

INTRODUCTION

"I re-equip lives. One person at a time.
Sometimes pieces of a life break. People break.
They need repairing. That's what I do. I get
people to say, like they did before they broke,
'I can do it myself.'"

This is how an occupational therapist described her job. Lives that aren't working quite as they should, she told me, need to be mended.

One life, perhaps, was born without everything it needed. Or some of its parts weren't working correctly. Another life might have flown by too quickly and crumpled in the passenger seat of a car that would never be a car again. Another life may have had a stroke. ("Hadn't been sick a day in my life," said the 42-year-old woman.) And still another reached its 90th year and, like almost anything that age, required at least some retooling to keep running as smoothly as possible.

"I keep lives at the ready," my occupational therapist friend said. "I keep lives living."

This is a book rooted in lives that most of you will never live. Or even come to know. These are lives lived in DisabilityLand.

And where exactly is this Land? Essentially it's anywhere kids and adults with disabilities (together with their families, friends and helpers) run, roll, skip, straggle, try, fall, dream, learn, hope, sing, whisper and succeed. Or not. DisabilityLand is the personal space around anyone with a disability. Maybe in a kitchen. Or a bowling alley. Or a boat. Maybe in a school. Or a hospital. Or, perhaps, a memory.

Not much happens in The Land of Disability that doesn't happen elsewhere. But so much of what goes on there seems to happen in bold relief. When people—disabled and non-disabled people—find themselves in The Land of Disability, they often start acting in italics.

So this is specifically not a book about a word—"disability"—but about a place. In that place, big and little lives play out daily and, sometimes, lessons follow. Many of the lessons are ones that could only have been revealed in The Land of Disability. These are what I've tried to capture and convey.

In some cases, to some readers, some lessons will seem obvious. These you should pass on to others.

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