

## **From Puddles to PRIDE**

(For all those who marched at the Disability Pride Parade)

by Janice Fialka

When they first gave me the news my child  
had a disability  
and would forever have a label glued to his name

I discovered sounds in my throat I never knew existed  
wails  
groans  
sobs

Even silent screams  
erupted from my throat,  
shattered the windows  
in my once-called *normal* home.

After my body emptied  
of all sounds  
the tears came  
madly,

streaming down my cheeks,  
sliding down my arms that clutched my baby  
raining over my heart.

into puddles,

Puddles all around me  
Puddles everywhere  
Puddles I thought I would drown in.

That was 19 years ago.

Today, July 18, 2004 on a balmy summer day  
in the city of Chicago

I stand

on this street where there are no puddles.

On this street there are feet  
of every size, shape, age, and color marching, shuffling, rolling  
in the first-ever Disability PRIDE Parade.  
Yes, I said: *Disability* Pride Parade!

On this street there are wheels rolling  
lovely legs limping  
clenched fists raised high  
    in the cloud-studded blue sky,  
beautiful bent smiles exploding with joy.

On this street there are voices, mumbles, grunts, spit, hands moving in the air,  
shouting out, signing out, singing out:

*What do we want?*

    Accessibility!

*When do we want it?*

    Now!

On this street are people who will  
no longer be shunned, excluded,  
no longer be segregated, pitied  
no longer be tolerated only on holidays and at charity balls.

On this street is Marlin, regal in his body and chair  
singing James Brown with a twist:  
“Say it LOUD, I’m Disabled and Proud”  
Rallying all young disabled activists to say it, shout it, sign it  
and Braille it . . .

On this street is our son, Micah  
whose label is not a source of shame to him.  
Who says, “I meet the best people in the world.”

On this street, I look around,  
turn to another mother who knows about puddles  
and say: “This is how life should look every day, on every street.”

On this street there are no puddles ---  
no puddles of shame.  
The glorious sunlight has dried them up.

On this street there are no puddles,

There is only PRIDE.  
There is only PRIDE.