

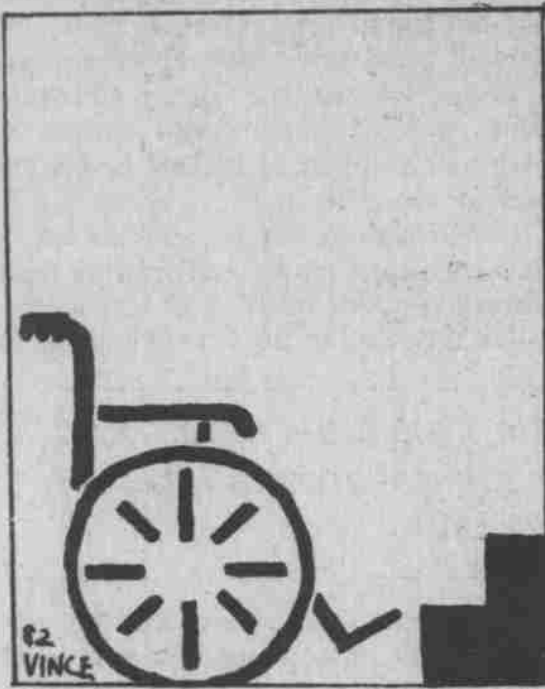
Handicapped fight for acceptance

By ANN PETERS

They're like foreigners in their own country. Others watch their most basic moves of crossing a street or communicating with friends.

Unwittingly, the "abled" talk to them as though they are children.

But those who are hearing impaired, blind, or mentally disabled or confined to wheelchairs find it unnecessary to have more than one set of parents.



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I spoke to members of the Rhode Island Handicapped Action Committee recently. My assignment: to write an article for *The Providence Journal-Bulletin*. Fear and apprehension filled my mind.

So many ideas ran through my head: "What if I say the wrong thing? Or, look at them the wrong way?"

I had made it through three years of college and various job interviews. But, never had I felt so uneasy.

I phoned one woman. I dialed the first three digits of her phone number. And then I hung up.

I felt unsure. How should I react to her, what to say to her, how do I respond to her?

Finally, I dialed her number. I conquered the fears that swelled within me. I felt I had overcome a disability of my own.

And although Rhode Island and RIHAC are more than 700 miles away from Chapel Hill and North Carolina, they are considerably closer in many respects than we may think.

Environmental barriers are falling — curb cuts have increased throughout North Carolina and the nation; closed-caption television for the hearing impaired is becoming commonplace; elevators are equipped with braille lettering. Partially responsible for the changes is the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It details the civil rights of the handicapped, acknowledging their right to expect and gain access to facilities that exist for the public's use. Section 504 of the

act mandates that the states create policies and programs to make state-owned buildings and facilities accessible.

Other advances have been made because of handicapped advocacy groups. But even though numerous examples of progress can be cited, attitudinal barriers — unfounded misconceptions and preconceived notions — remain.

Even people who believe themselves to be open-minded, myself included, may discover that some type of fear remains when dealing with the handicapped. Perhaps it's a fear of the unknown.

Maybe it's a fear of one's own abilities.

But of the persons with disabilities I spoke with, they pointed out one problem often not considered: While the disabled encourage more access to programs to improve their quality of life — programs accessible and necessary for anyone's use — they desire acceptance for their abilities.

In other words, they just want people to stop gawking at or worrying about their disabilities and accept them as people.

Ann Peters, a senior journalism and political science major from Miami, Fla., is managing editor of The Daily Tar Heel.

By LYNN PEITHMAN

Over the summer, a friend and I visited my father in sunny, southern California. I admit we saw the more sparkly, well-off side of Los Angeles—Beverly Hills and Hollywood. It was quite a different scene from the village of Chapel Hill.

The first day there we went to a chic, quaint little restaurant that is in Hollywood. That also means expensive. A glass of iced tea went for a buck. Yep, still in America, but now in Hollywood. A simple roast beef sandwich with fresh fruit went for \$5. (Fresh fruit is in abundance in southern California, even after the fruit flies went through, and seemed to be a mandatory part of every meal—whether you liked it or not.)

There's a lot of Mexican food, health food and expensive sandwiches around too. McDonald's cost the same as it does here, but I felt like I was committing a sin eating such grease and carbohydrates in the land of Beautiful People—all tanned, thin, and of course, health-food eaters. But, boy did that Quarter Pounder, fries and Coke taste good. You can have only so many lunches of cold soup, fruit salad and wine. It's chic, yes, but not filling enough for this meat-and-carbohydrates lover.

Beer. I love it. But that's something a 20-year-old cannot drink in California. At least not legally, in a restaurant. The legal age for everything is 21. My father even tried to convince a waitress once to serve me one lousy beer because he was with me. I had his permission to consume the stuff and he was buying. No dice. "She's not 21." I'm not going back until I am 21.

Though we were under-age, California terms, we did get to go to a Los Angeles disco. A friend took us to The Odyssey in the Beverly Hills-Hollywood area. We went there our last night in L.A., and believe me, it left us with some parting memories.

This place is an under-age disco, and I doubt anything like it would be a hit in Chapel Hill. You have to be at least 14 to get in. Our friend decided we should do this up right. Since we were IN California, we should LOOK California. Punk was the dress code for the evening.

CALIFORNIA

No comparison between Chapel Hill and Hollywood

We wanted to look like we Belonged too, and we thought the punk-funk outfits would do it.

They didn't. This night was disco night. Everyone else was in simple sport shirts, jeans and skirts. We were "weirded out."

I didn't feel comfortable in the place. To begin with, our friend wanted to dance, so the three of us danced. No matter that two women and one man were dancing together. This is California — if it feels good do it. (Personally, it didn't feel so good.)

Since this was an under-age disco, no alcoholic beverages could be served. (Just Coke and fruit juices for \$1.50 on top of the \$5 cover.) The only way people got feeling "good" was drugs: Almost everyone there was on something. I had never seen people openly and freely snort coke on a dance floor before, but it happened that night — again and again.

The funniest part of the evening was when a high schooler came up to talk to us. It was clear he was doped up on something. He had to steady himself by holding on to our knees while he knelt on the floor in front of us. He decided he liked my friend, Beth, and wanted to dance with her. She wasn't thrilled with the idea, but went along with it ... until he introduced himself as Lester the Molester. That's when Beth turned to our escort and said, "OK, give me the mace, right now!!" She was well within Lester's hearing range, but he was too out of it to be offended.

Little Franklin Street is no comparison to Sunset Strip, the main drag of Hollywood. Huge flashy billboards shout at you from above about current movies, records and Las Vegas attractions.

Since this is Movieland, U.S.A., they charge outrageous prices. We went to see the just-released "Annie" at The Chinese Theatre. A simple \$3.50 wouldn't do it. Six bucks would.

The cool of L.A. (which was downright chilly even at the end of May) was a welcome change from the muginess of North Carolina. And when we visited Palm Springs, the dry heat from the desert was a welcome relief from the cool of L.A.

You've probably heard Frank and Moon Zappa's humorous look at Valley Girls, who live in the L.A. area. They really talk that way. Fer sure. I mean, like totally. The whole scene barfed me out.

The beaches in southern California are different from the good ole' Carolinas' strip. We went to two: Manhattan and Venice. Manhattan is a nice, normal beach town, even though it is very crowded. Venice is where the weird people come out of the woodwork on the weekends. The main mode of transportation here is wheels, but four to each foot. The most common vendors are those renting roller skates.

A main attraction was one man standing with two shiny boa constrictors around his neck. He's on wheels, too. Of course, he draws a good bit of attention.

That's a big point of living in L.A., I've decided. Draw attention to yourself. See me. I'm alive. I guess in such a large city, that's a big part of survival: making sure you—and everyone else—know you simply exist.

Lynn Peithman, a junior journalism major from Charlotte, is an assistant managing editor for The Daily Tar Heel.



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