

## ***Ed Roberts and the Disability Rights Movement***

Many know Ed Roberts as the father of the independent living movement. Roberts, born in 1939, contracted Polio at age 14. When his mother asked the doctors if he would live or die, they replied *"You should hope he dies, because if he lives he'll be no more than a vegetable for the rest of his life"* (MNDDC [Roberts], p. 1, para. 2, July 2010). However, he didn't die. After a very long hospitalization, he returned home but was only able to move a couple of fingers and a couple of toes. Roberts went to school by telephone hook-up for three years. In his senior year, his mother, an advocate through and through, insisted he *"get out of the house"* (MNDDC [Roberts], p. 3, para. 1, July 2010). He started attending school in person, while still in his iron lung. His first battle came that senior year when the principal did not want to give Ed Roberts his diploma... because he hadn't taken physical education and driver training! Roberts and his mother took the fight to the school board. The board disregarded the missed requirements and awarded Ed Roberts his diploma (MNDDC [Roberts], July 2010).

After attending community college, Roberts was admitted to the University of California (UC) at Berkeley. He had to fight the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation for the support he needed to attend college because his rehabilitation counselor thought his disability was too severe to ever get a job. Hence, there was no need to get an education. Roberts was finally admitted to UC at Berkeley in 1962, but he had to sue them to get in! This was followed by a series of battles for accessible dormitories; lack of curb cuts to move freely around campus, not to mention the City of Berkeley; no accessible transportation; and no accessible off-campus housing (MNDDC [Roberts], July 2010).

Roberts, with others, actually secured the first curb cut in the United States. Eventually, after many meetings advocating for the needs of people with disabilities, Berkeley administrators decided to create a new campus office and the resulting Physically Disabled Students Program became the nation's first disabled students' office (MNDDC [Roberts], July 2010).

Roberts wound up earning his B.A. and M.A. from Berkeley in Political Science. He also completed everything but his dissertation for his Ph.D. while there. According to Roberts, *"The Dean of Berkeley thought that I was going to get my doctorate and go live in a nursing home for the rest of my life."* (MNDDC [Roberts], p.9, para. 3, July 2010). In 1976, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Roberts as Director of the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation - the same agency that had once labeled him too severely disabled to work! He filled that position until 1983; he then returned to Berkeley where he co-founded the World Institute on Disability. Ed Roberts died in 1995 (MNDDC [Roberts], July, 2010).

*"I dreamed that someday I would be the head of the Department of Rehabilitation, and the policies would be changed so that people with the most severe disabilities would be served first."* - Ed Roberts (MNDDC [Roberts], July 2010).

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