

Jean Searle

My Life – My Story

7-24-1962 to Present

September 2006

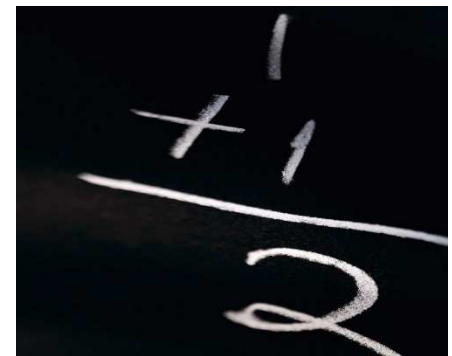
My Growing Years:

- I was born on July 24, 1962. I have 3 brothers and 4 sisters – I am the second child. I had been taking care of my brothers and sisters ever since they were little. We were all born with a disability. My Mom and Dad were both heavy smokers and alcoholics. In our system they say we have “mild retardation.” I have a brother in an institution that is blind since birth. He only comes home on holidays or on his birthday. He lives in an institution in Quakertown.



My Education:

- I went to special education classes in Philadelphia and then I went to the institution (Allied Services) in Scranton. They had nowhere else to put me. Then I went to another institution called Still Meadow – I was placed in this institution as it was more age appropriate and those making decisions for me wanted me to be among children my own age.



Institutional Living:

- Living in an institution was like living in prison. You could never leave the grounds and you always had to have at least two weeks notice from your case manager or your family to come home.



Staff support, the way I remember...

- Staff abused people in the institutions. If we did something they didn't like they would smack us or curse at us calling us evil names. At times they would even throw us up against the wall. It was upsetting to see consumers with bruises on their faces and on their bodies. This is why I want to see the institutions closed – people with disabilities don't belong there.

A Better Way:

- The reason I am writing this story is because I would like to see all of my brothers and sisters out of the institution and in the community where they belong.



My First Experience of Empowerment:

- I got out by meeting two people from an agency in Philadelphia. They came to the institution to interview me. They asked me if I wanted to come out. I said “Yes”. Two weeks later I was out! I moved to a community living arrangement (CLA) in Philadelphia.



My First Employment:

- Initially I went to work in a sheltered workshop during the day. There I worked on the floor performing assembly type work and sometimes if they were short-handed I worked in the office answering phones. I received a per diem for my days work.



Once I knew better:

- I was referred to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and assigned a job placement person. I expressed interest in competitive employment and my job coach assisted me in securing my first “real job” at Woolworths in the Neshaminy Mall. This lasted for only two weeks before taking on a new venture. I became quickly empowered and on a mission.



My current field of work:

- My next competitive employment was working with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (PILCOP). I was a support to the lawyers. I worked there for three years before landing my present job with the Disabilities Law Project. I have been working with DLP for almost 13 years. I am one of the secretaries otherwise known as administrative assistants.



Moving to Community Living Arrangement:

- I lived in the CLA for 13 years, later moving to my own apartment where I lived for 6 1/2 years. I then lived with a family in family living for almost 5 years. I liked living with a family, but I wish I had lived with a family that celebrated holidays. I have now been in my own apartment for almost 3 years. I again celebrate holidays!

My Assistance

- I have been lucky to have a lot of friends and family who always look out for me and trust me in working and in my personal life.

FINALLY

- It took many years and a lot of work by me and advocates who worked with me,

BUT

I now live alone, work in competitive employment, sit on several advocacy group Boards and Advisory Committees and am a member of the DDC Advisory Council.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment - My Dream:

My Goal - Empowering Others

Thank-You
Your Friend and
Advocate
Jean Searle