



*Where Reality is Respect,
Appreciation, and Fulfillment*



My Story. My Voice.

**By: Hannah Thompson, as presented during our
Annual Fall Benefit, October 4, 2015**

I am so honored to have been asked to speak at the RRAF Fundraiser. Thank you to all who were able to attend this event!

This event is so important because it creates success stories. I'm a success story in progress. I have Cerebral Palsy and three different movement disorders; I cannot walk or talk on my own. I live independently; I manage my own caregivers; I am on the FCC's Disability Advisory Committee; I am on the junior board of Over the Rainbow, an organization that provides housing for people with disabilities; and I mentor a high school student through a scholarship program. You may have noticed a paying job and a boyfriend are missing. I'm not going to pass by this opportunity to put in a plug: if you can help with the paying job, or if you like what I am about after hearing what I have to say, please contact me. I'm going to focus on the positive here, though, because there is so much.

RRAF is such a tremendous organization. Although I have not benefited directly from RRAF, I know how powerful organizations can be. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have certain organizations in my life. I'll start with Jewish Child and Family Services. For my family that consists of two loving parents and two younger siblings, David, who is now almost 20, and Genevieve, who is 16. Until I graduated high school, these amazing women would come and take care of me and my siblings if my parents went out. I was an independent spirit from the start. On the first day of preschool, I was the little girl who looked at mom as if to say, "Why are you still here?" That was just me. So, when the respite worker came, I was waiting for my parents to go. I bonded with each and every woman. That bonding helped me form relationships with every caregiver that I have ever had since. Forming relationships with my first respite care workers built a foundation for future relationships with caregivers.

So, when I saw RRAF offered in-home services, I know any individual with a disability will prosper greatly from these services, as I did. I was still at home when I had my first experience with these amazing respite workers, so it was my mother who trained them and directed my care, until the week when I went to Camp Courage.

My smile gets even bigger when I talk about Camp Courage. Camp Courage is a camp for people with disabilities. Courage taught me a lot about myself and, honestly, I could talk about camp all day, but I will focus on how it taught me to direct my own care. For the first time, mom couldn't train them. The counselors all had a basic knowledge of how to care for those with physical disabilities, but it wasn't my mom who was sitting down with them. I had to be the one to tell them things such as, "I have no balance response; you have to feed me on my right side" – the list of necessary instructions for my care is very long.

Continued on Page Two – My Voice

From Page One – My Voice

This all fell on my shoulders for the first time. I learned a lot about myself. I asked them to carry me the first day because I was too nervous to walk with them, but by the third day, I trusted myself to walk with them. Currently, my mother does initial training of my caregivers, and then we are on our own, which terrifies the caregivers, but I am thinking, “We’ve got this.” Camp Courage was a wonderful steppingstone for me. Really, I grew up there. I just attended a counselor’s wedding; it was a great place to meet friends. I stopped going to camp when – and I swear to God this actually happened – a counselor who was with me in the pool put me on her knee and said, “Bouncy, bouncy, bouncy.” I knew that was my last year. I had graduated from college and, apparently, I graduated from camp, too. By that time, I had learned so much about myself. So when I saw that RRAF offers developmental training services, I knew that the recipients of those programs would learn as much about themselves as I did.

Everyone who happens to have a disability needs to learn about themselves – really, we all do, but the one thing that is crucial for people who have a disability to come to know is how powerful they are. All children are powerful beings, but they only learn just how powerful they are through being independent.

I have only spoken about two organizations here, but I had countless organizations come into my life and say, “You are independent; you are powerful, even though you have Cerebral Palsy.” It goes without saying that I had so many individuals come into my life and say, “You can be great.” RRAF is that kind of organization that says to those it serves, “We support your family and understand your struggles”; but, most importantly, they say, “You can be independent, you can be powerful, and you can be your awesome self.”

I thank you again for letting me speak to you on such a lovely fall afternoon, and I would love to hear from you with any questions you may have.

A QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH HANNAH

After the Fall Benefit I had many conversations with guests who were still abuzz about the speech Hannah gave. It energized so many of us and guests relayed both comments and questions that they wished they could ask of her. So, I emailed her a few of them and her responses are below. Thank you Hannah for sharing your thoughts with us.

Marilyn Flanagan, Executive Director

- ◆ What do you think your life would be like now – if you were your age 30 years ago?

If I was my age 30 years ago, I would have fewer choices in technology, which would limit my career opportunities exponentially. The ADA act would be in it’s infancy (it’s infancy the appropriate term) so I probably would be struggling to live independently. So many things could be different.

- ◆ How do others with disabilities gain the confidence to just be themselves like you have been able to do so well?

This is a hard question. I see my disability as something to get around, not an identity or excuse. I think you need to have a incredible support system like I am blessed with and a fierce desire to live life to the fullest.

- ◆ I have been told that you “give others faith in humanity.” How do you feel when hearing that?

It warms my heart that people feel that way after meeting me.

- ◆ You mentioned that texting on your phone was easier than your communication device. What changes would you like to see with communicators to benefit you?

Companies that make adaptive equipment need to start testing their equipment with the end user. Some simple design mistakes could be eliminated with the end user testing the product.

Continued on Page Three – Questions and Answers

From Page Two – Questions and Answers

- ♦ What is the short version of your resume and your desired job at this time?

I have 2-3 years of experience in not-for-profit marketing with a focus on managing their social media. However, I would like to be a mentor for individuals starting to use communication devices. I would like to help people in rehabilitation facilities or pediatric therapy environments.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HANNAH

Hannah Thompson graduated from Elmhurst College in 2012. She participated in Greek Life and was heavily involved in spiritual life on campus as well. Her professors nominated her for prestigious awards such as Lincoln Laureate. She currently lives in Elmhurst in an apartment on her own. She is a member of the Federal Communications Commission's Disability Advisory Committee which is a complete honor to Hannah.

Hannah has also had the privilege of having a documentary made about her life during her college years that can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJOX4qJwBqw>.

Hannah also does a monthly blog that can be accessed at: <http://hannahcollegeadventures.blogspot.com>.



**Look at that raffle bin !!
And, all of those 175+ prizes !!
There were lots of happy winners.**



**The room was filled with supporters of RRAF.
Food, fun, contests, and friends galore.**



**The Saint Matthew Knights of Columbus,
Council 9893, members remain steadfast,
supportive partners of RRAF. Over the years
they have donated almost \$130,000.00.**

**Thank you!
Thank you!
Thank you!**

One and all!

**Our Annual
Fall Benefit
was attended
by almost
250 people.**

**And the
event raised
almost
\$17,000.00 !!**

**A wonderful
afternoon.**



**Zachary Slaughter and Kelly Bowen are
presented the Lapertosa Award by Sandy
Davis. Their above and beyond efforts as
employees of RRAF do not go unnoticed.**

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Our guest speaker, Hannah Thompson, and her assistant, Morgan Sonnenberg, gave us a speech that had everyone in the room emotional. Tears, smiles, newfound hope, and a renewed sense of purpose was felt by all. Thank you, Hannah, for your voice.



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