

**FALL 2010 DHA NEWSLETTER**

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**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**  
**Penny L. Richards**



**Welcome!**

As I write this president's message, preparations are underway in San Francisco for the 23 October public memorial service for Paul K. Longmore, who died 10 August 2010. The news of Paul's passing came as a major shock: just weeks before, he was part of the seasonal conference call that serves as the DHA board meeting. He was the usual Paul Longmore, laughing and talking about his recent fellowship, about the manuscript he wanted to finish, about the upcoming 20th anniversary of the ADA, and about the recent establishment of an Ed Roberts Day in California. We exchanged a few emails after that, tidying up business discussed in the meeting.

There is a Paul K. Longmore Memorial Fund now open for donations at San Francisco State University. "The fund will be used to honor, preserve, and advance Paul's legacy and work in Disability Studies," according to the announcement. I certainly encourage donations to that fund (address in announcements), but we can all honor and preserve and advance Paul's legacy in many ways. Keep disability history on the programs at history conferences--Paul loved that. Keep encouraging history students to consider the disability dimensions of their projects, and to study the scholarship in our field. Keep doing really interesting work on the history of disability, work that shines with rigor and creativity, and demands the attention of a wider audience.

Got a favorite photograph or story to share? I'd like to invite remembrances of Paul, or statements of his professional or personal impact, for the Spring 2011 issue of the DHA Newsletter. Just send them to me by email, [turley2@earthlink.net](mailto:turley2@earthlink.net), before mid-March, and I'll assemble a special section from all the submissions.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **First DHA Graduate Student Scholarship Awarded to Amy Renton**

The DHA Board is pleased to announce the first winner of DHA's graduate student award. This award of \$500 is intended to support student travel to conferences.

The 2010 winner of the award, **Amy Renton**, is a graduate student in history at the University of Cambridge. She will use her award to attend the Society of Early Americanists' Seventh Biennial Conference in Philadelphia in March 2011. The award committee was "deeply impressed" with Renton's application, and heartily recommended her to the board. Congratulations to Amy Renton, and sincere thanks to the award committee for all their work.

### **Paul K. Longmore Memorial Fund**

Donations to the Professor Paul K. Longmore Memorial Fund at San Francisco State would be welcomed and appreciated. The fund will be used to honor, preserve and advance Paul's legacy and work in Disability Studies. Please make your check payable to the San Francisco State University Corporation, with "Dr. Paul Longmore Memorial Fund" written in the memo. A tax deductible contribution can be mailed to:

San Francisco State University  
University Development  
Attention: Andrea Rouah  
1600 Holloway Ave., ADM 153  
San Francisco, CA 94132

## IN BRIEF

### **Special issue on "Victorian Disability"**

The journal *Victorian Review* had a special issue on disability recently (Vol. 35, No. 2, 2009), with articles on deafness in Dickens, Deaf churches, prosthetic legs and class, affliction and carework, masculinity and sentimentality, and disability in travel writing. The issue was guest-edited by Christopher Keep and Jennifer Esmail.

### **Recent Dissertations page at DHA website updated**

The "Recent Dissertations" listing at the DHA website was updated in August. If you have additions/corrections, please submit them to Penny Richards.

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

### 22 January 2011

**Picturing Women's Health, 1750-1910** is a one-day post-graduate interdisciplinary conference, to be held at the University of Warwick (UK). Deadline for submissions is 5 November 2010. For more information:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/events/pwhconference>

### 17-18 February 2011

**The Stimulated Body and the Arts: The Nervous System and Nervousness in the History of Aesthetics** will be held at the Centre for the History of Medicine and Disease, Durham University, UK. Deadline for submission of abstracts was 31 July 2010. More information:

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/chmd/news/eventdetails/?eventno=7283>

### 17-18 February 2011

**Health Rights in Global Historical Perspective** is a conference to be held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London. The Deadline for proposals was 1 October 2010. For more information about the event:

<http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history>

### 17-19 February 2011

**Carson McCullers: An Interdisciplinary Conference** and 94th Birthday Celebration will be held at the Carson McCullers Center at Columbus State University in Columbus, GA. Deadline for submission of abstracts was October 1, 2010. For more details:

<http://www.mccullerscenter.org/conference>

### 4-5 March 2011

**Southern Association for the History of Medicine and Science (SAHMS)** will hold its 13th Annual Meeting in Memphis, Tennessee. The deadline for proposals was 30 September 2010. For more information about the conference:

<http://library.uthsc.edu/sahms>

### 4-5 March 2011

**Breaking Boundaries: Body Politics and the Dynamics of Difference** is a conference to be held at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville NY; it will be free and open to the public. Susan Schweik, author of *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, is one of the featured speakers. Deadline for proposals is 3 December 2010. For more information:

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=178723>

**26 March 2011**

**The Body in History/The Body in Space** will be a Graduate Student Symposium held at the Barker Center for the Humanities, Harvard University. Paper proposals are due November 22, 2010. For more information:

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=180080>

**31 March-2 April 2011**

**Bodies: 8th Annual Conference on Citizenship Studies** will be held at the Center for the Study of Citizenship at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. The deadline for proposals was October 15, 2010. For more information:

<http://www.clas.wayne.edu/citizenship>

**14-15 April 2011**

**Jacobus tenBroek Disability Law Symposium** will be held at the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute in Baltimore, Maryland. The theme is “Bridging the Gap between the Civil Rights Movements and the Disability Rights Movement.” The American Association of People with Disabilities is cohosting with the NFB Jernigan Institute. For more information:

[http://www.nfb.org/nfb/Law\\_Symposium.asp](http://www.nfb.org/nfb/Law_Symposium.asp)

**15-18 June 2011**

**The Society for Disability Studies** will hold its 23rd Annual Conference at the Doubletree Hotel in San José, California. The theme is “Beyond Access: From Disability Rights to Disability Justice.” The deadline for submissions is 15 December 2010; for more information and a submission form:

<http://www.disstudies.org>

**29 June-1 July 2011**

**80th Anglo-American Conference 2011: Health in History** will be held at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Deadline for proposals is 1 December 2010; registration will open on 1 March 2011. Inquiries and proposals should be directed to:

[IHR.Events@sas.ac.uk](mailto:IHR.Events@sas.ac.uk)

**30 July-1 August 2012**

**Disability and the Victorians: Confronting Legacies** will be held at Leeds Trinity University College, hosted by the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies. The Call for Papers says that they are already accepting proposals for panel sessions and papers, and will continue to do so until the final call in the summer of 2011. For more information:

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=177390>

## **CONFERENCE REPORT: Disability History Conference 2010**

**Martin Atherton**

*[This report to the Wellcome Trust was kindly shared with the DHA by the author. Martin Atherton is the Treasurer of the Disability History Group of the UK and Europe.--Ed.]*

The Disability History Conference 2010 took place at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK on 25 and 26 June 2010, with the generous support of the Wellcome Trust. Hosted by the Disability History Group of the UK and Europe, the conference featured keynote speakers Professor Cathy Kudlick of the University of California at Davis, USA and Professor Eva Simonsen of the University of Oslo, Norway. Professor Kudlick opened the conference with a plenary address entitled “Disability and Survival: the Hidden Lives of Epidemics,” which explored the conference title “Disability History: looking forward to a better past” in terms of Cathy’s own research into disease and epidemics. Professor Simonsen gave the plenary address on the second day, in which she identified emerging themes within disability history over the past twenty years. The effect of these perspectives on Eva’s own research into the care and treatment of war children in Norway formed the second part of her presentation.

The two keynote speakers were supported by 32 papers presented in 12 parallel sessions over two full days. The sessions explored topics including Managing disability, Individualising disability, Enabling disability histories, Representations of disability, Challenging medicalisation, Politicising disability and Institutionalising disability amongst others. The conference attracted 45 delegates in all, drawn from across Europe, the USA, Canada, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Norway and Germany. The international scope of the conference was further enhanced by academics from Israel, Japan and Peru. Both established academics and emerging postgraduate students were welcomed to the conference and the overwhelming response from all those who attended was that the conference had been a great success.

## **CONFERENCE REPORT: OAH Conference (Washington DC 2010)**

**Jeff Brune**

The last DHA newsletter included a report on the Association's success in getting disability featured at the San Diego AHA conference in January. Having been there, I felt it was indeed an important moment for disability history to have the DHA-sponsored sessions. However, my optimism after that conference gave way when I attended the OAH conference in a few months later in Washington, D.C. Whereas the AHA conference showed how far disability history has come, the OAH conference showed how far we still have to go.

At the conference there were no panels that focused on disability and only three papers within panels seemed to address the issue directly. I was at two of the panels and the good news is that when disability was presented it sparked good conversation and seemed to influence people outside the field. Sarah Rose of the University of Texas at Arlington organized an excellent panel on the welfare state and presented some of her own work about federal disability programs. She did an excellent job of showing others the importance of disability issues in the evolution of the modern state. It was especially nice to see the other participants consider the relationship of disability to their own work, both as a topic and as a conceptual framework. It appeared as though Sarah's paper and her involvement in the panel influenced the other scholars to put their own work into conversation with her paper. This showed the value of having disability historians serve on panels with people from other subfields.

I also gave a brief presentation on a panel about "Teaching the Tough Issues," which commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *OAH Magazine of History*. The *Magazine's* editor chose to highlight two past issues of the journal, one about disability history and the other about the history of sexuality, that had tackled tough subjects that often meet with resistance. Here again the presence of disability prompted reflection by others on the panel and in the audience. Many in attendance were public historians and the discussion included some productive brainstorming about how museum professionals could use disability issue to improve some their exhibits. I also learned at the panel that the *Magazine* paid a price for publishing its issue on disability; its primary institutional sponsor withdrew all funding because it did not think disability is a worthy historical topic.

Those two panels showed that when disability is present at the OAH it can have a significant impact on many presenters and audience members who have not thought seriously about the issue. The problem, however, was that aside from a couple of panels it was the absence of disability that was most noticeable at the conference. For me nowhere was this more obvious than at the session on the state of the field of gender history. With some of the profession's most prominent scholars on the panel, such as Nancy Cott, offering an analysis on the past, present, and future of women's and gender history, this panel had to be held in the main ballroom. Hundreds were in the audience, making it one of the best attended events at the conference.

Many on the panel and in the audience talked about the importance of intersectionality and the need to take seriously marginalized fields that can improve gender studies. Most cited the need to consider sexuality especially, as well continuing to consider race, but no one mentioned disability. To me this omission became even more glaring when people talked about the need not to marginalize other fields. Many on the panel and in the audience also portrayed gender history as marginalized itself. To me this seemed ironic, given that there were hundreds of people in attendance (versus about a dozen the year before for the state of the field of disability history) and half of the panelists were from Ivy League institutions that have departments and centers dedicated to the study of gender.

As a junior scholar I was nervous about speaking up, especially since the packed session had such a celebratory tone and included many prominent scholars whose work and accomplishments I respect greatly. For my question I noted that many of them had talked about the need for intersectionality and the need to recognize marginalized but valuable subfields, but no one had mentioned disability. I explained briefly how a disability studies conceptual framework can help us better understand gender issues and vice versa. I mentioned that in the modern era the oppression of women often relies in part on the language of disability (and its accompanying stigma) and that disability is often viewed as feminine and emasculating. I then asked why most gender historians are reluctant to take disability studies seriously and whether anyone thought this might change in the future. There was dead silence.

Finally Nancy Cott responded with a two-part answer. First, she mentioned that one historian, Barbara Welke, who recently wrote *Law and the Borders of Belonging*, incorporates a disability studies framework in her work on gender. However, Cott claimed, most gender historians don't consider disability because there has not been much disability history written. She explained that once historians start writing more

about disability, she is sure that gender historians will begin to incorporate it into their own work. That statement, coming from a person who once was in a marginalized field herself, says a lot about the extent to which this profession still marginalizes disability and ignores the work we have done.

To be sure, disability was better represented at the previous OAH meeting in Seattle, but the absence at this conference still says a lot about the state of our field. It is still easy for mainstream historians to dismiss or ignore disability as a topic and as a scholarly field. Lest anyone think the OAH conference is insignificant, it would be useful to look at a new book coming next spring about the history of the OAH (Richard S. Kirkendall, *The Organization of American Historians and the Writing and Teaching of American History*, Oxford UP). Some of the chapters focus on the battles that historians of African Americans and of women had to fight to gain respect within the organization. In both cases, gaining acceptance from the the premier organization of U.S. history was an important step toward gaining wider mainstream acceptance and to begin establishing institutional footholds. Surely there are some lessons there for us to learn. My hope is that in the future disability history, like women's and African American history in earlier decades, will be harder and harder to ignore at the OAH conference.

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*Jeff Brune is an Assistant Professor of History at Gallaudet University.*

## **Advancing Disability Studies in Hard Times: Creating the University at Buffalo's Center for Disability Studies**

David Gerber and Michael Rembis

These are difficult times. Public universities are suffering considerable fiscal strain from neo-liberal policies that de-fund traditional state commitments to higher education and threaten to derail all new initiatives in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Yet Disability Studies continues to grow. The University at Buffalo's Center for Disability Studies (CDS) is a case in point. It was founded in April 2009, when there seemed no end in sight to the continuing decline of the American economy. New York State's fiscal health, now heavily dependent on taxing Wall Street, and its local economies long suffering from the consequences of deindustrialization, has been especially hard hit by the current recession. Though the pace has been slow and uneven, we are nonetheless succeeding in getting Disability Studies established at the University at Buffalo.

Whether there are lessons to be learned and practices to be copied from our experiences, others can decide, but we would like to share some of those experiences and a bit of our formula for the creation of the CDS, which we believe may have some traction beyond Western New York.

Our achievement to this point has relied on two crucial and intersecting lines of support: the College of Arts and Sciences at the University at Buffalo, and People Inc., the largest disability services provider in our region. The impetus for this project originated with the leadership at People Inc. Through the ongoing, critical evaluation of their work, especially their large involvement in supporting people with developmental disabilities living in the community, the executives at People Inc. have gained an understanding that only a new social model of disability that is deeply embedded in the consciousness of the larger nondisabled community can provide foundations for ensuring expanded roles and a better quality of life for people with disabilities. People Inc.'s CEO, James Boles and its Executive Vice President, Francisco Vasquez have come to understand both the importance of moving beyond medical models of disability and rigid normative frameworks for understanding disability and the necessity of ensuring the future of people with disabilities in the community, not at its margins. They possess an admirable vision of how intellectual work, and especially how disability history, can advance the cause of disability rights and independent living.

If you are ever tempted to believe no one is listening or no one *gets it* beyond our limited academic and activist circles, you need to talk to Boles, who was disturbed years ago that the history of disability was absent from the history we read and the curriculum we teach our students. Boles saw that awareness of history, with all of the flux and variability of the past, has a liberating potential for both society and for people with disabilities. To that end, he decided that the world needed a museum dedicated to representing that history, which ultimately led in October 2010 to the opening of the world's only traditional, brick and mortar disability museum located in Amherst, New York. By the time of its opening, the Museum of disABILITY History had for several years been present in virtual space ([www.museumofdisability.org](http://www.museumofdisability.org)), where it had received 10 million virtual visitors from over 100 countries in less than four years. The museum is now serving an audience from across NY State, the nation, and the world. Envisioned as a repository for information and artifacts and a resource for students conducting research in the emerging field of disability history, the focus of the museum has been to build its on-site collections and exhibits, as well as its virtual exhibits, and to develop traveling exhibits and K-12 curricula on numerous topics of interest in disability history.

It was the desire to establish the museum that led Boles and Vasquez to seek cooperation with the University at Buffalo. They hoped that a Center for Disability Studies, especially one with an emphasis on history, might assist in providing intellectual energies and ideas for the development of collections and exhibitions. These are hardly promising times to be bringing potentially costly projects, with significant aspirations to build and expand, to a public university. Yet Boles and Vasquez did just that; they approached the university in 2007 with their plan to create the CDS. The specific nature of how to accomplish this led to protracted negotiations with the university and ultimately to the founding of the Center in April 2009 and to the creation of a visiting scholar position that same year.

Since then, various projections of the future of disability studies have been considered on all sides, but what peaked the interest of People, Inc. and caught the eye of university authorities was our proposal to establish a Master of Arts program in Disability Studies. Both People, Inc. and university administration recognized the potential to earn tuition monies and the ability of the MA to draw a mix of students from the pre-professional programs, the community and the disability service sector, which is quite large in Western New York. Key in these calculations is the fact that M.A. programs, unlike

doctoral programs with their high fixed costs in tuition waivers and assistantships at competitive levels, are more likely to be profitable, if, of course, they attract students.

But the vision for the Center has hardly been limited to the bottom-line. Both People, Inc. and university authorities understand disability to be a significant human and political issue, and believe that it is an issue of the moment as well in light of the aging baby boom generation and the large, new cohort of veterans with disabilities. Both believe as well that the field has established intellectual legitimacy. Creating the M.A. will help People, Inc. further the mission of the Museum of disABILITY History by providing it with valuable student interns and an intellectual vibrancy that it would not otherwise have. People Inc. is also greatly concerned with furthering a different sort of professional education for disability service providers, such as its own employees, that proceeds out of non-medical model assumptions. For its part, the university sees the Center as a way of maintaining its profile of civic engagement, which is one of the goals of its current plan to move toward the center of the conversation about creating an economic, intellectual, social, and environmental plan for revitalizing a region in the throes of five decades of relentless deindustrialization.

The Masters program has also answered the call of New York's public schools, which have been recently mandated to teach disability history annually in October. Originally spearheaded by James Boles, CEO of People, Inc., the "Disability History Week Movement" has been spreading to states throughout the country. As of this writing, 24 states, including New York, have passed some variation of disability history week legislation. The CDS and the new interdisciplinary MA in Disability Studies will be invaluable to K-12 educators as they begin to integrate disability into their curriculum.

Though the University at Buffalo Center for Disability Studies will be known as a place where people can come to study disability history, we have maintained a focus on the interdisciplinarity of the MA program. The Masters program, which will begin in the 2011-2012 academic year, contains a roster of courses from History, Literature, Architecture, Anthropology, American Studies, Rehabilitation Science, and Social Work. Besides providing MA students with obvious intellectual benefits, this diverse course array has allowed us to pool together existing UB courses and to bring colleagues together from across disciplines, which in our situation also draws faculty together from two separate campuses separated physically by a couple miles of suburban sprawl.

The future of the University at Buffalo's Center for Disability Studies must be described as tentative but hopeful. We have two strong partners in People, Inc. and the university,

and we have worked hard to draw interest from across campus and the larger Buffalo community. Yet our ability to develop beyond where we are at now is dependent not only on the success of the Masters program, but also on its programmatic expansion and the growth in numbers of tuition-paying students, as well as our ability to secure an endowment in the private sector. And we must somehow accomplish all of this without ever sacrificing our initial vision or our academic and intellectual integrity, or that of the program. It will take skill and finesse and some hard negotiation, but we are feeling confident as we move forward. Advancing disability studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences and in the university generally has never been for the timid.

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*David Gerber is Director, UB Center for Disability Studies; and Michael Rembis is Visiting Professor, UB Center for Disability Studies.*

## WHY HISTORY?

**Joanna L. Pearce**

*[Editor's note: This graduate student's comments were originally a blog post at the FWD blog, and can still be found online at this link: <http://disabledfeminists.com/2010/05/27/why-history/>. I invite other DHA members at all career stages to submit writings about your day-to-day work and thinking. The historian's life is much richer than completed projects and job changes.]*

The committee approved my thesis proposal (and I passed my French Proficiency Exam – necessary for Canadianists) and thus I'm now at the stage of my MA where I'm researching, reading secondary sources, and writing stuff up.

[When I lay it out like that it looks so sad and boring. This is the bit where I get to do what I want, in the archives! Looking at letters and school records! I get to apply theories and see if they work, and maybe even develop my own! This is totally my idea of how to have a fun summer! Also, the archives are air-conditioned, which helps.]

My particular project is focusing on the development of residential schools for blind and deaf children and youths. I'm looking at how and why they were founded, what their teaching methods were, and who they hired to work there. I'm also looking at the types of jobs that these children were trained for, and what that says about the way disabled children were perceived by society at large in nineteenth-century Canada.

I'm also wondering exactly how many blind piano tuners and deaf printing-press operators the province of Nova Scotia thought it could support.

I've written before that [the history I do is explicitly political](#). It's partly about a part of our past that is highly neglected, and partly about arguing, simply by doing it, that this history is *important*, that it has long-term consequences that we're still feeling.

But I also write it because people with disabilities have a past, a present, and a future. Because we're important enough that having a history that's not just focused on a few Great Examples – Helen Keller, Louise Braille, Beethoven, Terry Fox – isn't *enough*. Because knowing how things turned out in the past might give us some insight into how things might be in the future.

Another reason I'm doing this is because it challenges people, and asks them to think.

Every time I tell people I'm doing *disability* history, "centering the experiences of people with disabilities in the historic narrative", they are taken aback. They're surprised. Just by doing history in my department, and telling people how awesome my research is, I'm making more of them think about disability, and about people with disabilities. Without ever having a conversation about language, people in my department have stopped referring to people doing unthinkable things as "mentally insane." Without my ever leading a classroom discussion about theory and frameworks, my classmates discussed the assumptions about disability presented in several of the readings we did.

These are small things. If I'm lucky, I've made 30 to 40 people reconsider their ideas of disability and think about people with disabilities in the past.

And yet, these small things are so satisfying.

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*Joanna L Pearce, is a Master's Candidate at Dalhousie University in Halifax, NS, Canada.*

## **INTERVIEW WITH AMY SELDERS**

### **Penny Richards**

Amy Selders is the creator of the Disability History Quilt. It's an excellent example of a larger trend in which traditional crafts are used to express activist messages and preserve marginalized experiences, with the AIDS Memorial Quilt as perhaps the best-known example (see Chansky 2010, Pentney 2008, Robertson 2009). This is a particular area of interest for me, so I'm pleased to learn more about a disability history project in the genre. In this interview, Selders talks a bit about the quilt's construction, its contents, and its meanings. A photograph of the quilt follows the interview, and Amy Selders gives a link to a website that displays and explains details of the quilt squares. (Click around on her site for other similar projects.)

### ***Tell me about the Disability History Quilt.***

The Disability History Quilt was my very first quilt. Others have followed, but this is the one that most people have seen on display and inquire about.

If you get an opportunity to see it in person, you'll notice that the quilt, actually all of my pieces, is uneven in shape and size. I have a head injury and have never been able to follow patterns, make straight edges, replicate the same piecing, quilting or finishing technique so I typically don't do the same thing twice (unless by sheer luck!).

My great-grandmother and great-grand aunts made beautiful quilts together. Their quilts all told stories, so not only were they beautiful, they had a connection to our family history. That always meant so much to me.

I loved their work and begged to learn how to do it. My grandmother didn't have much confidence in my ability to learn the complicated art of quilting and when I asked her to teach me she suggested I choose something easier. She was right about one thing, I'm not the traditional quilter who can follow patterns of flowers and ducks and remember the perfect way to finish a quilt.

I have the best time being me and finding my own way, though. As Justin [Dart] said once, "We must use our creativity to explode the truth in the face of the nation." I hope my quilts will help to do that as they tell our stories.

### **How long did it take to make?**

I spent just over twenty months working on the quilt every day to complete it. Once it reached approximately 94" x 64" I knew that it was time to stop. It was already much bigger than I originally intended (more on that later.)

### **How many squares are included in the quilt?**

The quilt contains twenty-seven squares, twenty-three of which are what I consider "universal" squares; they represent disability issues that all Americans with disabilities feel a connection with on some level. One square represents a Pennsylvania (my home state) State law, and the remaining three are symbolic of my connection to the movement. The border reads "with liberty and justice for all" twice around the quilt.

### **The quilt is covered in quotes. How many are there?**

The lattices (the pieces that define each square) contain twenty-seven quotations from disability/civil rights activists and advocates, Presidents and other national leaders.

### **Do you know how many beads were used?**

I embellished the lattices with over ten thousand individually sewn multicolored glass seed beads to add variety and sparkle.

### ***What was the original goal of the project?***

I didn't have an elaborate plan in mind for the quilt. The goal was to make a first attempt at quilting by creating a small wall hanging that I wouldn't be too embarrassed

to hang in my shared office space at a CIL that I worked for in PA. I wanted to have something more than my collection of “post-its” with Justin and Ed quotes on them. A quilt seemed perfect; what better way to start learning than a small wall hanging?

I knew the theme would be our shared history and the challenge was what do I include and what do I leave out? Since I wasn't following a pattern or plan of any kind and just creating as I went along, well, you can imagine how the small wall hanging soon grew into the 5'x8' quilt that it is today.

***Who contributed to the design and construction?***

I was the only person who worked on this quilt but the inspiration came from the words, actions and events of leaders past and present. So I guess you could say the disability community as a whole contributed to my first quilt.

***Where is it displayed?***

It is not displayed in any one location on a permanent basis. I receive requests to display the quilt in addition to some of my other pieces so it travels from time to time.

***What has the reaction to the quilt been?***

When I first displayed it I was surprised to find that so many people felt so drawn to my quilt. The first groups of people to see the quilt were the attendees at a SILC conference in Pennsylvania in 1999. It was startling and I was amazed that so many people felt connected to my quilt. Everyone wanted to touch it. I couldn't even imagine that people across the country would also have an interest in my quilting.

***Anything you'd want to do differently in another similar project?***

I would have to say that typically, I do every project a bit differently than the one before. I've completed a number of “squares” but haven't decided how to assemble them yet – I had an idea to make a long, horizontal quilt that would be easier for people who use wheelchairs to see.

Currently, my husband and I are working on a project together. The quilt we're working on is about as big as the Disability History Quilt. The theme is ADAPT. We're in the quilting phase so we're excited about nearing completion.

Another project that is completely different than anything I've ever done before is a community quilt project. The theme is “expressions of pride.” To date, about 100 people have made squares for the quilt. It's comprised of panels of quilt squares made

by people with disabilities at various events, CILs, conferences and gatherings. I hope to see this project travel to different parts of the country and just keep growing! The expressions of pride everyone has made are absolutely beautiful! What an experience!

If anyone would like to see the Disability History Quilt and some of my other work visit my website <http://www.amysthreads.com/> . I hope you enjoy the images and the written descriptions of each square.

### **A few cites on activist crafting:**

Ricia A. Chansky, "A Stitch in Time: Third-Wave Feminist Reclamation of Needled Imagery," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43(4)(2010): 681-700.

Beth Ann Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a Viable Mode for Feminist Political Action?" *Third Space: A Journal of Feminist Theory and Culture* 8(1)(Summer 2008): online at <http://www.thirdspace.ca/journal/article/viewArticle/pentney/210>

Kirsty Robertson, "Threads of Hope: The Living Healing Quilt Project," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35(1)(March 2009): 86-107.

*Next page: "The Disability History Quilt" by Amy Selders. Visual description: The quilt features images such as flags, peace signs, symbols of disability rights organizations including ADAPT and Not Dead Yet, accessibility symbols, and words in the form of slogans (We Will Ride) and quotes (embroidered). There's a tree, a lightbulb, and several houses in the design.*

