

CLAWS AND WINGS:

AN ORAL HISTORY EXPLORATION OF DISABILITY IN DELAWARE 1917-2017

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Interviewer: Kim Burdick, MA, MPA (Referred to hereafter as KB)

Interviewee: Derrick George (Referred to hereafter as DG), Advocate

Topics included: Spinal Fusion, Individual Education Plan (IEP), Accessibility

Run time: 44:02

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DG: My name's Derrick George. I am part of, member of the Developmental Disabilities Council, and also a former business owner, and network administrator for Delaware Computer Mechanics. Now that is defunct and I just do freelance. So that's me, small business owner.

KB: So tell us a little bit about your childhood.

DG: From, from childhood, I've, I've always been a real inquisitive, ornery individual. When all the other kids were, were outside playing sports, and they were outside being active, I kinda defaulted to using my brain, more or less, and going in. And I've always had a real big knack for computers, a real big knack for cameras and video, so a lot of my time was spent inside, you know, taking things apart, seeing how they work, putting things back together. Building computers. I built my first computer when I was like 7 years old. Used to build websites for free. Used to shoot movies on 16 millimeter, so you know, I didn't have the physical acumen because of the disability to go out and, you know, do those things and engage myself in the community. I just stayed in and, and kept to myself a lot.

However, that, that always taught me to be, brought me on to be a very observant individual. I was always watching people's interactions with one another, how they responded to me in social situations as well as private, and, you know, I was always very aware of everything. Always tried to be good and open with people. Always tried to be patient with individuals, and you know, and just kinda use that as a stepping stone to get people to know that, you know, that a lot of us out there with disabilities, we, we, there's, you know, wide-ranging severities of even my disability, which is cerebral palsy. And I've been blessed with enough cognitive function to be out there in the community and speak to people in a way to where we can all be respected and all looked at as contributing individuals.

I feel that is sometimes a long-forgotten thing, you know. We, we're all looked at as a lesser individual because of our physical impairments and that shouldn't be the case.

KB: So did you live here? Where did you live...

DG: I've, I've lived in this, in Newark [Editor: Delaware] my entire life, I've lived, I've lived in Newark my entire life. Lived in Devon Binns and I'm a Newark High School graduate. I've lived...

Upon graduation, I moved to Florida and I majored in film and TV production at Full Sail, lived on my own for two years. Just getting, you know, getting, hitting the ground running, you know. Learn how, learn how to pay bills, getting out, being independent,

meeting new people. That really kinda broke me out of my shell socially.

As a young man I was very introverted. I, I dealt with a lot of weight issues as a kid, and very, just, very secluded in, in my mind and my thoughts. And never, never really was depressed, per se. I would always try to look at the best, and, and take everything, the good and the bad, as a learning experience. You always learn the most from the bad, from the bad, I, I believe.

Lived in Florida through many ups and downs for three and a half years. Graduated from Full Sail and, and did some computer science work independently. Upon graduating, I moved back to, to Newark, where we are now, and started a business with a friend of mine from high school, along with doing freelance IT work and doing some, some weddings, shooting some weddings, videography, in my spare time.

KB: So you always wanted to be in computers and film, right?

DG: Yeah, computers and film are my first loves. You know, like I said. I've, now granted I love sports, I love, you know, I love going out and going to the bars and having fun, and getting into that camaraderie of sports and what sports teaches, teaches you as a leader, but not having the physical abilities, I just kind of reverted to movies, and music, and computers, and technology, and, and tinkering with things. I always had a good eye, good eye for troubleshooting, a good eye for people. I, I just have a good, good detector. And been a very, been a, been a very, been very blessed to, to be able to work through these things and, and learn, learn from them. But I've always loved computers and film.

KB: How old were you when you get your first computer?

DG: When I got my first what? [KB: Computer.] Well, when, I actually built my first computer, and I built that back in 1999. So I was 8, almost 9 years old. And just kinda learned from spare parts around, around the house. My uncle gave me a bunch of...gave me a computer case, gave me a power supply, gave me motherboard, gave me, you know, CD burner, and gave me some software, and said, "Hey play with it. See what you come up with." And I started tinkering with things and learned how things worked, and, and, you know, learned different areas of, of just building, building a machine, and how all of the parts integrate into each other and work together. That was something that always interested me.

And not only that – computers – but I've always been into films. I've always had a very analytical sense. I always, you know, I, I say this all the time because of how much I love movies, I hate people that talk during movies, so I like to say, "Yeah, I'm not one of those talkers," but I am always subconsciously questioning why a certain shot was done, why a certain character acted the way they did or a motive, or maybe a shot or a lighting situation. I would always kinda question that, always kinda. I just, I overanalyze things by default. That is, that is a good thing and that is also a, a negative at times. It leads to stress, it leads to stress in the workplace sometimes, but from just, from just, you know, having a genuine love for things and a genuine love for information, and never taking anything for face value and always questioning everything. Movies and, movies and computers just always, always taught me keep questioning, never give up, something's wrong, hey, well, you can figure it out, you just haven't figured it out yet. So, kinda helped me, taught me a little bit of weird disciple at the same time.

KB: So here's a personal question: did you date people? Do you?

DG: Do I? Really? As I, as I had mentioned earlier, as a young, young kid, I, I dealt with a lot of weight, weight issues, at one time being almost 300 pounds. Being, you know, 300 pounds, 4 foot 11, my nickname was the "Stay Puft Marshmallow Man," and me being a "Ghostbusters" movie guy, and having a good sense of humor like I always had, I, I would take that and run with it. I took it as a compliment and if you wanted to pick on me or pick on somebody else with a disability, I always told those people, "Hey, man, you never know what that other person's going through. There's a reason why they're doing that." And that, my weight, belonged with just me being, me being an introvert.

Yeah, I had a lot of girlfriends over the years, on and off, friends, relationships, but nothing that was ever serious. And, and me being aware in social situations and, and seeing the way that people, seeing the way that people look at me when I'm in whatever, and their body language towards people with individuals, there's, there's still a barrier that hasn't been broken yet. And even me, with enough, you know, like I said, with enough awareness and, and kind of function, to be able to discern between, you know good body language and bad body language, I know I can definitely tell how people feel towards me, and I always try to break that ice. By either making a joke about myself, you know, old self-deprecating humor kind of gets me in the door. So and that, that has led me to have a lot of good friendships over the years that I still have to this day.

Now, granted, do I want a relationship? I think, well, hey, like we all do. Hey, women are [unclear]. Women are fun. It's a great thing, you know. I would love to have something but that – it all comes in time, you know. Something – I, I've always wanted a connection with someone, you know, and for them to look past the disability. But sometimes it's just hard, you know. Activities in daily living from showering to, to dressing to any, anything, which are showering and dressing are my two main issues. That's a big hurdle to jump over for a lot of people. Even friends that I've made, that are now very good friends of mine, had trouble with that at first.

So if your friends are gonna have trouble with it, a woman's definitely gonna have trouble with it. So it's always put a damper on relationships but, hey, that's just a part of life and, hey, that, that kinda comes secondary. I'm glad I'm here and I'm glad that I'm able to advocate for people that are in my situation, that feel the same way as I do but cannot verbally communicate their, their feelings and their thoughts and their opinions. And I feel as though I can be there for them as an advocate to help them, to relate to them, to let people know that I know what they're going through and when people tell them, "No," or when people try to shut them down I can be there to, to relate and try to break those barriers.

KB: So, where, where do you live now and who else lives here and do you wish you could live someplace else or different or the same?

DG: I live, I live by the University of Delaware campus, right off of Elkton Road. Like I said, other than my time in Florida for school – which my brother came down and took care of me, I'm very grateful for that. It's just helped with my independence – I've been here my entire life. I live with my, with my two brothers. I'm, I'm the youngest; I'm the third child. And I live with my mother, and we, we just, you know, we, we, we help each other out, we look out for each other. And, yeah, it may not be the best and, hey, I got a

temper and we all have tempers and we all argue just like any other family would, but we try to, you know, always be there and look out for each other even if we can't stand one another. We're, we're still very supportive of one another and I know that, you know, if I need them for, for things, whether it's a shower or, or a ride somewhere to get to and from therapy, they're there.

As I get older, I've, I've been desiring more of a relationship and just, you know, more, more freedom and independence. Living in Florida and living on my own really taught me how much can be gained from just pure independence, and, and being on your own and living with roommates and being there, but I kinda lucked into a situation down there where I had friends and I had a network of people down there that I already knew. So I was comfortable. A big thing with me is, you know, going in, going into a living situation and not knowing these people and then having that disability act as like a compounding factor is like a big surprise.

Now it goes back to having the roommates, and being in cluttered spaces, and just, you know, me having to take showers, me doing all this stuff, it's very, it's very imposing upon, upon certain groups of people. And, and living in Florida and having, having that structure really helped me gain some discipline. I'm actually in the process of possibly moving out, looking at a couple places, and that is the eventual goal in the short term is to try to move, move out, move into Pennsylvania right over the line and try to, try to start a life where it's just kinda me and build off of it and have friends that will help, help me on a daily basis.

I'm, I'm lucky. I have a good core group of friends. I don't really break out of my box. If I've known you and I let you in, I've known you for a while. You gotta pass my test, you know. I gotta see where your head's at. And luckily – lucky to have a good group of friends that if I were to call them at the drop of a hat, things hit the fan and I needed help, whether it's a ride to therapy or a ride to an interview, if, if they're not working, they will, they would do anything for me. So, you know, so will my brothers, you know. But if none of them are available, I have a good group of friends that will step up to the plate. And I'm hoping, you know, that eventually maybe one of them could move out there with me and help me get situated and help me get, you know, help me get accustomed to a new life, but I definitely, definitely want to move out. That is definitely in the, in the goals, in the picture.

KB: How old are you now?

DG: I'm 27.

KB: About the age of my kids, but...

DG: I'm, I'm 27, I'm young, but I just, I've, you know, I got that first taste of living on my own, did well, it was a great experience. It taught me more than I could ever, ever really learn on my own. And it's just something that I, I'll never forget, and I need to get back to that. It was a good time. It was a good time in my life. It was a great learning experience. It helped me socially, it helped me break out of my shell. It helped me break out of my shell socially, as well as kind of physically. I, I lost a lot of weight. As I became more social I wasn't...I was still aware, you know, subconsciously I was still very analytical, I would still question people all the time. I would still, you know, I still had

the same analytical sense, but I, I was able to relax. I was able to open up in ways that I wouldn't if I'd never had the chance to live independently.

KB: So what are you doing these days?

DG: As of right now, I'm currently unemployed. I'm doing a little bit of freelance IT work on the side, as well as website design through, through forums, just kinda pick-up work, just kinda hustling, just kinda keeping my nose, nose to the grind and eventually wanna go back to school and get my Masters in computer science. Hopefully I'm gonna apply to the University of Delaware, so see, see how that goes.

KB: Talk about your advocacy work you do now.

DG: As far as my advocacy work, I just got appointed about two months ago. Now, granted, I've been going to, I've been going to meetings way longer than that, but I, I'm a part of the, I'm a part of the Developmental Disabilities Council. Now granted, it is not really along the lines of what I have – I don't necessarily have a developmental disability, I would say I only have a physical disability. Cerebral palsy is a physical disability.

We're working on a couple RFPs [Requests for Proposals] for Alzheimer's and dementia patients to kind of get some advocacy and get some awareness out there about proper care for these individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia.

I'm also a part of the Adults and Aging with Physical Disabilities Council, which is right along there with what I got going on being an adult, and an aging adult, with a physical disability of cerebral palsy. But I was brought on by a friend of mine who I used to play, I used to play Challenger baseball with her daughter Brigitte, my friend Terri Hancharik. I've been, I've been friends with Brigitte for years. They actually lived in our neighborhood here, and that's how I kinda brought up, you know, this whole advocacy thing came about, was she had always told me how articulate I was and how well-spoken I was and how much I genuinely care about the other people in my position. Which I do, because we're all the same, man, we just can't communicate and articulate the thoughts like some of, some of the rest of us.

So I wanna be there for those other, those other people that I know feel the same way as I do, want the same freedoms and the same independence that I do, and, and can't advocate and can't tell people just to leave them alone or give them their space. You know, because we're, you know, I'm, I'm just like the rest of you. I like my space, I like my quiet time, I like to just be isolated sometimes. I like to throw the headphones on and listen to music. I like to just, you know, be, be in my own thoughts, and so do they. They just can't, they, they can't tell you.

So that's what drew me to the advocacy was to, to be that voice for individuals like me who, who can't necessarily have a voice.

KB: Do you know if anyone from Delaware went down to DC in that recent protest?

DG: Which one? Which protest? 'Cause I [KB: Most recent one, the one where they threw people out of Congress.] Oh, yeah. My buddy from Florida did, my, my friend, my friend Kurt [redacted], pretty heavy down there in the Orlando area. And he actually flew up to DC for the rally. He's a – his mother's an old hippie. So I feel like, you know, all of us with older, older parents from the Baby Boomer generation, we're just all taught to,

you know, not, not take anything and not take anything for face value and always ask questions.

And, and, you know, nothing is really right, you know, between the current political landscape and all this racism that's going on and all this hostility. It's just, it's just all this hatred isn't just for – all this hatred and disdain isn't just for the, you know, for the white or black individual. Blue, orange, I don't care what color you are, we're all the same. We are, we all, you know, we were all made the same way. We were all taught to be better than that, and really, you know, there's just a, we're just a society full of ignorant people. You're not only ignorant about, you know, what's going on – policies and all that – but you're also ignorant about different, different people from different walks of life, disability community being one of them.

So there's, you know, there's this ignorance on, on the state level from, from Legislative Hall, to kind of pigeon-hole us all into one, one class. And, and you know, try to put us in homes, and try to push us along, and there's no, there's no oversight, there's, there's nothing, you know. There's no input, there's no inclusion from the disability community themselves. And I feel like, you know, that – me joining the, me joining the Council, and multiple councils, I hope to be one of those first people that can be on Legislative Hall. And when they're trying to take away, you know, people with CPs' benefits, people with spina bifida, and they're trying to say, "Look, well, people with CP can't walk, they can't drive a car, they can't have kids, they can't be contributing members of society." Yeah, I'm here to tell you they can. Okay?

And for you to think that, that's where that ignorance, ignorance starts. Every, every case, every person with a disability should be approached on a case-by-case basis. Meaning you shouldn't have this preconceived notion about a person with a disability. You need, you need to go and meet them and talk to them and see what really drives them. Instead of, you know, just putting us under this class and sticking us to, sticking us in this class system and keeping us there.

You know, there's a lot of things going on that, you know, we all have our opinions on. We, we can articulate our opinions, and especially when it comes to our needs. I'm sorry to tell you, but the best person, the best person to ask about what they need is an articulate individual like myself and others that I've met on the Council, that, you know, they know exactly what they need, they know their limitations, they know what, what, what they're good at, what, what they can do well independently. They know what they can do, what, what they can get better at. And it's all about just keeping an open-minded dialogue. There's not enough of an open-minded dialogue between personal advocates, self-advocates like myself, and the disability community and that input at, at the state level, at Legislative Hall, on how to make better community-based services. What's needed, down to PT, you know?

If, if, you know. A good example is, I can't even go, I can't even go now to get another, another ch... another walker or another assisted device without going through months and months of, of paperwork and time-consuming things when people, there should be an oversight committee of some sort that is only comprised of self-advocates or parents, you know, first relatives, close people that know, that have been down those paths. That know what they need and, and can really say, all right, we need to bring this case to review. Or

we need to have a session, bring a bunch of cases to review. And then take the input from self-advocates and parents on how to provide better community-based services.

Because it's not out there. From, from, you know, being protected on an educational level, you know, we've come a long way even, even from past 15 years just in terms of how IEPs have been implemented, for education and accessibility, following the ADA Act, and all that, but there's still a lot of, there's still a lot of room to grow and we can't become complacent. You can't become stagnant, you gotta keep, you gotta keep knocking those doors down. Somebody tells you, "No, you can't do this," you ask them, you say, "Why? Why can't I do it? Don't tell me 'No.' You don't know me. I don't know you. I don't, I don't assume to know you. so don't assume to know me." Assume is, assuming is a sign of ignorance. You don't act, you don't treat me like that. Sorry to tell you, don't treat the rest of us like that. Okay, we're our best advocate and you ask us, and if you wanna, you wanna do something behind our back, I'm sorry to tell you, we're, we're gonna know, we're gonna find out, and you're not gonna keep anything from us. You're just gonna burn our, burn our ears a little bit more and make us wanna work that much harder.

So the more secretive you are, the more people you're gonna get hounding you. So the best way is to keep it open and you'll get people off your back. But, you know, they don't see the logic in that. They, they wanna, they wanna talk in riddles and get their lawyers to draft up stuff and kick us to the curb and try to get us arrested and for, you know, for voicing what we, what we feel is, you know, a, a universal opinion. Multiple, you know, multiple people, multiple states, multiple agencies probably agree with us. But you know, you know, there's gotta be some type of oversight and there just isn't.

So, me, be a part of the disability community, this is just something that I feel as though, me, you know, I have this old-school sh**kicker attitude. And I don't, I don't take any and I don't leave any, I don't leave any stuff and just be this gotta, you know... We can always mediate, we can always find happy medium where we're all involved, where we'll all open, where we're all accountable, and where we can just find, find some common ground.

There's always some way, but you gotta desire to, to mediate and desire to come to that common ground. If, if, if, if you walk into a meeting with us and you're already, you take one look at us, you size us up and shut us down, well no, you're not keeping an open mind. So, the objective is to keep an open mind, and I'm trying to, as a member of the Council, a member of the Adults and Aging and Developmental Disabilities, I wanna teach people to be more open-minded and ask for more input from the disability community, because there's not enough.

As soon as we, as soon as we graduated from high school, we're on our own. And I've been lucky because I can go out there and I can ask questions on like what community-based services are there, you know DVR, vocational rehabilitation has still helped me to this day. But I feel as though a lot of people don't have the patience that I have either. I'll keep bugging you, keep knocking down doors. A lot of people in my situation I've noticed, some that can advocate for themselves and some that can't, they get deterred after, you know, the first four or five phone calls isn't returned. You know, you space out a, you know, two-week process and it becomes a couple months. You gotta keep going,

you gotta keep bugging them. You gotta, you gotta, you gotta bug them 'til they, 'til they know your name to the point and they just, they get tired of you. So then they'll finally give in and help you 'cause they get tired of hearing from you.

So you gotta, you gotta be, you gotta persevere, you gotta keep after it. And if you, if you get a little deterred, we all do, we all, we all get a little skeptical of the outcome. But, you gotta, you know, you gotta keep after it even if, even if you get a little down, that's just a part of life, man. It's, it's part of the cycle. So, you know, you're gonna get down. It's gonna... I know that sounds cliché but, you know, and I don't even think about it that way, I just, you know, I don't even get down anymore. I just know it's a part of the political red tape. You know, I know it's a part of doing business. But, you know, there has to be better oversight, and there isn't, and I hope that I can help, help start that, help start that trip.

KB: Now tell me about ADA.

DG: Oh, ADA. I could start, I could start, you know, from... When did it, 1974, right? That's, that's when it was? I mean I'm, I'm a, I'm a '90s baby but, you know, I've been around, I've seen the good and bad of it, you know. From, from, from, you know, the, the, the pads on the doors to just the bathrooms to the, the inclusion of kids in the education system and, and trying to include them in regular classes and, and the development of the IEP programs. There's been so many things that have come about from A... from, from what started as the ADA. The ADA has come leaps and bounds from where it was. Even when I was a young kid going to Maclary [Elementary School] and going to West Park [West Park Place Elementary School], and, and doing, doing all my elementary, it's come a long way. They didn't even have automatic door openers when I, on, on my elementary school building, up until I was, like, in first grade. [Laughs]

So I was one of the main reasons why they threw keypads on. They always saw me wheeling, wheeling up, up the ramp and being independent and they saw me having trouble opening doors up and I finally said, "Hey, man. Why don't you put a keypad on there?" And I was like, "I know you can get a tax break for it. Hey get it, man. Do it, let's do it. What's the wait? It's, you know, it's boom, boom, boom. Get it done. You know, you have... You know, just validate it, however you get it validated, get it in there." And they've, it's come a long way but there's a lot that still needs to, still needs to come. There, there needs to be more input, more, more input from the, from the student or, or the individual's level when it comes to just ADA compliance.

And if something, if, if something, you know, from a parking space issue pops up, now granted it isn't big, because the disability community is small, but we have to be able to, to... There has to be some system, some, some checks and balances-type system where, you know, where everybody is held accountable. You know, there's still not... There's still not pads, you know, doors aren't still accessible everywhere they should be on campus. You still gotta do things independently. Now, granted that isn't a big issue for me because I have full use of my extremities, but again this, this is being a part of this Council, being a part of disability community, isn't just about me. It isn't, you know, life just isn't about you, me, the, you know, the other person. It's about us all, it's about working together and helping everybody and loving everybody.

And listening. You can learn a lot just by listening. Don't be ignorant and tune everybody out. Listen. And actually listen and genuinely care. If you listen and genuinely care, you will definitely, you will definitely get, get, get something out of that. You will learn something from it. And, and really, you know, it, it, it would come a long way, and there's just not enough of it.

But the ADA, you know, it's come a long way. I see us...without the ADA I wouldn't have been able to be included in normal classes, you know. They probably would have put me in a, a REACH program, a latch-key type program. Luckily, you know, I was able to advocate for myself, and I made friends with all my teachers and they were, they noticed my ability. And they noticed that I was articulate. They, they noticed that I kind of, you know, always kinda gravitated towards them. Because I'm, I'm just old in the mind, you know, the way I look at things, the way I conduct myself with people. I've tried to treat every, you know, it's cliché, but I was just brought up, you know... I don't really trust the young kids my age, their, their motives, their, their intentions are different.

And so me, kind of having that analytical sense that I've always had, I've always gravitated towards my, my teachers for advocacy, for, for, you know...to, to let them know my opinion on something, and then them kinda be my indirect advocate.

But again, you know, the ADA's come a long way. There needs to be more of an oversight to include the older buildings, you know. Because one of the clauses is, well, if your building was built after 1971, 1974, then you don't have to have the ramps, or you don't, or if you do, you know, like a small business, like a restaurant, or a, a little small concert venue, or, you know, things that we, you and I, enjoy because we're all normal people. I'm sorry. We all enjoy the music, we all enjoy the movies, we all enjoy getting around. I can't get, you know, I can't get into old restaurants in old New Castle. That's a good example. So there has to be some type of inclusion.

And they need to somehow, you know, have a clause in the ADA act for ADA compliancy for ramps, for curbs, because there's been a lot of times even... I'm, I do a lot of traveling. I go around. I go monoskiing out in Utah, I go, you know, I'm, I'm up in Philly. I go to shows at the Merriam and go around Old City and you got all them curbs, man, and you'll, you'll flip right over. And that being a public place, that should fall into some clause where, you know, that needs to be held accountable. Not just because, you know, they shouldn't be excluded just because all those buildings, you know, were built, you know, predated the ADA. If it's a public place, and you know, it's a restaurant or it's, it's a venue or it's, it's a, you know, anything where, where, you know, basically a normal individual, which I see myself as a normal individual, because I don't look at myself as "Derrick with cerebral palsy." I'm Derrick George. That's who I am. Yeah, this chair is a part of me, this chair is a part of my daily life and helps me get around, but past propelling me, helping me get around, it's not a part of me. And disability does not define me. And it shouldn't define anyone. Because everybody's different.

Again, so, you know, there has to be some way that the ADA can kinda build on that and there has to be more oversight. Whether it's from a parking spot, parking spots and trying to wall people off and maybe getting a ticket. Like if you see somebody parking that isn't disabled, they can have a disabled placard. But if, if they're parking and like a person with a, a person with a ramp or a lift isn't able to get in, then they should be fined. I don't

care. 'Cause it's so easy to get a handicap placard now. You can have a bad back and get a placard. You're taking up those spots when, yeah, I understand, so such and such person has a bad back, blah blah blah blah. There needs to be more oversight on that at the DMV level, from the state level on up, and not just hand those placards out.

Because then you're taking those, you're taking those parking spaces away from individuals who need them, from individuals who may drive on their own who may need that extra couple feet to get in and out of their vehicle safely. If they don't have that space, they could get hit, they could (get) hurt, they could be out in the cold. It could take them an hour, you know, or 20 minutes to load up because they gotta, you know, have somebody else with them. You know, when all this could be avoided just by having clearer guidelines in the ADA and more oversight.

There's not enough oversight, I can't use that word enough. I know it's cliché, but there really isn't. Because the disability community just doesn't – I hate to say this – disability community isn't a big enough moneymaker for the state legislature, state legislature, so they're not really gonna worry about us. But again, it's not about money, you know, that's fine. If you wanna make it about money, that's fine. But you also – not everything, not every decision has to be made with greed or with money in mind or, or with money as the end goal or somebody's skin. It's about how to make just living better and, and just navigating better.

I'm lucky because, you know, if I need to go to the bank, I can just wheel, wheel into the bank. If I gotta go to the grocery store, I can wheel up there. But I'm in a college town where, and a small college town at that, where you can get to everything in a reasonable amount of time. In the big cities again, like I said, Old City being a good, good example, and Philly being such a big city, yeah, you can get around the subway and public transportation is wonderful. And, and I've, I've worked up there a few times and getting around is, is good. But getting in and out of restaurants and, and drumming, bringing that business in, you know, we can contribute to any, any small business just like the rest of us.

So if you want our money, you know, make, make, you know, make it more welcoming environment, Make it a safer environment to where, you know, disabled individuals aren't, aren't afraid to go up a curb in fear of, in fear of tipping over, in fear of hurting themselves, in fear of injuring others. You know, you could injure others. And so there's a lot of things that need to happen for that to occur. But the ADA has a long way to go. They've come a long way but they still have many, many years to go.

KB: So if you had a magic wand, what of all those things would you do to change the world?

DG: If I had a magic wand... Well, I wouldn't necessarily say that any of us can change the world. We can just kinda try to contribute to make the world just a more loving place, you know, more open-minded place. I feel, I feel, you know, with the advent of technology and all this social media, and Instagram and Snapchat and Facebook, and we've become a, we've become a society of these self-obsessing, self-absorbed individuals who only care about themselves, who only care about the "now." They don't think about the future. They don't think about, you know, 10 years from now. They don't think how they can effect change. All they care about is, you know, the, the newest song

that came out or the newest, newest video that came out.

So the point is if I could wave a magic wand and change anything, there's not really much...there's a lot I'd wanna change. From politics on down, from the way that people look at, look at individuals like myself. You know, I, I would hope that if anybody hears this interview, stop looking at us and looking at the chair and looking at it as an obstacle. Come and talk to us first. It's ignorant for you to think that. I understand everybody has their assumptions, but, you know, just come and speak with us. Come keep an open mind. You'd be surprised what some of us have to offer.

So if there's one thing I could change, it's, it's the selfishness within our, our new, our new kinda generation we have here, with all this advent of technology where it's just constant stimulation. You need, you know, we all – all these kids, you know, it's constant stimulation, they want this constant reward system, to just, “Oh, that next ‘Like.’ That next ‘this’ on Snapchat.” To get away from that. Start working on yourself and start opening your mind up and listening. Listen more and don't just, you know, observe from afar and with your selfish motive in mind. If you can observe from afar, ask questions, not take anything for face value and, like I said, just keep an open mind and treat everybody the same, it's, it's very easy. It's very easy.

KB: So if somebody was going to do your autobiography, your biography, your obituary, whatever, what would you want people in the future to know about you?

DG: Well, what, what would I want people in the future to know about me? Well, that I was a person. Honestly, you know, I've, I've always, I've always said this and I'll say this probably 'til the day I die, 'cause it's also one of my downfalls, and it's with women and with, with friends, especially with women. It's, it's, take advantage of it a lot but, you know, I always would put everybody else before myself. And, and the fact is you just like, you have to constantly be learning. Every day you learn. Take the good with the bad. You keep learning. If something bad happens to you, don't cry about it, don't bitch about it, just, just work through it. It, it was there, to teach, it's there to teach you a lesson. It's there to, to, to, to help you grow.

So you grow every day, you learn every day, keep an open mind, and love everyone.