

Where there's a will there's a way!

I was born on the 21st of December in 1924. When I was a baby I stayed with my grandmother in Layton, Utah. My Mom and my Dad moved to Lassen County in California. My Dad moved so he could find work. It was during the Depression and in those days jobs were very hard to find.

I used to go after them in my rocking chair

My Mom had three other children besides me. When my grandmother died, my Mom came back to get me and she brought me back to California. In those days they didn't know anything about crippled people. After my Mom took me home she got me a rocking chair because they did not have wheelchairs like they do now. With God's help I learned to get around the house in the rocking chair. Especially when my sister Barbara and my brother (Jon D) used to tease me and I used to go after them in my rocking chair. When I was close enough I would kick them.

They called us "feeble-minded" in those days.

And someone told my Dad about Sonoma State Home because they didn't have any school for people like me. They called us "feeble-minded" in those days. My Dad put me in Sonoma. They did not have programs like they do today, besides I lived in the mountains. My Mom had her hands full with four little kids and no help with them. We were very poor in the dark ages, that's why my Dad took me to Sonoma. I was ten years old.

I met two crippled girls who taught me how to read from the books.

They put me on a ward with kids my age until they gave me an IQ test. After my test they put me with the older people and my "type" of people. I met two crippled girls. They taught me how to read from the books. My Mom sent me the old school books that my sisters and brothers used. I learned to read from them.

The only people who would take me, or anyone like me, were black people.

In the late forties times started to change. They opened one ward for school. They put me on the ward for school and that's where I met Henry Gibson. He lives near me now. I lived there for five years. Rolf Williams came along and I was the second one who needed help to be placed in a family. The only people who would take me, or anyone like me, were black people. I had to wait for awhile.

Finally, they found a lady and a man that would take me in San Francisco, They had to help me walk up the stairs and I could walk with their help. The lady had two boys and two girls. Her husband was not well. They started a workshop for crippled people. Two years later her husband died, that was in the late forties. Something happened to Pauletta, she was not the same after her husband died. She went to pieces. She did not give us enough food to eat because she was on drugs. Nobody knew she was on drugs. We moved to Galt so we could go places. She was not mean to me, but she was mean to other people and she shouted at them. It made me nervous. I did not tell anyone because I did not want to go back to Sonoma.

Something was wrong with Pauletta

One morning my roommate Bea helped me up and dressed me. We got up at 9:00 a.m., but Pauletta did not get up. At 11:00 a.m. she still was not up so I saw somebody go by the window, so I asked my roommate Bea to open the window and I called for help because I did not know how to call 911. One of Pauletta's friends came by the window and I told them something is wrong with Pauletta. They came in the house to look around. They opened her bedroom door and they found her dead from an overdose. They had to call my social worker because Bea and I needed to find a new place to live because

we are both crippled. Pauletta's friend took us in and took care of us. She was a very good lady. I do not know what happened to the boys. The lady kept Bea and I for one year. I had a very bad asthma attack and went into a nursing home.

I saw the Easter Seals Telethon find someone to move me

One Sunday I had the TV on. I saw the Easter Seals Telethon find someone to move me to Sac City—they did. I moved to the orphan's nursing home. When I first moved there it was different. The people living there were middle-aged women and men. Five years after that they moved the old people out to another place and they made room so young people could live there. They also started having crafts there. The first class there was a painting class. That's where I learned to paint. A month later, I went to Easter Seals for five to six years.

I wanted to get a real education

Then I wanted to get a real education so I went to American River College. I knew I was too old, but the school counselor told me they would take me anyway. I went and I got all Bs. I went to college for five or six years. One year I went into the office and the counselor Larry talked to me about what I was interested in.

Before I go on, if anyone remembers "The Waltons" that was like my life. That is why they had to put me away. When my Mom become pregnant with her fifth child, they started me in independent living programs. Laura Lee came to "The Gardens." We went to the independent living company. When they were to put Laura and I in TLC, I was wondering what Laura Lee could do for me. When we got together Laura Lee grew up fast.

My sister Barbara thought I had fallen in love with John.

They put us on Bell Street in an apartment. That is where we met John. He took us places. I didn't know he had two different personalities. I felt like a teenager. I guess I acted like Maya when she gets excited. My sister Barbara thought I had fallen in love with John. We went places for five years, then he started to change.

When he took me out we were going along and he popped me alongside my head. That happened three or four times. I didn't want to move of that apartment because there was a washer and dryer. On Saturdays Laura would wash our clothes.

One day my sister came and I was crying. She asked me what was wrong. I had to tell her John hit me. She told me she'd tell my social worker if I didn't, so I did. I moved out. Laura is with me too. I go to the Short Center a lot. I have been coming to the Short Center for a long time. I live on the right street. Henry Gibson lives there too. I wish Henry had a talking box like Frankie so I can understand Henry when he comes over. Laura K. is moving to our apartment complex too.

I am 72 years old now. I kept my teeth for a really long time, but this year (1996) I went to the dentist and they took x-rays over the holidays. That's when they went to pull my teeth and my gums because they were so bad. I let them go too long because I painted with my mouth. I told a doctor do you have to give me an operation on my gums? He told me if they don't I won't live long because of all my painting. I wanted to keep on. I was concerned. I wanted people to know I not so retarded as I look.

THE END

By Ruth Shelton as told to Kristin Hart.

Addition to story per Ruth Shelton's request:

When President Roosevelt was president, things started to change because he was crippled too!

I have reached the golden age. I've lived two different lives. I don't know how long before I will depart from this life. Maybe that's the reason I was put down here. To show people how to take care of a cripple. They used to call it that in the

olden days.

I want to thank Kristin Hart for helping me write this story. I told her my story and she wrote it down. I want to thank Short Center teachers for making my life good.

Note from Donna Zurfluh, Editor: This story is written exactly as it was told to Kristin Hart by Ruth Shelton. The sentences and wording have not been changed, as this is Ruth's story, not ours!