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#### Personal Disability Inquiry

In my own family, several people have disabilities. Some have disabilities from birth and some have disabilities from illness. I have always known about these disabilities, but I never gave them much thought until now. We are a family, and looks, intelligence, disability, etc. does not make a difference in our feelings for each other. People with disabilities in our family have always just blended in. Or so I thought. After thinking a little bit more about how disabilities are viewed in my family, I discovered some things that I not thought about before.

My aunt [REDACTED] as an able bodied person up until several years ago. She has severe Diabetes and circulatory problems, and as a result had to have both of her legs amputated. She was able to keep one leg at first, and with a prosthetic she was able to walk and drive. She then had to have the other leg amputated unexpectedly. [REDACTED] is now a wheelchair user. She lives by herself and cares for her three-month-old grandchild twenty-four hours a day. Her house has few adaptive devices. The only problem that she has is that she can not drive. She has to depend on others to take her where she needs to go and she hates that. She does not want to depend on anyone at all. She will not even consider going into a building unless it is fully wheelchair accessible. She says that if a business will not take some extra money to make it so that she can get into the store on her own, then they do not deserve her business. I happen to agree with her.

[REDACTED] wants to keep her independence, and any sign of pity from anyone makes her fighting mad. She says that she can do almost everything that she could when she had

her legs, and she can. My family has gotten very irritated with [redacted] in the past when she has refused help. I realize now that she is trying to keep control of her own life. If my grandmother had her way, [redacted] would never have to lift a finger to do anything. [redacted] will not let my grandmother help her at all because if she does, my grandmother would begin to rule her life. I did not understand [redacted] need for independence until I took this class.

My cousin [redacted] has been deaf since she was about one year old. She had a high fever which caused her to lose her hearing. [redacted] is a very independent woman. She and her husband are expecting their first child. The only time that I have ever known [redacted] to be treated differently in our family is when she announced her pregnancy. Her mother felt that she was not mature enough to have a child, even though she is almost thirty. This was one time when I saw several devalued roles in connection with my family's treatment of [redacted]. [redacted] was treated like a child that was not ready to have the responsibility of parenthood. She was seen as an object of charity because the family felt that she would need a lot of help with the baby. She was also seen as an object of menace or dread because the family was worried whether or not her child would turn out "normal."

One thing that I regret with respect to [redacted] is that I have not gotten to know her very well. [redacted] lives in Pennsylvania, and I do not see her often. Because she speaks sign language, and I do not, I have a hard time communicating with her. After taking this course, I have decided that I need to make more of an effort to communicate with [redacted] when I see her. She is a member of my family, but I feel like now that I have been neglecting and even avoiding her because of her disability.

The third person in my family who has a disability is me. That is hard for me to write because I do not consider myself as being disabled. While my mother was pregnant, my right hand was affected by amniotic band syndrome. Even though my hand has been affected since birth, I have not felt like a person with a disability or been treated like a person with a disability by my family. I can not think of a single time that my disability has been an issue with my family. Sometimes my family members even forget about my hand. My fiancé has never had a problem with my hand. I can honestly say that it has never been an issue for us. There is no reason why it should be. My parents realized that I would have some things to overcome in my life, but they never let on like there was any reason for me to be challenged in any way. As a result, I have really not had that many problems. They have had great expectations of me, and I have lived up to those expectations.

I feel glad that I have not had any more problems with my disability than I have had. The things that I have had to deal with have really not been that difficult to overcome. I also feel like my family has been more accepting of me than they have with other family members with disabilities. I do not know why this is. I think that part of it is the fact that [REDACTED] can not communicate to the family like I can. This makes her disability more obvious. My family views [REDACTED] disability as more severe because it seems like she should need a lot of help. My disability does not hinder me in any way, so they forget about it. My family treats [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] differently than me because their abilities would seem to be affected more by their disabilities. Before I took this course, I had the idea that my family was all-loving and all-accepting. I think now that there is

more to the story than that. I think that even my family needs to reevaluate the way that they view people with disabilities.