

REFLECTIONS ON A SNOWY DAY

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow

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Outside my window on the first day of the New Year, the tall pines are dusted with snow and the sun is peeking through high clouds. A few inches of white powder cover the ground. The temperature will rise, but not much. Later today, my family and I will enjoy this New Year's Day by going to a movie, munching on popcorn, and performing our usual "family rating" of the movie on the drive home. This is how we will begin our New Year.

Before we leave the house, we'll need to make sure our son's power chair is okay for the day. A part on his chair has broken—again. The armrests won't stay in position, so we stuff small pillows under them to hold them at the right level. We've ordered him a new chair, but don't know whether to order a new part or hold off and hope the new chair arrives very, very soon. Otherwise, life is grand! This minor inconvenience is but a blip on the radar screen of our lives.

Pondering what the new year will bring to our family (a new chair for Benj, along with continued drama class lessons; dance classes for Emily; a vacation; and other activities that make for a wonderful life), I wonder what this year will bring for other individuals with disabilities and their families.

Will someone else who has a broken wheelchair get a new one? Do all the other Benjamins of the world have someone to go to bat for them to get the assistive technology devices they need? If not, what will it take to make that happen?

Will my friends who have disabilities finally get real jobs this year? What about the millions of others who are subsisting on "disability welfare" and living below the poverty level? Many of us complain that we're overworked and underpaid. How trivial these

seem alongside the reality that countless people with disabilities have never had even *one* job about which they could either complain or rejoice!

Will any of the adults with disabilities I know be able to move into their own homes or apartments this year, instead of being stuck in group homes or other congregate residences? As I enjoy the quiet of an early morning on New Year's Day, with Mark, Emily, and Benjamin still sleeping, our home and our privacy are more precious than ever. Are people with disabilities in congregate settings able to enjoy quiet, peaceful, private moments like this? Are they able to sleep until noon or stay in their PJs all day if they want?

Will the children with disabilities of my friends be included in regular ed classes this year? What about the millions of other kids with disabilities who are physically segregated and socially isolated in special ed classrooms? What will it take for parents and educators to work together and put aside their own personal issues, for the good of each student? And will this be the year we recognize that too many "special education programs" don't really educate?

Reflections such as these can be painful. The issues seem too big and too difficult to tackle. A sense of powerlessness may overwhelm us.

When my daughter was younger and it was time to clean her room, she would stare at the mess, unmoving, a look of sheer horror on her face. How could this enormous task ever be accomplished? Where to begin? What should be done first? It seemed overwhelming. But when I helped her break the one big job into smaller, more manageable jobs, she was successful.

The same is true when looking at the "big mess" in disability issues. Whether you're a parent, a person with a disability, or a professional, break the big job you're facing into smaller jobs and tackle them one at a time. Small successes lead to enormous gains—and big, positive changes in the lives of children and adults with disabilities. We can do it!