

FROM STATE SCHOOL TO MY OWN PLACE

by James Templeton

My parents abandoned me when I was a baby. I floated from foster parent to foster parent. That was hard, cause when I got used to one set of parents they'd say "OK its time to move." It was hard to get attached to anyone. So you can tell my childhood was terrible. When I was seven I was put in the Austin State School.

At first it was just a big open dorm, no privacy. All the people in wheelchairs were in one dorm, 24 guys. Later we had four to a room. We were just supposed to be there for life. There wasn't enough people to help with dressing, bathing, eating, etc.

They made us work in a workshop where we were paid by the piece, like 2 cents a piece. There was a canteen on campus, and I just made enough to get snacks now and then. I didn't have the right equipment, not even a motorized wheelchair, and it took forever to get from place to place 'cause a lot of time I had to push myself with my feet. I couldn't watch what I wanted on TV, and couldn't pick my own clothes even, and lot of what I got didn't fit. You had to get OT, PT, the whole package, just like in a nursing home. I didn't need the package, and the therapists bullshitted around with me, just so it could look good on paper.

There was a lawsuit filed against the state schools and I got ahold of Diane Shisk at Advocacy Inc. She was doing the suit. I heard about this from MIGHT, a local disability group. The suit was against institutions. I went Tyler Texas and I testified in front of a judge. I felt nervous. I told them how bad it was in there: how bad the food was, how bad the care was, too many people in the dorms. He ruled that state schools had to get out people into the community. I went to Herndon House where they taught me some basic skills like how to keep house, get groceries, keep bank books up. Just the stuff you need to live out in the community.

I got involved with MIGHT for a couple of years. I felt like they wasn't going nowhere. So I joined ADAPT of Texas. and we working on lifts on buses. We would protest Greyhound, around 1988 we went up to Dallas which was where Greyhound headquarters were. We protested for lifts on the city buses in Austin and other places. We were trying to get them to see ADAPT people ride the buses too, if they would put lift on them. Of course I didn't want to be carried on the buses; I was carried most of my life. Now I ride the buses with lifts every day; I get around town on Capital Metro buses. I used to live at Shady Oaks Apartments, for around three years I guess. I found a person, my love, and now we're living together in a duplex in South Austin. I love living this way. I love this woman and even though legally we can not get married, but that doesn't stop you from living together -- if you really love somebody. We're roommates because of the bullshit rules that they have.

It's totally different. I have an attendant. He's not there all the time, because I don't need 24 hour supervision I need help with dressing, undressing, cooking, showering, just the normal things that anybody would need. I like it when the attendants come because they are a big help. Karen and I make the grocery lists up with our attendants. We tell them what want. I like it when my attendant leaves because I feel like I'm more in control of my life.

Now I can come and go as I please. I can do as I please when I want to do it. I love spaghetti and I can have it when I want. I hate when people tell me when and what to eat. I buy my own clothes, wear what I want and they fit me. We have pictures on the walls, ones we want up there. For example, there are pictures of me in every room. I put puzzles together, we go to the mall - when we want to. Now I can have a party. At the State School, when I got mail they opened it and read it, now I have real privacy.

My roommate and I helped another person to get out of a nursing home. We gave her our second room to live in for a while.

And I'm still with ADAPT!!! I do volunteer work for ADAPT, and I love it. I survey business for access, trying to get curb cuts around the city so people can ride on the sidewalks and not in the street. I still ride in the street sometimes, cause I am so used to it and I forget. I go to hearings and testify, and I've been to DHS Board meetings a bunch of times. And we do a lot of this stuff. ADAPT fought for the ADA. and we won it In 1990. Now we're pushing for attendant services. The reason we're pushing for attendant t services is so people can live in the community. That's so people like me don't have to live in an institution any more. I feel ADAPT is a super, super organization.

THE STORY OF J.T.

My parents abandoned me when I was a baby. I floated from foster parent to foster parent. It was hard to get attached to anyone. So you can tell my childhood was terrible. When I was seven I was put in the Austin State School. At first we just had a big open dorm, no privacy, 24 guys.

Later we had four to a room. There wasn't enough people to help with dressing, bathing, eating, etc. I didn't even have a motorized wheelchair. It took me forever to get from place to place 'cause a lot of time I had to push myself with my feet. I couldn't pick my own clothes even, and lot of what I got didn't fit. I was there for 30 years.

I got ahold of Diane Shisk at Advocacy Inc. She was suing the State Schools. I went to Tyler Texas and I testified in front of a judge. I told him how bad it was in there: how bad the food was, the care, the crowding in the dorms. He ruled that the State Schools had to get people into the community. We won.

I joined ADAPT of Texas way back when we were working on lifts on buses. We protested for lifts on buses. We were trying to get them to see we could ride the buses too, if they had lifts. Now I ride the buses with lifts around town every day.

I lived in Shady Oaks Apartments, for around three years. Then I found a person, my love, and now we're together in a duplex in South Austin. We're just roommates because of the bullshit rules that the bureaucrats have.

My attendant is here all the time, because I don't need 24 hour supervision, just help with dressing, undressing, cooking, showering, the normal things. The attendants are a big help. Karen and I make the grocery lists and tell the attendants what want. I like it when my attendant leaves too because I'm more in control of my life.

I can come and go, do as I please, when I want to do it. I buy my own clothes, wear what I want, and they fit me. We have pictures want up on the walls. Now I can have a party. At the State School, when I got mail they opened it and read it; no one does that here.

My roommate and I helped another person get out of a nursing home. We gave her our second room to live in for a while. I volunteer for ADAPT, and I love it. We make ADA surveys. We try to get curb cuts around the city so people can ride on the sidewalks and not in the street. We testify at hearings. We're pushing for attendant services so people like me don't have to live in institutions any more.