

Time to Raise the Bar!

My name is [Jason Hahr](#), I am a 32-year-old average looking guy. There is nothing all that special about me, when you first look at me. Okay that was a slight exaggeration. I do roll around with a giant metal contraption everywhere. You see I have a form of cerebral palsy and use an electric wheel chair. A majority of you who are reading this may have pre-conceived notions about cerebral palsy and disabilities in general. While this piece will highlight a little bit of my personal story, my intention is to present the human side of disability and address the idea that society has such low expectations for people with disabilities.

I grew up in a small town in Montgomery county Maryland. There is nothing all that special about our town. It resembles many other small towns in America, there are very few people with disabilities in my hometown and even fewer who are as physically limited as I am. Due to the fact that I am lucky enough to have been educated in a post ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) world I was mainstreamed throughout all of grade school. I was treated like all of my able-bodied peers. This meant that I was expected to complete the same assignments they did with very little modifications. Thanks to this mentality I never saw my disability as a barrier to achieving my goals. My disability would hit me smack in the face towards the end of my junior year. It was not a question of whether I was smart enough to go to college but would my physical limitations prevent me from doing so. Thanks to a wonderful lady in the guidance department I was able to find a school that met my personal care needs. I graduated in 2004 and shortly there after headed off to college like so many of my peers.

It is at this point I should mention the fact that I was as much as possible a typical college student. I partied, cram for tests at the last minute, etc. About halfway through my sophomore year of college I began to realize people with disabilities weren't seen by everyone the way I had previously thought. Without getting into too much detail I will say that the school elected to close the personal care program and left those of us who relied on it for support searching for other options. I was fortunate enough to find another school in North Western Pennsylvania that could meet my needs and continue to challenge me academically. It took me four more years but I would graduate with two bachelor's degrees one in history and the other in theatre. Yes, I am a nerd. Even though I had encountered obstacles while getting my two degrees I had no idea that there was an even greater battle yet to come.

Like many new college graduates, I was unsure where my journey would take me next. After months of reflection I decided to go back for my masters and education so that I could become a well-rounded history teacher. In January 2010 I returned to school in North Western Pennsylvania. The program I was a part of not only offered a masters in education but also teachers' certification. Throughout my master's program I earned a 4.0 average and the program was completely online so my physical limitations were not an issue that is until I was scheduled to take the final two courses. These courses served as a practicum and were intended to gage a student's ability to teach in an actual classroom. I say that my physical

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limitation became an issue. I honestly believe that my perceived limitations became an issue rather than my actual physical limitations. My school elected not to allow me to demonstrate my skills in the classroom, they said that I was “too disabled to teach.” In their mind because of my use of an assistant, they believed that my assistant would be the one completing all of the work in the classroom for me. It is at this point you as a reader maybe wondering why I have chosen to tell my story. The answer to that question is simple it is not to highlight the difficulties and obstacles I had to overcome. Instead it is to highlight a larger societal issue when it comes to people with disabilities.

The obstacles I encountered are not unique to me. If one has any type of disability whether it is physical, intellectual or even emotional there are certain stigmas associated with them. People with disabilities are treated as if they are third class citizens. The struggle that people with disabilities had to face to pass the ADA was great but it is my belief that the struggle continues to this day. “We “are often infantilize and praised for such mundane achievements as getting out of bed, tying our shoes, or even opening our mouth to speak, and aspiring to greater achievement than what society has planned for us. I have written many words throughout this piece but my point can be simplified to its purest form when I say it is time for society and people with disability to expect more from people with disability as a whole. If you are a person with disability do not accept the low expectation that society has placed upon you.

You may be asking yourself, how do I raise the bar and expectations for myself, as a person with a disability? There are several ways to accomplish this. Although an individual’s disability can and should be a part of their identity, it is important to develop as a complete person. Secondly, there are a wide variety of role models one can look up to that have disabilities. Remember that statistics show that one in six Americans have some form of a disability. As an example, let us look at the entertainment industry, on the critically acclaimed show *Breaking Bad*, the main character’s son had a disability, and was played by a disabled actor named “RJ” Mitte III. For another example, one can use the show *My Gimp Life*. The web series ran for two seasons, it was about a young lady named Teal who was a disabled actress in search of a career in Hollywood. These are just a few instances of successful people with disability in one small niche of society. There are many other examples, which I would not list here. In closing, remember this: Whether you are disabled or not, attack everything with passion and you will be successful.