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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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18.08.2024

Does Disability Pride Month include children in Gaza?



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

A few weeks ago, I learned that July is Disability Pride Month in recognition of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in July 1990 (only 34 years ago) that breaks down legal barriers for inclusion of those with disabilities.

Being a person with a disability, you'd think I'd have known there was a month dedicated to recognizing people with disabilities. I suppose like my diagnosis, I'm a little late.

When I began to crawl, my parents noticed something was off. They took me to a doctor who said I had one leg that was shorter than the other. This took me down a years-long path of seeing orthopedists, surgeons, and other experts who either confirmed I had one

shorter leg, or disagreed and said one hip was higher. Regardless of the cause, the effect was I walked with a limp.

I had heel cord surgery, a special shoe, metal braces, physical therapy, and more throughout my childhood years. Once I became an adult, I said no more surgeries, no more therapies, no more appliances, no more “fixes,” and resigned myself to the fact that I walk with difficulty.

It wasn't until I was 37 and in need of bunion surgery from the toll walking takes on my body that the surgeon sent me to a neurologist before agreeing to the surgery. The neurologist came back with the cerebral palsy diagnosis. A couple of weeks later, the foot surgeon sent me to a hip specialist who looked at my x-ray and said that he could indeed perform a surgical procedure to put the hip socket back into place, but that it would not improve my walking ability because this was a neurological issue, not a structural issue. He confirmed that I had cerebral palsy.

So, after 37 years of believing I had one leg that was shorter than the other, or something along those lines, I came face to face with the idea that I had a disability. A serious disability.

Being someone with depression and anxiety since I was five or six years old, I did what I normally would do when I was overwhelmed with life's sufferings: I mostly ignored the diagnosis.

That sufficed until the past few years. Other medical conditions have arisen due to the cerebral palsy as well as my mobility problems, poor balance, and falls (on top of garden-variety aging). I found a doctor at UCLA's Cerebral Palsy clinic. This doctor confirmed the CP diagnosis and said I was a Level 2 on the Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFS), which uses a five-level system that corresponds to the extent of ability and impairment. A higher number indicates a higher degree of severity.

After the diagnosis at 37, I believed I had a mild case of CP. I was not wheelchair-bound, I had no speech impediments, I worked, I drove a car, I did all sorts of things people with severe disabilities didn't do. But the CP doctor's diagnosis concerned me, suggesting it is a more serious case, and was getting worse.

She did Botox injections in my right leg to help with the spasticity and dystonia (muscle contractions). I took a couple of different medications for essentially the same purpose and had a very expensive brace sculpted specifically to my body, none of which helped.

In a follow-up appointment, the CP doctor admitted that she has exhausted her tools. She suggested that I get in touch with companies that make walking implements like canes,

walkers, and arm braces to help me walk more safely. I occasionally fall, and fall hard, resulting in wrist and hip injuries.

All of this exacerbated my depression, self-loathing and tendency to feel sorry for myself. As I started down rumination road, I thought about a photograph I saw recently in my social media feed of a very young girl in Gaza who had her leg blown off by the Israeli military and government. What was this little girl's life like, living with a serious disability, trying to survive a genocide and famine caused by Israel? Was the amputation done with anesthesia? Did she have access to proper painkillers and other medicines while Israel continues to block food, water, medicine and fuel from getting into the territory?

Following her into the rabbit hole, I learned that prior to October 7, 21% of households in Gaza had [at least one member with a disability](#). That is one-fifth of the population, and that was prior to Israel's 10-month genocidal war.

Being a Jewish person who has made a point of following this war very closely, I needed to find out more. According to a [World Health Organization \(WHO\) report](#), "It is reasonable to expect that there are between 2760 and 3600 limb amputations, though some anecdotal reports indicate this number may be higher. As with extremity injuries, the majority are likely to be lower limb injuries. At present, there are no operational prosthetic and orthotic services in Gaza. A scale up of sustainable prosthetic services is needed – in careful coordination with existing providers who are already planning surge capacities."

The report further states that at least 17,000 children are orphaned or separated from their families. Every day since early October, an estimated 37 mothers are killed, leaving families devastated and children vulnerable.

A couple of weeks earlier, a [report](#) came out from the journal *Lancet*, which says that the true death toll in Gaza could reach more than 186,000 people. The Gaza Ministry of Health's death toll reports [more than 39,175 Palestinians have been killed](#) since Israel launched its military offensive, and driven most of the 2.3 million citizens from their homes.

The U.N. human rights office and the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health also say that the true figures are likely higher than those published.

More than 90,923 people have been injured. How many of those 90,923 are now disabled? How many are children?

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently spoke in front of Congress, he received a standing ovation. The man leading the genocide, the man responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of people, two-thirds of whom are women and children, the

man responsible for blowing off the leg of the little girl in my social media feed, was being honored by the U.S. political apparatus and elite. It was like living in some surreal world where killing and maiming children is love, and protesting genocide on college campuses is evil. These men and women cheering on a genocide, funding a genocide, and providing the weapons to blow off the limbs of children cannot represent me—a disabled person.

To see this occur during Disability Pride Month, well, that's literally adding insult to injury.

AUGUST 16, 2024