New Freedom for the 21st Century

Today, in the 21st century, the word "disability" has a whole new meaning. People say look at my "ability" instead of my "disability." Why should they be ashamed of being different from others? After all, aren't we all different in our own special way? They hold their heads up high with pride in everything they do.

My friends helps with Special Olympics and has also volunteered with paralympics. A freind of mine, Jeffrey, is a young man with Downs Syndrome who is an accomplished power lifter. It makes me proud to know that I can make him smile and to watch as he brings joy to everyone that he meets. In the 21st century, young people like Jeffrey are given many opportunities to show their talents. Jeffrey was even named Alabama's Special Olympics Athlete of the Year for 2002.

In June of this year, my family and I will have the opportunity to go to Ireland and spend time with the Special Olympics athletes at the 2003 International Special Olympic Games. This will be a wonderful chance to meet and work with very talented athletes from throughout the world. Some people feel like they would be wasting their time with these special people but for me they are a big part of my life. It is so rewarding when you watch these athletes strive to achieve the goals, which they have set for themselves.

Another special person in my life is a little girl that I once worked with in dance class. Her name is Peggy and she is Deaf. This never stopped her from dancing. Even though she was not able to hear music, she could still feel the beat! Peggy would dance by feeling the beat through the floor. Through the aide of a new hearing device she was able to hear sounds and her speech has improved greatly. Now she does not rely completely on sign language. When she danced she didn't dance for anyone but herself and she truly danced from her heart!

In 1995, a close friend of my dance teachers died of AIDS. Eric was an AIDS victim for many years and even though I was only in about the 1st grade when I met him, he never missed one of our dance performances. Eric was a dancer but as the AIDS progressed, he got to the point where he didn't have the energy to dance. However, only a few weeks before his death, Eric came to the last performance he would be able to attend. He didn't care about the fact that he was hooked up to machines, but about the fact that he was living his last moments "having the time of his life."

The 21st century opens up many oppurtunities for a special person with disability to be able to show the world their talents. No one has to be as shamed for any reason because of the person they are, because everyone is equal. It makes me happy to see a person with disability whose life is filled with fun and to watch how they just live each day to the fullest with no worries. I wish I could live like that!