

Elena

Ms. Altieri

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*Jeopardy*

On October 20, 1999, I was watching the television game show *Jeopardy*. I was very surprised when I saw that one of the contestants was blind. He had a special Braille device that allowed him to read the categories. That was the only assistive device that he used. He answered the questions by only hearing them read by Alex Trebek. He did not have the advantage of being able to both hear and read the questions as the other players did. Even though I expected this to put the man at a disadvantage, it did not. Eddie went on to win this game as well as four others, making him a five-time winner. He was retired from the show and had won more money than any other contestant before.

At first I oohed and ahed over Eddie like the rest of the audience. I thought that it was great that he could be so successful. After all, it is not everyday that you see a blind guy on *Jeopardy*, right? I then began to notice some things about the way that Eddie was treated that disturbed me. He was treated differently than the other contestants by the audience and even Alex Trebek. Everyone seemed too preoccupied with the fact that Eddie was blind. This made me begin to question my own initial reaction to Eddie.

The first thing that bothered me was that at the beginning of each episode that Eddie was on, Alex Trebek remarked on the fact that he was completely blind. Usually the show starts immediately, but when Eddie was on Alex took time to share with the

audience that Eddie was blind and that he was an extraordinary fellow. This would have been fine if it were not for the fact that no other contestant that I have ever seen has been treated this way by Alex. Alex made remarks to the effect that Eddie was "amazing" and "inspirational". This really bothered me. Why do we feel that it is so amazing that a man who happens to be blind is smart enough to be on *Jeopardy*? Eddie was not only enough; he basically whipped the pants off of the other contestants. I reacted to Eddie with fascination at first too, but realized that I should not be so surprised that Eddie was qualified to be on the show. Just because you have a disability does not mean that you are not intelligent. The fact that Eddie is blind has nothing to do with his intelligence.

The morning after Eddie won his first game, I was listening to the radio. At the end of *Paul Harvey News and Comments*, I was surprised when Mr. Harvey announced that a man who is blind had won *Jeopardy*. It seems that Mr. Harvey was amazed as well that Eddie had won. Later in the day I saw a commercial for the show that said not to miss "an inspiring week on *Jeopardy*." When I heard that commercial I really thought that they might as well just gag me with a spoon.

The other episodes of the show seemed to me to get worse. During the time where Alex talks to the contestants about their lives, Eddie was again treated differently. While the others were asked career questions, Eddie, a successful sports writer, was only asked questions about being blind. He was asked when he became blind, what was his impression of color, and if the rest of his senses were better than other people's senses. Eddie always answered these questions with humor even though he seemed a little embarrassed by them.

This experience made me think about how we view people with disabilities. If a person has an obvious physical disability, many times we just assume that they must also have a mental disability. Eddie was obviously blind, so it was surprising to us that he would be smart enough to actually compete in and win a game show based on intelligence. I found it surprising that society thinks this way. I found it even more surprising that I unknowingly think this way. I am glad that I was able to see Eddie on television so that I could realize that I am part of a big problem of how society views people with disabilities.

*Jeopardy* episodes airing on NBC on October 20-26, 1999.

*Paul Harvey News and Comments* airing on WXBQ on October 21, 1999.

Ed.

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