainstream

schools. He was very aware of issues of segregation versus inclusion, and when we started to talk about Black South Africans he said, well they are not equal, they can't be; they are black. And he hadn't experienced the point, that equality can go right across the board. When we looked at it further we realised it was because he'd only seen images of Black people being something less than him as a white person. We talked through those issues and we were on a literature course and he said, now in Britain I can see that you have lots of images of Black people but no Disabled People, why don't you want to be equal? He thought that Black people in South Africa didn't want to be equal as he thought we didn't, purely because of the images he was being fed. I would like to underline, because I think it does need underlining, that art, even for very young children is political. It entertains but it also politicises at a very personal level and by doing nothing we are still doing something. We are colluding with the political culture that we are struggling to live in and we are struggling, because we are struggling on our own. We are not in a position to be the powerful image-makers of the moment because the buildings, the metaphorical buildings, where the power is contained aren't accessible to us. We have to do it in partnership together and that I think is a very important point. To get anywhere politically there has got to be a partnership. My other point is not mine, it comes from a fourteen year old disabled girl who is at a mainstream school, always has been. She's a wheelchair user and she is fully included within her own society. I was speaking to her recently and she asked me 'when will people stop loving me?' and, when we talked it through, she presumed that as you become an adult, people stop loving you because she had no images of loved disabled adults. She was frightened of becoming the evil, disfigured disabled person and she had been so scared of this that she hadn't been able to say to her parents 'will you still love me on my eighteenth birthday?' She presumed her security, her safety net and all her relationships



would break the day she became an adult. That is a very powerful and a political point and I think, certainly for myself, I feel that I have a responsibility to show her that she can still be part of society and that people she currently has relationships with will still want to know her as a valid person.

**CHARLES DENTON, HEAD OF BBC TV'S DRAMA GROUP:** What we heard this morning focussed issues which in my mind had so far been unfocussed. I speak as the father of a grown up daughter with multiple disabilities, and, by profession, as Head of BBC TV's Drama Group.

What seems to me to be urgently needed is the will and determination to focus producers and other decision makers on the need to address the issue of disability, the issue of invisibility and stereotyping within our society.

I intend to harass my producers, and particularly the producers of running popular shows like **'EastEnders'** to consider, just consider, building in storylines and opportunities to deal with some of the issues we've heard about. I don't believe too much in proselytising drama, but I do believe that a show like **'EastEnders'** has an obligation to reflect the whole of the society in which it is set, not just the so-called 'normal'.

I think if each of us here agreed to try to influence a handful of our colleagues, we would begin to notice a difference.

**NEW SPEAKER:** I just want to say that we shouldn't all be lulled into a false sense of security, you hear about companies that profess to have equal opportunity policies. At my college they have this beautiful brick ramp leading up to the college door and it weaves all the way up there and when you get to the top there are about ten steps actually leading into the college building. They won an award for this design. So the people in wheelchairs have to go round the back by the bins and the gents toilets to get into the college. So you have to watch out for the sort of image that companies put

across. I will say one thing, disabled people don't have a problem with their disability; it's the able bodied people who have the problem.

**WENDY HARPE, ARTS COUNCIL:** I have just two things to say, mainly to the people who spoke from television. I think when people hit disability it seems to me they lose their minds. They go into emotional modes. I think disability is an area which you need to educate yourself on by reading. In terms of casting we have at least **'Graeae'** in this country which is a professional company of disabled actors, who run a youth theatre which is full of disabled children, and they will go out and research for you, you just have to phone them up. And they are not some sort of deep hidden secret. So I would suggest that your research departments are not good enough on this subject really.

**NEW SPEAKER:** I am a writer I was also going to plug **'Graeae'**, but I was going to say as well, I live in Bradford and I do quite a bit of work for schools broadcasting and then I go into schools. When I write the parts I hear certain voices in my head, and then the casting is mainly done from Sylvia Young and from Tiffen Voice School, and so there are all sorts of things for the children to have to get over before they can begin to recognise themselves in the pieces that are done. I am not quite sure that big institutions are geared up to include people in the way that we would all like to see done, but I hope that may begin to change.

**PETER CHARLTON, BBC TV PRODUCER:** Just to set the record straight, the programme (referred to earlier) is called **'We are the Champions'** which, for the grown-ups here, is a sports competition programme featuring children with disabilities. I just want a word as a school governor – because one thing that has been said several times is the importance of integration. At the moment I think, and I think everybody would agree, that it is important for children with disabilities to be integrated into mainstream. As a governor this is



getting extremely difficult, partly because of cuts in school budgets everywhere, but also because of the league tables. A lot of schools are now refusing to accept children with disability in mainstream. I think we all should be aware of it, and we should all fight it. In my own borough we are in the stupid position of losing, fairly soon I think, a very highly skilled, special needs teacher because she has a Downs Syndrome child and has been unable to get the child accepted into any single mainstream school. So beware brothers and sisters.

**BILLIE ROSEN, WRITER:** Talking about things not being only about in London and England, but of course disabilities, both mental and physical, are worldwide. I grew up in a small village in Greece with two cousins who were both mentally disabled. Both of them completely integrated, and this is funny because remember, this is a long time ago, this dates back to the Greek Civil War in the 40's. One of them, cousin George was about twenty at the time and cousin George had the job of whistling in the ships and whistling them out again as they came into the harbour. For that he was paid a small sum, nobody laughed at him, nobody made fun of him behind his back, he was then able to go and buy his cigarettes, stick them behind his ear, feel important, till the next boat came in. Absolutely accepted. The other cousin we took to school. We put him in a greengrocer's cart and we wheeled him to school every morning. He had had polio and meningitis, as a two year old. But we thought well, if we go to school so should he. Nobody seemed to object. We took Arkie to school, put him at a desk and the teacher said, "Oh, right you have to help him though", because we were 90 children, there were four classes and we were ninety children. So the teacher said "Fine, if you want him to be here we are not going to stop you, but you've got to help him." All these classes took turns helping my cousin Arkie who truly the only thing he rewarded them with was a big smile. Now this whole village had accepted the whole family, these two cousins – no question. Then the political

situation changed and my lot were all dissidents, 'very nasty people', they were the ones who fought up in the mountains. And all at once, we were all classed mentally disabled because we thought differently or at least my family did, I was just a child.

So the whole family was classed mentally disabled and when we asked for proof of this my grandmother said, "What do you mean, you have known us, you have known me – I'm sixty years old, these are my grandchildren, you know two that are if you like, normal." She said, "What's the problem now?" So the police chief came in looked around and said, "Ah! I can prove that you are all mentally disabled. There you are you see, that's the weak link." That was my poor cousin. So we were all supposed to be shot. They said, "You should all be taken out and be shot because you are all mentally disabled." My question is this, I told this story to a class of school children. At first they were all going "Ahhh".

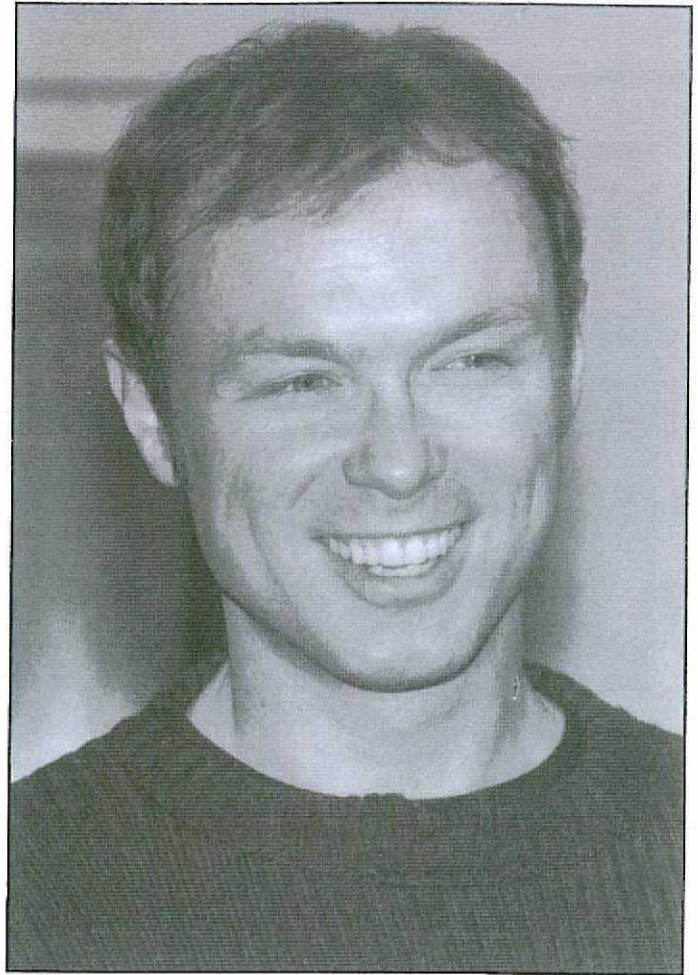
Afterwards when I spoke to them privately, no one, not two but three and four came up and said "Well really, what kind of life would you have anyway?" These are children about thirteen years old, and what I want to say is the veneer is there but what goes on underneath? Is Nazi Germany really that far away? Is this sort of thinking really as buried as we like to think it is because we were that much away from being shot, the whole family, and this is in England, the school class I am talking about was in England three months ago. So really, is it all buried, is it sort of nice on the surface as we think it is or if you scratch the veneer underneath how many will say "Political dissidents, mentally disabled, physically disabled – yeah shoot them because, really I mean, what are they there for?"

**NEW SPEAKER:** I just wanted to say something which I hope will encourage you because I think it is fantastic what you are doing and I think that it is just appalling the way disabled people seem to have been cut off, particularly through transport. So I wanted to share with you something that I

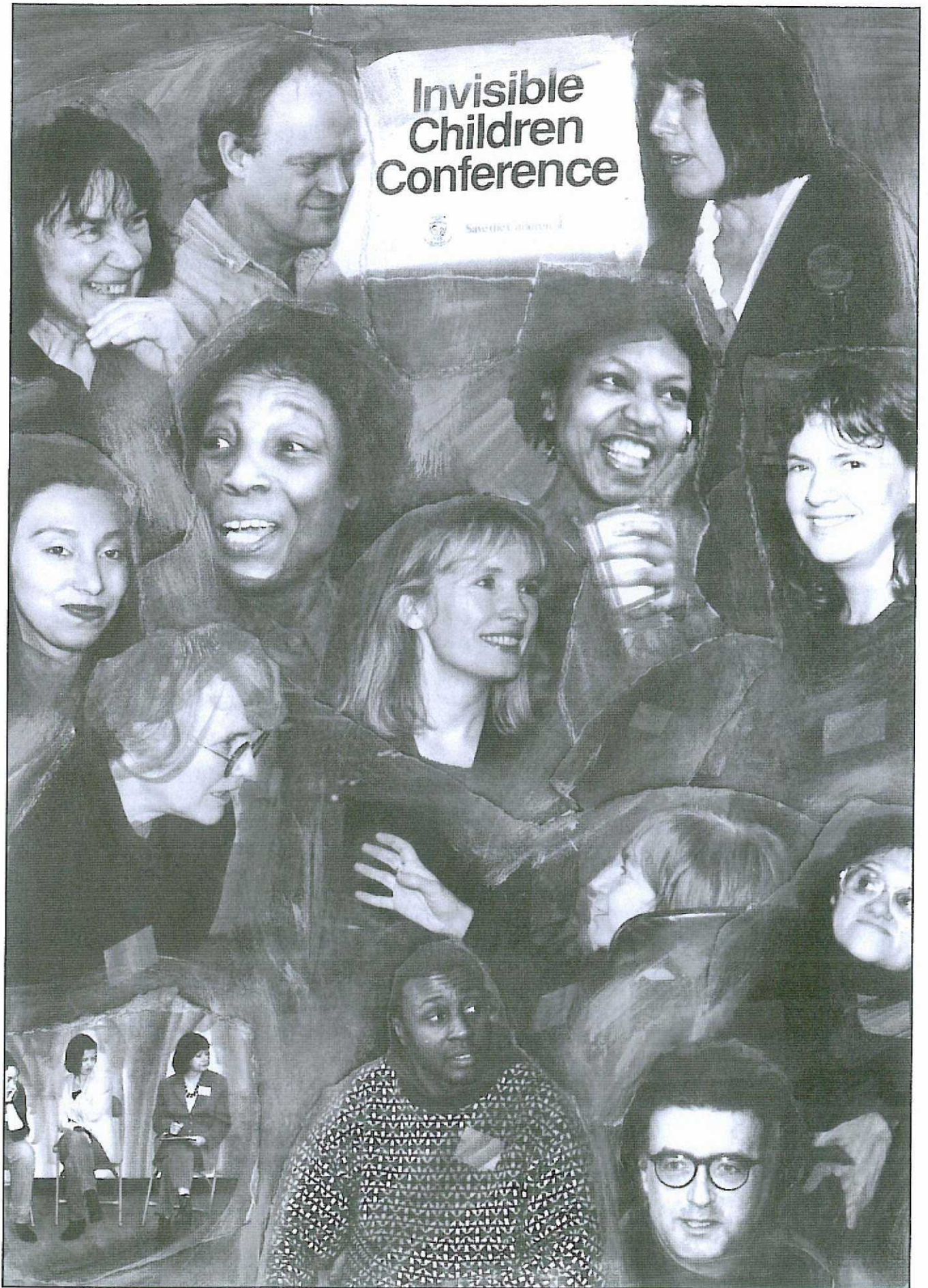


have noticed because I go a lot to California and in Santa Cruz where there are a lot of disabled people, partly because they are Vietnam Vets., they have completely taken over sections of the city and one thing they do is they are all the parking meter people. Not only that, they have lobbied for the buses to be accessible and all the buses have legs that come out and lift you on if you happen to be at a bus stop with a wheelchair. So, consequently, you meet disabled people all the time.

They are just around you and you get to talk to them and you get to know them and I think that is extremely important and something that we should be working towards here. That we include disabled people in our ordinary lives.









# Invisible Children

## Afternoon Session Workshops and Plenary

### SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS

THE MAIN POINTS MADE FOLLOW THIS SECTION

#### MOVING IMAGE A

FACILITATOR RICHARD RIESER

SCRIBE ROSY ADRIAENSSENS

A wide ranging discussion took place of our group who were mainly involved with television. Disabled people from 'Richard III' onwards have been used in drama to make a point. It was agreed we had to find a way of genuinely portraying disabled people in the media. The need for greater integration in schools was covered. Labels of 'politically correct' were often used to curb equal opportunities. We are talking about a fundamental human rights issue. What is appropriate in terms of language and role is for disabled people themselves to identify. As for casting disabled actors for disabled parts views were split. Why can't we have cross-casting? We need disabled children to represent themselves and to find ways of supporting them. Most of all we need to be serious about making disabled people 'real' on TV.

#### MOVING IMAGE B

FACILITATOR MENGHI MEULCHANDANI

SCRIBE SOPHIE LAWS

We recognised it is going to be hard to make the change but then life is hard.

We started talking about integration and that it was about inclusion not academic achievement. In this change of awareness of all children, media images are crucial. A common experience was portraying disabled people as wheelchair users only. Only 8% of disabled people ever use a wheelchair.

We need to encourage a whole range of disabled people to tell their stories. Some were concerned with the integrity of an original piece of drama and opposed cross casting. Others believed it was for the actors and director to communicate the theme of the play and its universality through their skill. Writers need to get to know disabled people from the inside. We should have disabled characters in mainstream drama, but the focus should be on them as people, not on their impairment. Their ordinariness should predominate because we have a common human experience, then as a supplementary aspect their impairment.

Dual focus on the Writers Guild and commissioning editors and on young disabled people being encouraged into acting.

#### FIXED IMAGE C

FACILITATOR LOIS KEITH

SCRIBE DIANA NEWTON

REPORTER JAN WHITING

Many writers are nervous about getting it wrong and steer away from disability issues. Writers would welcome an advisory group of disabled people to proof new novels. Such advice should not be free. The ordinariness of the issue needed to be accessed by writers. Ways could be found of promoting Disabled Writers and their work amongst publishers. It should be possible to submit it and have it edited into a professional style. Disability and excellence are not mutually exclusive. Writers are not special. They have the same prejudices as everyone else but it is important they recognise this in themselves. Children are more accepting of difference, but publishers, not children, decide what makes a book. We need books that are more truthful and acknowledge bullying, so children can question the devaluing of disabled people they pick up from adult society. But stories should avoid 'overcoming' disability to get to the conclusion.

#### FIXED IMAGE D

FACILITATOR HAZEL PEASLEY

SCRIBE JUDY LISTER

We had a lot of authors in our group. We had an interesting discussion about the language used in books and how hard it is to keep up with the changes in the language that disabled people want to be used. One participant described how last year he had adapted an interesting children's adventure story, based on a Scottish island, for a film script. The lead role was a girl with cerebral palsy who communicated by computer. Walt Disney turned it down because they could not have a 'heroine' who was disabled. They would have accepted the best friend being disabled they said! We discussed the problem of the demand from publishers about impairment specific books like 'I have Asthma', and



how we can overcome this and bring in more social issues. We can't change or ban classical books and they can still be enjoyed, but critically evaluated. Children, parents, publishers, writers and disabled people need to link up. We need to re-evaluate how old folk stories and fairy tales are presented and illustrated. We need to make a personal commitment to change to more positive imagery.

#### MOVING IMAGE E

FACILITATOR SHARON MACE

SCRIBE NICKY ROAD

We began by asking where do we find disabled actors having agreed there should be more disabled actors on television. We focussed on **disabled children** and decided to get them on mainstream programmes as child actors but not to go to theatre schools. It became quite clear that in theatre schools like Sylvia Young "they've all got nicely combed hair with sparkling white teeth" and that doesn't represent all of us, and yet, out there in society there is a representation of all of us somewhere if we can find it. There is resistance to including disabled actors and guarding against perceived failure, but it could liberate us all to re-examine our practice. We should ensure through our employment policies that disabled technicians bring their insights to our work. Children have a lousy deal and little power in our society. We should use our power to create a space for disabled children in TV.

#### MOVING IMAGES F

FACILITATOR ANN POINTON

SCRIBE PENNY KENWAY

A mixed group of television and theatre practitioners. We talked about representation on screen both in terms of fictional and factual programming; about the difficulties producers might have in meeting and using disabled people and the discomfort they have about meeting Disabled People's Organisations, some of whom will be more or less sympathetic to their quest. We felt that since more disabled people needed to appear on screen, whether it be drama or current affairs, and there was a problem of finding them, a data base would be helpful, including children and young people who were experienced, interested or trained in theatre or television work. We also need a more formal children's television network and forum both for practitioners and disabled people.

#### FIXED IMAGE G

FACILITATOR BARBARA CLAYTON

SCRIBE TINA HYDER

In our initial discussion there was a plea for more examples of pieces of work that are going in the right direction. We discussed language and publishers featured quite a lot with regard to whom they ask about which books to publish. Disabled people want to see diversity celebrated in books and that is a political issue. Writing is an isolated activity and to get in touch with existing writers as our allies would be useful and to look at existing organisations that can help us along the way. A worry was that publishers are driven by money and we looked at ways to persuade them that the right sort of books are being published. Firstly, the direct lobbying of publishers using the Conference Report and this would be a joint initiative between Disabled Artists and writers. Secondly, to forge links between illustrators, writers, and Disabled People to bring forward ideas of the sorts of images that we want to see, and how to get in touch with writers and illustrators who may use them. Thirdly, to put this issue on the agenda by making sure there are critical reviews written in newspapers and journals written by disabled people. We need to work on our own prejudices, to go back to our workplaces and ask for in-house training, Disability Equality Training, as part of race, gender and equality issues and make sure that we get disabled people in to talk to people in libraries. We need toys that reflect the experience of disabled people. We need to look at ways to expand the demand because, at the moment, those that do exist are very expensive.

#### FIXED IMAGE H

FACILITATOR PREETHI MANUEL

SCRIBE STEPH SMITH

Illustrators, writers and one journalist. The illustrators wanted to portray powerful evil characters, but they also felt they wanted not to associate disability with evil and that they hadn't been aware of this connection before. So what they wanted was more awareness in dealing with the situation, but not to make it so bland as to not get a strong reaction from the readers. They also did not want easy solutions by having 'a mass of wheelchairs appearing'. Decided to use Disabled People's Organisations as a sounding board and work together with them. Writers group wanted to write from a natural position and so reflect an increase in inclusion in schools which is linked to political change in this country.







# Invisible Children

## SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS FROM WORKSHOPS

1 Disabled people want to be part of the illustrations, stories and storylines in books, films and programmes, sometimes incidentally and sometimes main parts, where the focus is on relationships not on their impairment. People with learning difficulties and people with hidden impairments such as Epilepsy, M.E. and Sickle Cell need to be included. We also need images of children and adults with facial disfigurements to show their ordinariness and dispel fears.

### ■ Moving Images

2 To avoid stereotyped portrayals, to make disabled people real, the key is to get storylines which are on-going, over a long period into the mainstream soaps. Writers and producers of TV series should be encouraged to introduce disabled characters. (Grange Hill are doing this very well.) The continuing nature of the soaps lend themselves to a gentle introduction to disability issues, looking at other complex things and then moving into how society disables in other ways. Writers should create characters who happen to be disabled, ie. defined first by their complex humanity and second by their disability. (14% of the adult population are disabled. 10% of parents have disabled children. This is a mainstream audience!)

3 Disabled people can play any character not just those written to be disabled. In Shakespeare, Juliet could be a wheelchair user. In mainstream television disabled people could be there all the time as Newsreaders, Weather Forecasters etc.

4 Everyone involved in the media should look at their employment policies and employ disabled actors, writers, researchers, editors, on the creative side and also on the production side. There should be traineeships offered in all production companies to bring disabled people's experience into the production team, eg. a disabled camera operator would realise how disempowering it is to be shot above eye-line and that being shot from below eye-line is empowering.

5 A list could be drawn up of individuals and organisations willing to act as paid Disability

Consultants to advise and train authors, publishers and programme makers and the commissioning editors. The Writers Guild could also play a greater role in introducing disabled characters. There should be further regional Conferences with emphasis on how to introduce disability into programmes (as with race & gender).

6 We need disabled children in mainstream programmes as child actors. However, they are not to be found in theatre schools like Sylvia Young and Anna Scher. (Perhaps we could persuade drama clubs and schools to encourage disabled children to participate.) We need a database of disabled actors including children and young people who are interested and may have some experience or be trained in theatre or television work. A formal children's television and disability network would also be useful. This would allow people to communicate and meet. Setting up the database and the network could appeal to the BBC or Channel 4.

### ■ Fixed Images

7 Use the skills of professional writers to encourage and support disabled people in producing stories and texts. Some means of paying for this Literary Partnership needs to be found, possibly by publishers (also in point 4). It is important to listen to disabled children, get their views on books and encourage them to write.

8 Build a literary network, plug into existing networks, develop a directory starting with the people attending the Conference. The network would forge links between illustrators, writers and disabled people to bring forward ideas of the sorts of images that we want to see, and connect with other writers and illustrators who may use them. Organisations like the Association of Illustrators and the Society of Authors, could put these ideas in their newsletters. There should be reviews written from disabled people's perspective.

9 Publishers to put more emphasis on taped versions of texts. Books in taped form should be more readily available (for people with visual impairment and learning difficulty). The direct lobbying of publishers using the Conference



Report could be a joint initiative between disabled artists and writers.

10 Language in books. Classic stories should not be rewritten, but children should be taught to critically evaluate them. Current books should try to get the language right, particularly in non-fiction eg. the difference between 'disabled' and 'impairment'. There was a plea for image makers to develop an awareness about the language of disability.

11 We hope as image makers to make a personal commitment to what we have learned today, research to improve imagery and open up a wider dialogue. We need to work on our own prejudices, take the message of the Conference back to our workplaces and initiate in-house Disability Equality Training.

12 The illustrators, not having been aware of the

issue previously, wanted to disassociate portrayals of evil and disability. They still wished to portray powerful and evil characters to get strong reactions from readers but they wanted more training and awareness to break the link with disability.

13 There should be an annual literary competition of writing featuring disabled characters, to be judged by a panel of disabled people.

14 Journalists' dilemma was how to cover events like Comic Relief and Children in Need without patronising disabled people. A way forward is that they can create a space for the perspective of disabled people in covering these.

15 The need for toys that reflect the images and experience of disabled people. We need to look at ways to expand the demand because, at the moment, those that do exist are very expensive.

## Closing Comments

BARBARA LISICKI - CHAIR

I haven't contributed much today but I would like to say there have been some really useful contributions from the workshops and from what people have been saying here in the plenary both this morning and this afternoon. From my point of view one of the single most useful activities that could be done, certainly by the BBC, but probably by ITV as well, is to drop charity or fund raising appeals like 'Children in Need'. You can't argue that disabled children have got to be seen in the context of equality and then start begging on their behalf by showing images of them as pitiable or dependent.

RICHARD RIESER: Thank you all very much for coming and contributing.

I hope the thinking, discussion, connections and networks that have started today will continue to spread outwards like the ripples on a pond to change the image of disabled people so that children and all people know us in all our diversity as just being part of life.



## Stereotypes of Disabled People

by Richard Rieser

*The pre-conceived attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are one of the biggest barriers to our equal opportunities.*

These stereotypes are portrayed on television and the radio, in local and national newspapers and magazines, in comics, in childrens books, in adult literature, in films and in advertising.

In part these stereotypes are based on superstitions, myths and beliefs from earlier times, but they show remarkable persistence and are rooted in deep seated and childish fears we all have about disability.

We can all, at any time, become physically or mentally disabled as well as die. Perhaps the need to distance ourselves from this reality makes it convenient to rely on stereotypes of disability. They are less troubling than accepting the individuality, the joy, the pain, the appearance and behaviour and the rights of disabled people. The refusal to acknowledge this rich variety of human experience diminishes the humanity of the able-bodied.

Disabled people have been and are challenging these negative attitudes and images of ourselves.

Teachers, parents, librarians, publishers, writers and illustrators, photographers, designers, advertisers, journalists and all who collaborate in maintaining these images have to be made to see the damage they perpetrate.

### What are the Stereotypes of Disabled People?

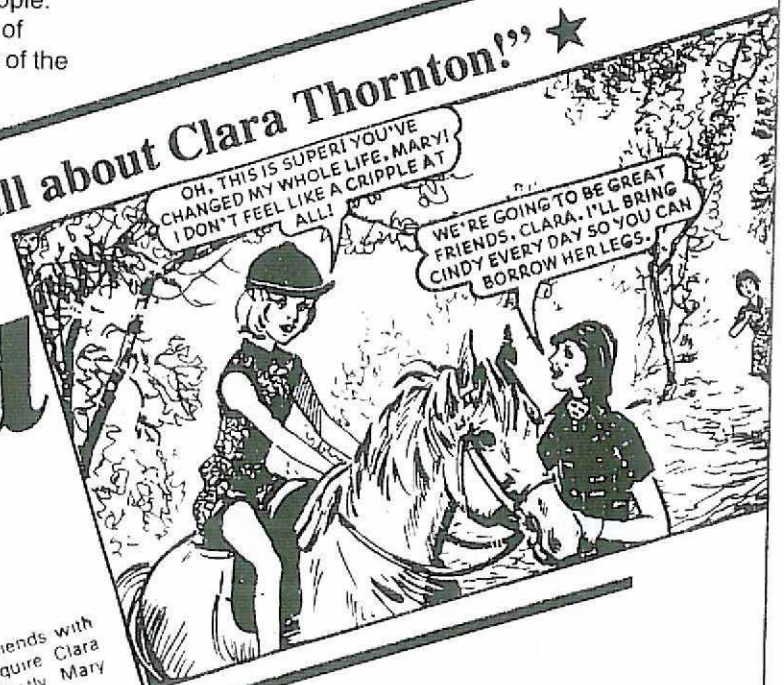
Biklen and Bogdana (1977) in their study of 'Media Portrayals of Disabled People' identified 10 commonly occurring handicapped stereotypes. We shall use this as a basic framework.

'Crippled Clara'  
Credit Buntv  
Magazine.

# ★ "You must forget all about Clara Thornton!"

## THE COURAGE OF Crippled Clara

AFTER moving to the country, Mary Jordan made friends with Clara Thornton, the frail crippled daughter of the squire. Clara had begged for a ride on Mary's pony and reluctantly Mary had agreed.



### (1) The disabled person as pitiable and pathetic

This has recently been reinforced by the Telethon to raise money for the disabled. In adult literature Laura in 'The Glass Menagerie' or Philip Carey in



'Of Human Bondage'. The inclusion of the disabled character is often used as a literary device to show another character's goodness and sensitivity. Tiny Tim in Dickens's 'Christmas Carol' 'Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch and had his limbs supported by an iron frame'; Porgy in 'Porgy and Bess', Gershwin's opera is another example. This patronising stereotype springs in part from feelings of superiority of the non-disabled to the disabled and is patronising.

The disability charities operate on this stereotype reinforcing the passive, pitiable dependency of disabled people. Much public information comes from, and government funding, goes to these charities, which are *not* controlled by disabled people.

For many years one of these charities allowed the absurd sight of little girls wearing callipers to sit outside shops begging for money!

As the charities compete for money, they outdo each other in projecting pitiable images of disability.

## **(2) The disabled person as an object of violence**

In reality, disabled people are often victims of violence. But the absence of other roles in media and literature reinforces society's view of people with disabilities as totally helpless and dependent.

Films like 'What Ever Happened to Baby Jane' in which Joan Crawford confined to her wheelchair is wholly at the mercy of her murderous sister Bette Davis or, Audrey Hepburn's blind character in 'Wait Until Dark'.

In television too the disabled are apt to be victims.

The tabloid press will use this stereotype, but they seem less horrified when reporting the mistreatment of the mentally disabled in institutions.

## **(3) (a) The disabled person as sinister or evil**

This is one of the most persistent stereotypes.

William Shakespeare's Richard III is a classic example. For dramatic effect the character is given a disability to accentuate the evil dimension of his personality.

In fairy tales 'the dwarf' Rumpelstiltsken, and the mean witch (leaning on her crutch) in Hansel and Gretel, or Captain Hook, in J.M. Barrie's 'Peter Pan'.

In Collodis' story Pinocchio, where a fox and a cat, in order to steal from the hero, pretended to be paralysed and blind. At the end of the book their feigned afflictions became real: is this not meant to be their just punishment for their deceit?

Stevenson's Treasure Island begins by using disabled characters Blind Pew and Black Dog to evoke terror and suspense.

Many of the villains in films are given a disability. Dr Strangelove, Dr No and a whole host of characters in horror and science fiction movies; where the evilness of characters is matched to their grotesque appearance.

Wahl and Roth (16) 1982 in conducting a media watch in Washington found that 'the image of psychiatric patients as frightening and dangerous came across clearly in television portrayals'. Mentally ill persons were shown to be active confused, aggressive, dangerous, unpredictable and male. Such an image is inaccurate; mentally ill persons, in general are much more likely to be withdrawn and frightened; than violent and aggressive; they are more likely to avoid than to attach others; they are as often female as male.

## **(b) The disabled child as the reward for the evils of the parents.**

Nowadays confined to fantasy as in the film 'Rosemary's Baby'.

Throughout Europe from the Middle Ages up to 1800's it was widely believed that deformed or disabled babies were changelings. The devil or fairies had changed the baby. This was because

---

*In real life Richard III was not disabled at all*

'I, that am curtail'd of this fair proposition  
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature  
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
Into the breathing world, scarce half made up  
And that so lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace

Have no delight to pass away the time  
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun  
And Descant on mine own deformity  
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
To entertain these fair well spoken days  
I am determined to prove a villain  
And hate the idle pleasures of those days (Act  
1 Sc. 1)

---





'Bunty'

of the sins of the parents. Infanticide of such children was common.

Many thousands of women who gave birth to such babies were burnt at the stake as witches. To give birth to a disabled baby was proof positive of intercourse with the devil.

#### (4) The disabled person as atmosphere

Blind musicians, news dealers and the blind man with the cup are frequently thrown in for seasoning in films and TV stories, a practice which dilutes the humanity of disabled people by reducing them to the status of colourful or curious objects. Related to this stereotype is the depiction of people with disabilities as exotica. People displayed in this way at 'freak shows' are the victims of this stereotype. In the USA despite higher profile campaigns against handicapism than in the UK, the 'freak' remains a feature of state fairs. The headline in Newsday 5 September 1983 read:

'Farmers, freaks, fun: 142nd State fair'. At the entrance of the Great Sutton's circus sideshow there's and old thin man, about 3 feet tall. Then there's Otis, the Frog Boy, a middle aged man with deformed non-functioning legs and hands.'

British circuses still feature dwarfs and bearded ladies amongst their attractions.

These exotica and interest in the physical condition of people is forever focussed upon in comics and horror and science fiction movies, and it would be true to say that these continually reinforce the idea that physical appearance is linked to the moral character of the person so portrayed.

#### (5) The disabled person as 'Super Cripple'.

Disabled people are often portrayed as having super human attributes. 'Ironside' the wheelchair bound detective has extraordinary mental powers as well as an unusual calm in the presence of adversity. Longstreet, another TV private eye, who is blind, is given superhuman hearing.

Readers Digest and other magazines often feature the extraordinary achievements of disabled persons who 'overcome' so becoming 'acceptable'. TV news also regularly feature people with disabilities who have taken part in sports events such as the London Marathon, the Wheelchair Olympics or water skiers with one leg.

It is not that people with disabilities do not participate and enjoy these events, rather it is that the media in showing mainly this perspective of disabled people's achievement encourages the stereotype that disabled people have to over-compensate to win acceptance in the wider community. By always making examples of people like Helen Keller and other disabled superachievers our society implies that the experiences of ordinary people who are just struggling to cope are unheroic or irrelevant.

Another side of the same coin is heaping excessive praise on the disabled person for carrying out some perfectly reasonable act. We are not being seen as people.

#### (6) The disabled person as laughable

Mr Magoo is the fool in showing society's view that certain conditions of being - in this case physical disability - are humorous. People with hearing loss are frequently made the butt of jokes in comedy routines and 'jokes' when they misinterpret what is said to them. Harpo Marx built his career of humour on not speaking. The 'Thalidomide' joke or more recently the jokes about the victims of the Kings Cross fire which pass around schools and playgrounds and can be heard to be repeated in staffrooms, show that this stereotype is very much with us. Laughter may often be used to deal with difficult or embarrassing situations. All the more reason for



# When you buy a copy of Anti-Social for the Disabled, you help the handicapped 5 ways:



Credit: 'Anti-social for the Disabled'

Give so others may live!



all teachers to take up and discuss with a class the whole area of disability.

Recently the film 'Hear No Evil, See No Evil' featured a blind man and a deaf man thrown together having to solve a crime with 'hilarious' consequences. Here both blind and deaf are the butt of the joke.

**(7) The disabled person as her/his own worst enemy** - blaming the victim. This is also common in racist and sexist attitudes and behaviour.

Disabled people are often portrayed as self-pitiers who could 'make it' if only they would stop being 'bitter' about their 'fate', think positively and rise to 'the challenge'. The legitimate anger which disabled people feel about society's abuse is misrepresented as unfounded bitterness that has its roots in the person's character. The parallel with the 'male' view of women complaining of sexual harassment or rape victims 'as asking for it' is obvious. Similarly in racist attitudes and behaviour, which classifies those in the black community who react to racism as the problem, we see the blaming of the victim. TV medical shows such as 'Marcus Welby MD' are particularly prone to this approach. This may well have its roots in the clinical approach to disability that does not put it in a social context. Certainly my experiences at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital lead me to believe this is a fairly general attitude in hospitals dealing with people with disabilities.

Children's authors seem especially fond of this

stereotype. An example is 'The Door in the Wall' by Marguerite de Angeli (Doubleday 1949). Here Robin reacts angrily when a child calls him 'crook shanks' because his legs are disabled. Robin's guardian, Brother Luke, both criticises and laughs at his anger. Later Robin 'overcomes' and so Robin changes from a person who naturally defends his rights into one who submits to society's narrow minded expectations. The reader is left with the impression that this change is desirable.

Another variant of this is the *Disabled person as using their Disability*. This is especially common amongst professionals dealing with disabled children.

Disabled children are not believed in their own assessment of how much, or how little they can do. 'They exaggerate their disability to manipulate.' This draws on another common assumption *that disabled people are all stupid or not intelligent*, the 'Does He Take Sugar' syndrome.

Both views derive from the Medical model of disability, that the doctors, psychotherapists, etc., know what is best and assess our capabilities. Yet they get it wrong so often. IT MUST BE REALISED THAT THE DISABLED PERSONS ARE THE BEST EXPERT ON WHAT THEY THEMSELVES ARE CAPABLE OF.

**(8) The disabled person as a burden**

This stereotype is linked to the concepts that all people with disabilities are helpless and need to be taken care of by 'normal' people. Many

**Avoiding Handicapist Stereotypes: Guidelines for writers, editors and book reviewers.**

- Shun one-dimensional characterisations of disabled persons. Portray people with disabilities as having individual and complex personalities and capable of a full range of emotions.
- Avoid depicting disabled persons only in the role of receiving: show disabled people interacting as equals giving as well as receiving. Too often the person with a disability is presented solely as the recipient of pity.
- Avoid presenting physical characteristics of any kind as determining factors of personality. Be especially cautious about implying a correlation between disability and evil.
- Refrain from depicting persons with disabilities as objects of curiosity. It is entirely appropriate to show disabled people as members of an average population or cast of characters. Most disabled people are able to participate in all facets of life and should be depicted in a wide variety of situations.
- A person's disability should not be



disabled people have fought hard to assert their right to independent living in the last 20 years; their right to be supported by society in overcoming the barriers society imposes. The idea their special needs are a burden comes from the difficulties society imposes on meeting their needs. The burden image objectifies and dehumanises. It is important to recognise that people with disabilities are human beings who are capable of much independence and of interacting with others in mutually rewarding ways.

The popular TV series 'Beauty and the Beast' set in New York portrays the disabled, disfigured outcasts as having to live a subterranean existence. It also underlines the unacceptability of the different and that they are dangerous and must be segregated.

### **(9) The disabled person as non-sexual**

Disabled people are almost always portrayed as totally incapable of sexual activity. In 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' by D.H. Lawrence, her husband is disabled and non-sexual leading to her affair with the socially inferior but sexually potent gamekeeper, Meadows.

(Battye - The Chatterley Syndrome in 'Stigma' 1966 )

Although some disabilities may limit an individual's sexual activity, the assumption that disabled people are non-sexual beings is false and unreal.

The film 'Coming Home' with Jane Fonda and Jon Voigt was particularly good in portraying how a

love affair develops between a paraplegic Vietnam war veteran and the attractive able-bodied wife of an army officer, Jane Fonda. Faced with the reality of this her husband can't take the 'insult to his virility' and tries to kill them, and then having been dissuaded by argument, kills himself.

Sexuality always arouses powerful emotions and nowhere more than put alongside disabled people. This probably explains why most portrayals ignore sexuality.

The opposite view of disabled persons as sex starved and degenerate, as featured in comics, TV crime and horror films is a strange reversal. Perhaps this links back to the thesis about those who are different challenging our primal insecurities including sexuality.

Certainly this ambivalence is suggested by the way men with certain mild disabilities - especially sustained in war -are viewed as brave and/or sexy, i.e., Nelson or Mosha Dayan. Of course this does not apply to women in a similar position. Women with disabilities have had to fight particularly hard to reclaim their sexuality. (See section on Women and Disability.)

I wonder if 'Coming Home' would have got released at all if Jane Fonda had been the paraplegic rather than Jon Voigt.

### **(10) The disabled person as incapable of fully participating in everyday life**

This stereotype is mainly perpetrated by disabled people being absent and not being shown as integral and productive members of society - as

ridiculed or made the butt of a joke. (Blind people do not mistake fire hydrants for people or bump into every object in their path, despite the myth-making of Mr Magoo.)

- Avoid the sensational in depicting disabled people. Be wary of the stereotype of disabled person as either the victims or perpetrators of violence.
- Refrain from endowing disabled characters with superhuman attributes. To do so is to imply that a disabled person must overcompensate and become super-human to win acceptance.
- Avoid a Pollyana-ish plot that implies a disabled person need only have 'the will' and the 'right attitude' to succeed. Young readers need insights into the societal barriers that keep disabled people from living full lives -systematic discrimination in employment, education and housing, inaccessible transportation and building, and exorbitant expense for necessities.
- Avoid showing disabled people as non-sexual. Show disabled people in loving relationships and expressing the same sexual needs and desires as non-disabled people.



part of the work force, families, schools and colleges. The absence of such portrayals feeds the concept that disabled people are inferior human beings who should be shut away and segregated. This is one of the biggest problems with nearly all literature, textbooks and curriculum materials, and with very few exceptions people with disabilities do not appear. **Over the last 10-15 years black people and girls have appeared as almost obligatory token figures in much children literature. Do images of the disabled, largely absent apart from specialist books have to go through the same tokenistic phase?** Regular inclusion of disabled people as participants in all facets of society would lend emphasis to the wide range of things we can do rather than to what we cannot.

*The Way Forward.* The portrayal of the disabled should ignore the 10 stereotypes outlined above. A number of guidelines have appeared which would be useful to reproduce here to help us with the above task.

The guidelines on pages 102-3 were prepared by the Center on Human Policy, the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York and the Council on Inter-racial Books for children. They are offered as suggestions to assist authors, editors, reviewers and readers in counteracting the common stereotypes about disabled people.

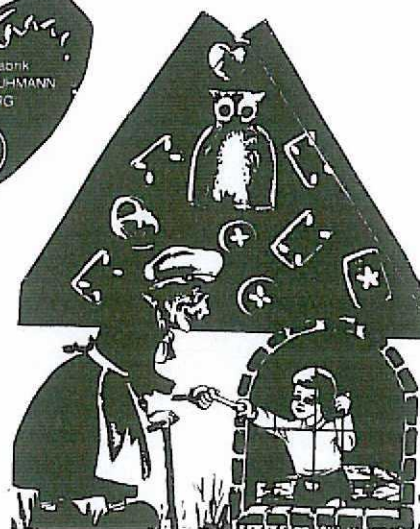
Update – The stereotypes are still very much with us. The Campaign Against Patronage has been

established by Disabled People and has taken direct action against the images of disabled people that are used by the big charities and against the way disability is portrayed on Telethon, Children in Need and Comic Relief. The latter allowed a film putting the Campaigns case, to be screened, but late at night. The press still continues to reinforce the image that disability is something to be frightened of or is a tragedy or outside society. 'What the Papers Say and Don't Say about Disability' (Spastic Society 1991 £2.95), looks at 335 stories in the national press and analyses their treatment of disability.

Films continue to reinforce stereotypes. 'Dick Tracey', directed by Warren Beatty portrayed all the baddies as disabled or disfigured. This was seen worldwide by more than 500 million children. Spielberg's latest film released in the UK 'Hook' reinforces the old stereotype of vengeful evilness caused by disability. The horror movie has always used appearance as a metaphor for character. However, with the increasing use of cartoons, such as the Turtles and others, children are now getting a daily diet of animated horror "comic morality" in which all that is evil is disabled, different or disfigured. This issue must be addressed by educationalists and parents. The producers of images must be made accountable to the public. Advertisers also feel free to use images of disability (see below) or the recent Guardian Advert featuring Britannia in a broken wheelchair (page 129).



**Dick Tracey**



**Packaging of Lebkuchen biscuits featuring the witch from Hansel and Gretel as disabled/evil**

**Footnote**

BCODP are producing a guide "Disability Stereotypes in the Media" in the spring 1992, which will include Charity Advertising and a proposed Code of Ethics. This should be very useful.

See also *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* by David Hevey, Routledge April 1992.

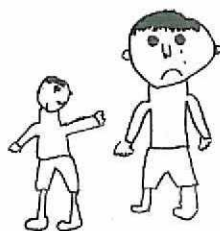


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## Nasty

When Richard was a little boy at school the kids made fun of him because he had polio. And said "arrrrrr you are horrible. look at your leg." When they said that it made him feel sad. The teacher didnt let him yous the life. PEOPLE MAKE FUN OF OTHER PEOPLE because they are in a wheelchair. Sometimes they tip them out and beat them up and they say they won't get a girlfriend or a boyfriend because they think disabled people are horrible. Sometimes disabled people think they are horrible them selves. Disabled people see beautiful people with no disability on the television or on advertisements. There arent hardly any disabled people in story books. If your black and you never see any pictures of black people you might feel invisible. That's how disabled people must feel.

by Indiana Age 7.



'Indiana Aged 7'

.....



DISABILITY AND TELEVISION

LANGUAGE AND DISABILITY

WHY BOTHER TO LOOK AT THE LANGUAGE OF DISABILITY?

1. LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT. Individuals and organisations of disabled people are rejecting much of the 'disability language' of the past which overwhelmingly conveys negative views and images of disabled people. Language reveals many of its users' underlying assumptions. It can be benevolent in intention but patronising and negative in effect. It can also be plainly offensive.

2. WHAT'S THE 'PROBLEM' OF DISABILITY? The old language of disability reflects the medical and individual focus on disability in which the problem of disability is seen as people's 'defective/malfunctioning' bodies which require either cure or care. An increasingly popular perspective with disabled people is the social model which focuses on the three key problems that disabled people face, ie, an inaccessible environment, institutional structures which create barriers to disabled people, and non-disabled people's attitudes.

3. WHO USES NEGATIVE LANGUAGE? Everyone uses negative language. Disabled people are not immune to language conditioning and use it too. 'What's wrong with you?' 'I have a bad leg' is an exchange that everyone takes for granted and sees as unproblematic. But more and more disabled people are adopting the view that language is important and can be changed, just as feminists rejected the word 'chairman' because of the meaning implicit in it.

4. MEDIA PROFESSIONALISM. No-one can change language habits overnight and some people might reject the need to do so. However, it is important to know about the debate around disability language and to understand that groups of disabled people and individuals may make judgements about where media professionals are 'coming from' by the language they use. But of course it is important not to get so worried about 'correct' language that one ceases to write about disability or on a personal level avoids contact with disabled people, who in any case may themselves still be using 'negative', or 'offensive' language.

5. CHANGING LANGUAGE - ONLY A FASHION? Disabled people are already under attack for introducing so-called 'politically correct' language. The two phrases most commonly used as ammunition in rejecting this are the phrases 'physically challenged' (horribly Outward-Boundish?) and 'differently abled' (aren't we all?). Paradoxically these euphemisms seem to be most popular with non-disabled people, and though they have certainly entered the debate, neither phrase has been or is being promoted by organisations of disabled people.

6. GUIDELINES ONLY. The attached guidelines are intended to be a helpful outline of ways in which the language around disability issues can become more positive. Challenge and stimulating discussion will undoubtedly continue in this area for some years yet.

DISABILITY AND TELEVISION

DISABILITY LANGUAGE - PROBLEMS AND PREFERENCES

COLLECTIVE, DEPERSONALISING, OBJECTIVISING NAMES, eg, 'the disabled', 'the handicapped', 'the elderly', are easy and lazy phrases to use, and great shorthand for news sub-editors writing headlines. They are nevertheless distancing, and imply a homogeneity which does not exist. Some disabled people see them as clearly offensive. Note however, that the deaf community in general still uses the phrase 'the deaf'.

<p><b>AVOID</b></p> <p>The disabled</p> <p>The handicapped</p> <p>The blind</p> <p>The deaf</p>	<p><b>PREFER</b></p> <p>Disabled people/ people with disabilities*</p> <p>People with impairments/disabled students, parents, employees, etc.</p> <p>Blind people /people who are blind or have a visual impairment</p> <p>Deaf people /people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment</p> <p>The Deaf community (i.e. those deaf people who use sign language and identify themselves as Deaf community members)</p>
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**NEW LIFE FOR THE BLIND**

\*Note: 'Disabled people' and 'people with disabilities' are both acceptable, but disabled individuals and groups often have strong preferences for one or the other. 'Disabled people' is the choice of most of those at the radical end, ie, those who identify with the disability movement and it is the phrase recommended by the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People. If using the social model 'people with impairments' rather than disabilities is the accurate choice.



**DISABILITY AND TELEVISION**

**MEDICAL LABELLING** – Disabled people are not medical conditions, nor are they ill. Avoid using medical terms as labels to describe people.

- AVOID**  
 An Epileptic/epileptics  
 A Thalidomide/Thalidomides
- mother of a Thalidomide baby, puns the costs of love, writes*
- PREFER**  
 Person who has epilepsy  
 Person who has a thalidomide caused condition,  
 Person with no upper and/or lower limbs  
 Person with... (medical term, amelia, phocomelia, etc., if relevant and known)  
 Child who has Down's Syndrome  
 Person who has cerebral palsy
- Down's Syndrome child*
- Spastic**  
 (inaccurate and offensive)
- Down's women still missing*
- but spine broke for MacLennan's death caused one to now leaning to walk*

**INACCURATE** – Passivity and helplessness is the dominant image that comes from most of the language used around disability. Much of it, however, is also irritatingly inaccurate. For instance, whilst 'dumb' gives the impression that deaf people are stupid it is also misleading. Deaf people can speak, but if deaf from birth do not hear the sounds which non-deaf people are able to imitate. Some deaf people also prefer only to use sign language. Also inaccurate is 'confined to a wheelchair' which conveys pitiful helplessness, and denies the main function of a wheelchair which is that of mobility aid, without which people unable to walk certainly would be 'confined'. Similarly, 'wheelchair bound'.

- AVOID**  
 Mongol/mongoloid  
 Dumb/mute
- Wheeler-bound**  
 Confined to a wheelchair
- PREFER**  
 Person who has Down's Syndrome  
 Unable to speak, having a speech impairment  
 (if deaf) Deaf without speech/profoundly deaf  
 Wheelchair user  
 Wheelchair user
- PAUL is blind, confined to a wheelchair and profoundly handicapped. Now aged 27 he spends most of his time hunched up, awaiting the arrival of his morning routine, oblivious to his surroundings. Yet he*
- THE PLIGHT of wheelchair-bound speakers at the mercy of callous young muggers has touched the hearts of Gazette readers*

**DISABILITY AND TELEVISION**

**TRAGIC ASSUMPTION** – 'Suffering', 'victim', 'afflicted by' are very much a non-disabled person's view of so-called 'tragedy', and reflect an inaccurate and unhelpful interpretation of disabled people's experience although disabled people, like others, experience suffering at some times in their lives. However 'suffering, afflicted, victims' tend not to be offered jobs!

- AVOID**  
 Victim of  
 Afflicted by  
 Suffering from
- PREFER**  
 Person who has ...  
 (cerebral palsy, spina bifida or other condition)
- Joy Melville on the plight of blighted children*
- STRUCK by cerebral palsy, seven-year-old Sadie Gawai was born with the inability to formulate speech.*
- POLIO VICTIMS' MARATHON BID TO RAISE CASH**
- MAESTRO BANS CRIPPLE**
- OUTDATED** – The word 'handicapped' has been dropped by organisations of disabled people. This is partly on the grounds of inaccuracy of use. Its origination as an artificial barrier (sporting context when jockeys with a weight advantage rode with 'cap in hand') is generally ignored and instead it is applied to people, eg, 'the mentally handicapped', 'born handicapped'. It is also disliked because of its begging 'cap-in-hand' connotations.

- AVOID**  
 Handicapped
- Mentally handicapped**  
 'A retard' /mentally retarded  
 Mentally ill (implies people ill/sick all the time)  
 Crazy/insane  
 Lame  
 Cripple (from 'to creep')  
 Hunchback
- PREFER**  
 Disabled person /person who has a (e.g. visual) impairment (according to context)  
 Person with learning difficulties\*  
 Person with learning difficulties\*  
 Mental health disability  
 Mental health disability  
 Person who uses crutches/sticks etc  
 Person who has a mobility disability  
 Person who has/with a spinal curvature

\*Note: The term 'people with learning difficulties' to replace the old term 'mentally handicapped' was the choice of the international self-advocacy organisation 'People First', and has gained ground over other suggestions such as 'intellectual impairment'. Mental retardation is still commonly used in the USA.



**DISABILITY AND TELEVISION**

**DEHUMANISING** – Dehumanising words that really refer to disabled people are still casually used in the media, and in social life, and are extremely offensive in this context. Particular words used in myth and fairytale should also be avoided in a contemporary context.

Blackpool bans circus 'wolf' boys

**AVOID**

Midget/Dwarf

**PREFER**

Person of short stature; small person/people; or person who has ... (whatever the particular medical condition, eg, achondroplasia), if relevant.

Having an impairment of ...

(Use only in historical context)

(More appropriate for motor cars than human beings)

Damaged/deformed

Monster/freak

Defective

**FORCED TO LIVE**

The fate of damaged children

**THOUGHTLESS NEGATIVE IMAGERY** – The negative use of the names of conditions, eg, blindness or deafness, in general contexts is offensive and should be avoided – difficult though it may be to change the habits of a lifetime.

The halt lead the lame into a new Europe

**AVOID**

Blind as a bat/the blind leading the blind

Deaf to reason/falls on deaf ears

Lame duck/lame excuses

Defections give 'loony' Brent to the Tories

Official paralysis keeps brakes on

**DISABILITY AND TELEVISION**

**PATRONISING 'POSITIVES'** – Disabled people tend to get treated in the media either as marvellous 'supercrips', or as pathetic people in need. The words 'brave', and 'courageous' are continually and unhelpfully used to describe quite ordinary ambitions, eg, to go to college, to travel, to marry, to have a baby.

**AVOID**

The patronising, inaccurate use of:

brave/courageous/marvellous

Just 26 1/2. And, as she celebrates her second birthday beneath twinkling Christmas tree lights, her smile is a reminder of the courage that kids like her need to face the future.

**NEW DEBATES** – The words and phrases 'special', 'special needs', and 'carer' are much disliked by many disabled people and organisations, particularly following the shift of emphasis to rights issues. However, they are not easy to avoid.

'Special' and 'special needs'

Disabled people see themselves as having rights not so-called 'special needs'. In the educational context the needs may be 'different' or 'particular' and should be under the general heading of 'Resources' as other pupils' needs are. However, the institutional language of 'special educational needs' which includes pupils whom some would not label 'disabled', makes it almost impossible to avoid the phrase in an educational context, but much easier to drop in other contexts.

Disabled people and their 'carers'

'Carer' is an infantilising word, which because of its institutionalisation in service provision is difficult to avoid. But whilst appropriate for children, it is inappropriate for adult disabled people, whether they are getting personal care assistance from a family member or a service agency. Use 'care assistant', 'personal care assistant', 'facilitator' or possibly 'helper', in preference, or parent, wife, husband, partner, etc.

Special needs kids say thanks to Children in Need

Taunting disco youth bites off carer's nose



# The Social Model of Disability

Richard Rieser explains why the way we make sense of others has a profound effect upon the way we treat them

## THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The medical model [ see figure 1 ] sees the disabled person as the problem. We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is. If this is not possible, then we are shut away in some specialised institution or isolated at home, where only our most basic needs are met. The emphasis is on dependence, backed up by the stereotypes of disability that call forth pity, fear and patronising attitudes. Usually the impairment is focused on the impairment rather than the needs of the person. The power to change us seems to lie within the medical and associated professions, with their talk of cures, normalisation and science. Often our lives are handed over to them.

Other people's assessments of us, usually non-disabled professionals, are used to determine where we go to school, what support we get and what type of education; where we live; whether or not we can work and what type of work we can do and indeed whether or not we are born at all, or are

even allowed to procreate. Similar control is exercised over us by the design of the built environment presenting us with many barriers, thereby making it difficult or impossible for our needs to be met and curtailing our life chances. Whether it is in work, school, leisure and entertainment facilities, transport, training and higher education, housing or in personal, family and social life, practices and attitudes disable us.

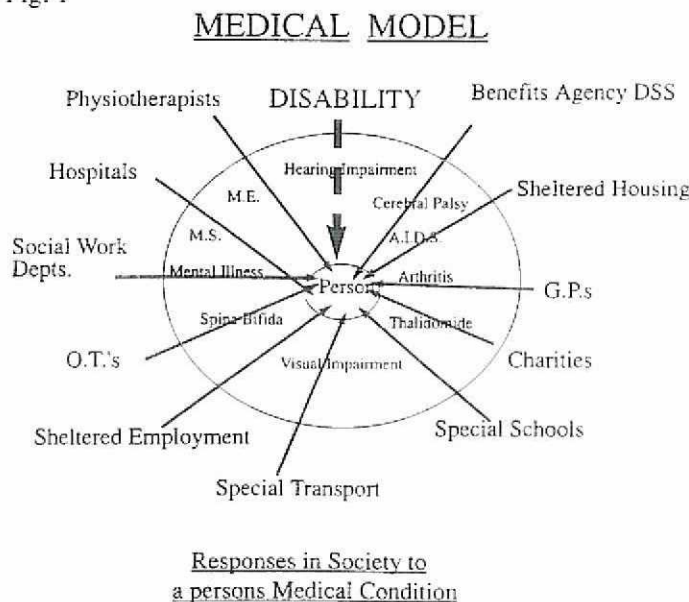
## THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

(see figure 2)

Impairment and chronic illness exist and they sometimes pose real difficulties for us. The Disability Movement comprises those disabled people and their supporters who understand that they are, regardless of their particular impairment, subjected to a common oppression by the non-disabled world. We are of

the view that *the position of disabled people and the discrimination against us are socially created. This has little to do with our impairments.* As a disabled person you are often made to feel it's your own fault that you are different. The difference is that some part, or parts, of your body or mind are limited in their functioning. *This is an impairment. THIS DOES NOT MAKE YOU ANY LESS OF A HUMAN*

Fig. 1





BEING. But most people have not been brought up to accept us as we are. Through fear, ignorance and prejudice barriers and discriminatory practices develop which *disable* us. The understanding of this process of disablement allows *disabled people* to feel good about themselves and empowers us to fight for our human rights.

The disabled people's movement believes the 'cure' to the problem of disability lies in the restructuring of society. Unlike medically based 'cures', which focus on the individual and their impairment, this is an achievable goal and to the benefit of everyone. This approach, referred to as the 'social model' suggests that disabled peoples' individual and collective disadvantage is due to a complex form of institutional discrimination as fundamental to our society as sexism, racism or heterosexism.

In addition to this, the obsession with finding

medically based cures, distracts us from looking at causes of either impairment and disablement. In a world-wide sense, most impairments are created by oppressive systems - hunger, lack of clean water, exploitation of labour, lack of safety, child abuse and wars.

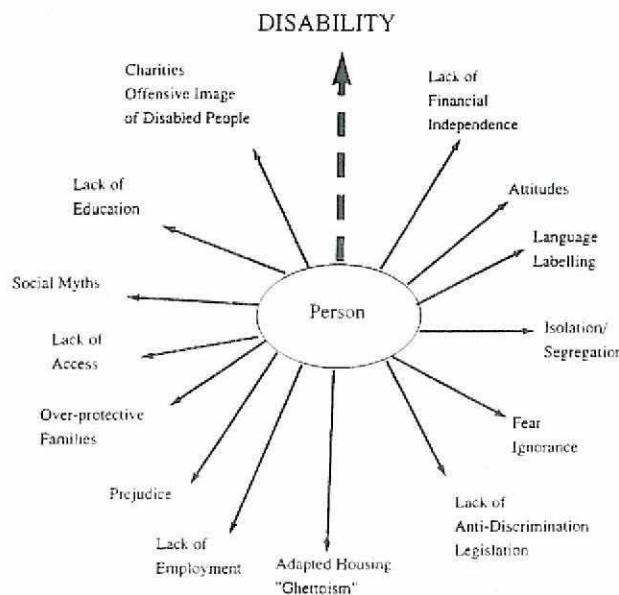
Clearly, this thinking has important implications for our education system particularly with reference to primary and secondary schools. Prejudicial attitudes toward disabled people and, indeed, against all minority groups are not inherited. They are learned through contact with the prejudice and ignorance of others. Therefore, to challenge discrimination against disabled people we must begin in our schools.

Our fight for the inclusion of all children, however 'severely' disabled, in one mainstream

educational system, will not make sense unless the difference between the 'social' and the 'medical' or individual model of disability is understood.

Richard Rieser teaches in London

SOCIAL MODEL



It is the "Barriers" present in Society that truly Disable People



## A Sample Of Recommended Books

RECOMMENDED BY RICHARD RIESER AND MICHELINE MASON  
FOR YOUNG READERS

### PICTURE BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

*A Nice Walk in the Jungle*  
by Nan Bodsworth, Puffin.

*Race You Franny*  
*Good Morning Franny*  
by Emily Hearn, Womens Press of Canada.

*Come Sit By Me*  
by Margaret Merrifield,  
Womens Press of Canada.

*Letang's New Friend*  
*Trouble for Letang and Julie*  
*Letang and Julie Save The Day*  
by Beverley Naidoo, Longman Book Project.  
Available from Letterbox Library.

*Adventure Holiday*  
by Sue Brearley, A & C Black.

*The Tooth Fairy*  
*Boots for a Bridesmaid*  
*Are We There Yet?*  
by Verna Wilkins, Tamarind Books.

*How We Play*  
by Anita Harper and Christine Roche,  
Kestrel Books.

*Where's Spot?*  
by Eric Hill  
Ventura (braille and signed English versions).

*A Garden in the City*  
by Gerda Muller, MacDonald Children's Books.

*Jonathan of Gull Mountain*  
by Jens Ahlbom, R & S Books.

*My First Sign Book*  
by Pamela Baker, Kendall Green Publications,  
Gallaudet University.

*Something Else*  
by Wendy Lohse, Hodder and Stoughton.

### BOOKS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

*Letty*  
by Avril Rowlands, Puffin Original 1984

*Nothing Special*  
by Micheline Mason available from  
Working Press, 85 St Agnes Place,  
London SE11 4BB.

*Mundo and the Weather-Child*  
by Joyce Dunbar, Piper, Pan Books.

### BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

*Down All The Days*  
*My Left Foot*  
by Christy Brown, Pan Books.

*Under the Eye of the Clock*  
*Dam Burst of Dreams*  
by Christopher Nolan, Pan Books.

*Born on the Fourth of July*  
by Ron Kovak

*A Sense of Self*  
available from Camerwork, Old Ford Road,  
London E2. 0171-980 6526.

*Let's Discuss Disability*  
by Ruth Bailey, Wayland.

### TWO BOOKS WHICH COVER ISSUES OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION ARE:

*Disability Equality in the Classroom: A Human  
Rights Issue*  
by Richard Rieser and Micheline Mason,  
available from DEE, 78 Mildmay Grove,  
London N1 4PJ. £12 plus £4 postage.

*Altogether Better: from Special Needs to  
Educational Equality*  
by Micheline Mason and Richard Rieser,  
available from Charity Projects Trading,  
74 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1EF,  
£7.50.



# invisible Children

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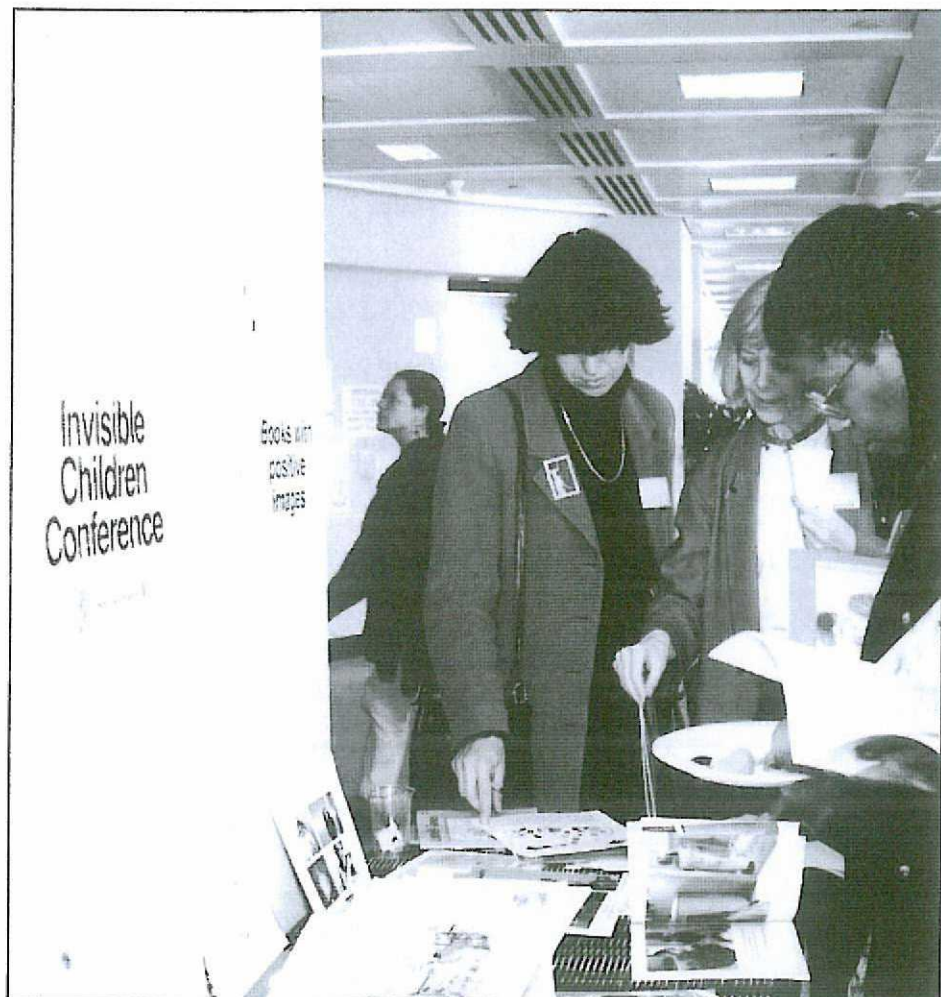
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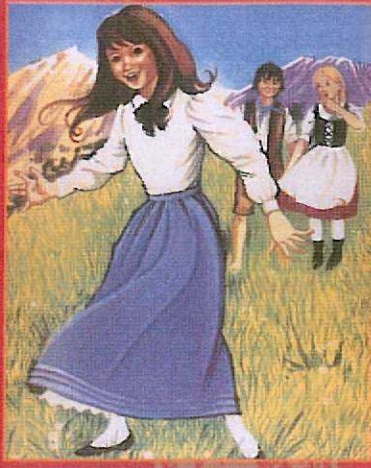
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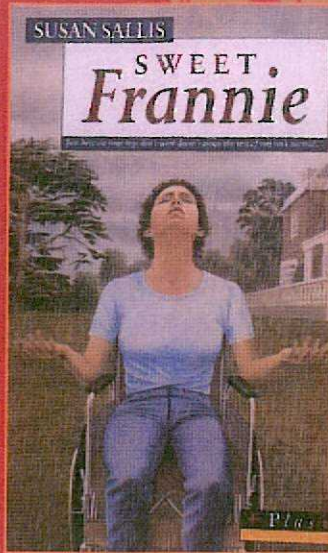


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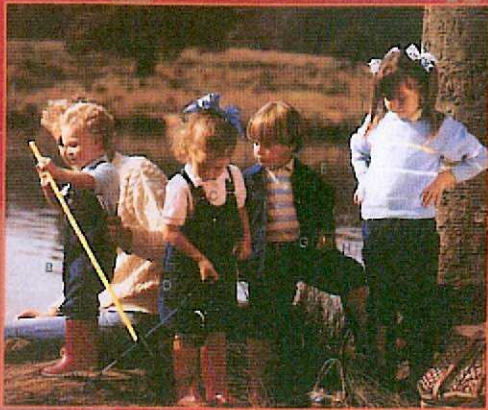
"Look, look I can make proper steps", Clara.40



Sweet Frannie.42



"Colin was standing upright" Secret Garden.41



Mothercare catalogue.43



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Disabled people's demo: Rights now!45



The voice of disabled people stifled and ignored.54



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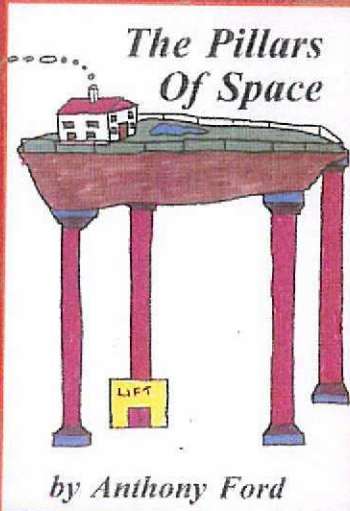
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David Purcell & family.36



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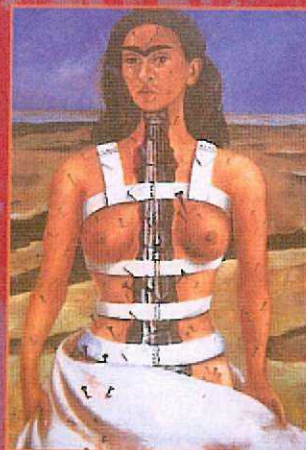
The Pillars Of Space.56



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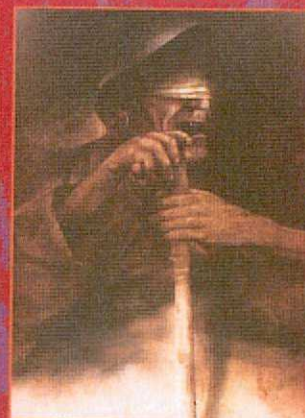
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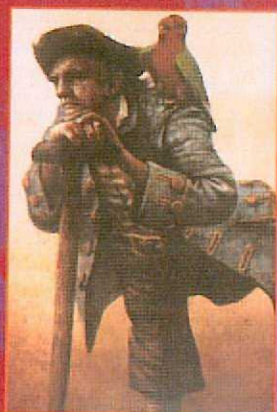
Broken Column Frida Kahlo 1944.38



Leper and Bell.13



Blind Pugh Treasure Island 1993 Ed.19

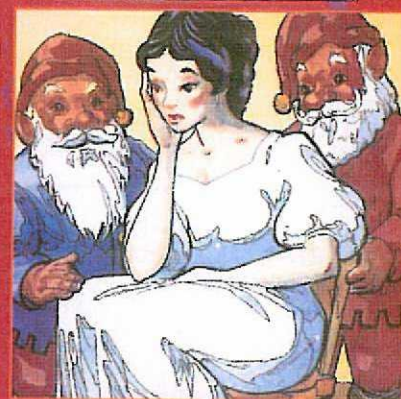


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