

Book Review**Title:** *Ed Roberts: Father of Disability Rights***Author:** Diana Pastora Carson; Drawings by Patrick Wm. Connally**Publisher:** Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing 2013**Paperback:** ISBN: 978-1-4575-1952-9**Cost:** \$14.95, 30 pages**Reviewer:** Steven E. Brown, Ph.D.

For many years I have anticipated the day Ed Roberts would be taught in history textbooks, just like James Meredith, who broke the American university color barrier for college students in Mississippi in 1962. That same year Ed Roberts provided a similar breakthrough for students with significant, or high-level, disabilities, at the University of California at Berkeley.

This book, targeted at elementary school-age children is long overdue. Clearly written, with a lot of blank spaces on a few pages, Carson's style is direct and to the point. I wanted to know a little more about the intended audience, so wrote the author. She quickly and cordially replied:

“Ed's work had some high-level concepts and vocabulary that were difficult to translate into a format for younger audiences. I recognize that the language level in the book varies. But given the Common Core Standards, at least in my district, teachers are now supposed to provide rigor and scaffolding in instruction, including high level vocabulary and challenging concepts (Personal correspondence, Feb. 28 2014).”

While aspects of his life are missing, such as his marriage, divorce, and fathering of a son, I recognize the Ed I knew and became friends with in his later years, and the focus is on his role as “Father of Disability Rights.” (In full disclosure, I have also written about Ed--see References). Ed possessed an uncanny ability to connect with pretty much everyone he encountered. He frequently showed up late for meetings because he would spot someone with a disability on the street and, especially, if he did not know them, would stop to talk with them because he wanted to encourage them to engage.

As a person with a significant disability--using a respirator to breathe during the day, an iron lung at night--he rarely traveled anywhere alone. One of his frequent companions was Patrick Wm. Connally, a colleague and artist, whose magnificent drawings on the book cover and opposite each page of text, which some readers might find far less direct than Carson's writing, I believe both reflect and enhance the text.

The book begins when Ed is described as, “fourteen when it suddenly seemed that he would never go to college, get a job or get married” (p. 2) because he became disabled from polio. But he did do all of these things, and much more. Ed attended and taught college, married, had a son and at one of his jobs, became Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation, after having been told by a worker at that same agency he was too disabled to ever work.

Ed also co-founded the public policy think tank, the World Institute on Disability, received numerous awards, and traveled around the world. When he died in 1995, many people traveled to Berkeley, (including my wife and me) to celebrate his life. Carson concludes, Ed, “proved that people with disabilities can work and play together with everyone else” (p. 30).

This book can be used as a model for addressing disability rights biographies and issues for younger audiences. It not only belongs in every school library; more importantly, it belongs in a range of curricula.

Steven E. Brown is the co-founder of the Institute on Disability Culture (<http://web.mac.com/disculture/>), a poet, essayist, and speaker. A collection of essays, *Movie Stars and Sensuous Scars: Essays on the Journey from Disability Shame to Disability Pride* is available at many online bookstores. He may be contacted at: sebrown@hawaii.edu.

References

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