



P
E
A
T
C

arent
ducational
dvocacy
raining
enter

Fixations #2: Getting over It

By Tony Trott

There are a lot of things in life that we have to get over: for example, the death of a close relative; the loss of an engagement ring; or the ruling of a judge that goes against something in which we believe. Those of us with disabilities have to get over the fact that we have a disability. This does not mean that we just give up and allow the world to walk right over us. But it does mean that yes, we are different and have problems different from people without disabilities.

I have a disability. So what? Does that mean I can't own a home? No, it certainly doesn't; it just means I will have more issues to consider when buying the home. Issues such as wheelchair accessibility or financial assistance from HUD might not be issues for a friend without a disability.

I know that there are people with disabilities who adopt a 'find a cure' attitude and there are people with disabilities who adopt an 'acceptance is the key' attitude. Here's my attitude: to quote Teddy Roosevelt, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

That attitude is applicable to everyone equally, not just those of us with disabilities. We all need to be realistic about our current status and not fool ourselves into doing something foolish because it's something anyone should be able to do. For me, something foolish could be driving a motorcycle. Any American with a license is allowed to drive a motorcycle, so why should I let my disability slow me down or keep me from doing something I want? A Harley would be perfect, right? No, driving a Harley would be a bad idea for someone with Friedreich's Ataxia like me.

I have to be realistic about myself. I know that I will never be a tightrope walker or a running back in the NFL, yet I don't need to walk in order to be a lawyer or a teacher.

I am able to take care of myself and maintain a realistic sense of who I am. But parents may find it difficult to have a realistic sense of their children's abilities. Parents are responsible for their children, and have dreams for them. So for all parents, whether they have a child with a disability or not, it's not easy to see their children objectively and realistically. However, parents of children with disabilities must attain and maintain a realistic view.

There is a fine line between maintaining that realistic view and being disappointed when your child doesn't achieve a goal you set. You should not be disappointed because the goal that you had set was set for *your child* and should therefore be attainable by *your child*. Goals should fit the child. Goals change. Goals should change with the child.

*"Do what you
can, with
what you
have, where
you are."*

Teddy Roosevelt

Because my disability did not begin to affect me until I was in my teens, my parents and I set all kinds of goals for me when I was young. I grew up watching M*A*S*H on television and because of that, I set a goal to become a surgeon. When my disability became apparent, that goal was no longer realistic, so I changed it. I did not want to keep focusing on what my disability was keeping me from doing so I set a new and attainable – not lesser or easier – goal for myself: to be an educator.

I went to college and got a degree in and a license to teach music. After several years, I decided that my disability was going to make the goal of being a band director an uphill battle, so I changed my goal again. I got another degree in special education and I have not looked back since. Goals change – they should change – they have to change! They must take into account that individual’s capabilities as well as his or her disabilities.

Like me, many of the parents reading this have had more than their share of disappointments. But I choose not to focus on those. There are still many great challenges for me to tackle and opportunities for me to succeed. So I guess my advice for those sad, angry or frustrated about a particular setback is, “Life is too short. Get over it and get on with the next opportunity!”

Fixations was a three-part series by authors with personal experience with disability. The mother of a middle-school aged son (Fixations #1), a young adult with a physical disability (Fixations #2), and the mother of several young children, one of whom has a disability (Fixations #3).



Parent Educational Advocacy Training
Center
Supporting ALL Virginians
with
Offices in Springfield & Richmond
and
Teams throughout the Commonwealth

PEATC
6320 Augusta Drive #1200
Springfield, VA 22150
703-923-0010 (Voice/TTY)
703-569-6200 (en Español)
800-869-6782 (VA parents only)
703-923-0030 (Fax)
E-mail: partners@peatc.org
Website: www.peatc.org