

# **“The Life You Lead is the Lesson You Teach”**

**An AHEAD/CAPED Teach-In  
in Honor of the Life of Judy Heumann©**

**December 18, 1947 – March 4, 2023**

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**PAUL GROSSMAN, JD, PA**

# CV and Caveats

- Succinct CV for Paul Grossman
  - Executive Counsel, Association for Higher Education & Disability (AHEAD)
  - Chief Regional Civil Rights Attorney, US, ED, OCR, SF, retired
  - Adjunct Professor of Disability Law, UC College of Law, SF, retired
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# Every Movement Has Its Iconic Moments and Its Iconic Leaders

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# **Our Iconic Moment was the 504 Sit-In in San Francisco**

## **Our Icon Leader was Judy Heumann**

With full credit and respect to the many other people who organized, planned, strategized and battled for disability rights and justice in America; some of whom we will hear from today

# Judy Heumann: THE Leader (1)

“Nothing about us without us” → “Nothing without us”

Co-founder:

- 1972 Disabled in Action (DIA)
- 1975 Center for Independent Living (CIL)
- 1983 World Institute on Disability (WID)

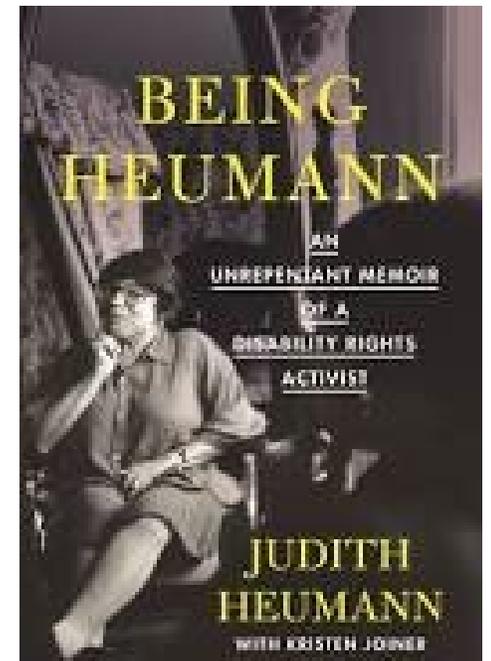
**1977 co-leader at the “504 Sit-In”** (Featured in Crip Camp, an Academy Award Nominee)

1991-2001 US ED Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (Clinton)

2010-2017 US Dept. of State, Special Advisor for International Disability Rights (Obama)

2017-2019 World Bank, Advisor for Disability and Development

2017-2019 first advisor to the Ford Foundation on inclusion of disability in the Foundations work



# Judy Heumann: THE Leader (2)

- **The long road**

- Contracted polio at 18 months of age – used a wheelchair for mobility and personal assistance for dressing, etc., from then on
  - A great deal of American disability history was first written by people with polio
- Much of what she accomplished, initially, was a response to a series of challenges, disappointments, set-backs and barriers, a source of the “fire in her belly”
  - Until age 9 she was excluded from her school, as a “fire hazard” then forced into segregated education; albeit a mixed blessing. Nearly every school in NYC was inaccessible at the time
  - Judy got a degree in speech therapy from Long Island University, a private school (MPH from UC Berkeley)
  - In 1970, denied a NYC teaching credential based on a “health exam” focused on her mobility and a concern that she could not lead school children out of a building in case of a fire
    - Judy sued and was successful in reaching a settlement
      - An important lesson about the courts and advocacy
      - Might be the first disability rights litigation in America

# Judy Heumann: THE Leader (3)

- She knew when and how to use her anger
  - “And I would appreciate it if you would stop shaking your head in agreement when **I do not** think you know what we are talking about.” [Heumann to Representatives Philip Burton and George Miller]
- Nonetheless she was eminently patient – e.g., required her colleagues to wait for pointer stick communicators to contribute and collaborate with everyone else involved in the Section 504 Sit-In strategy meetings
- Placed a very high value on consensus building, meat loaf/pasta a camp Jened
- Courageous
  - In the face of medical vulnerability – people on catheters or critical daily medication regimes who could die without timely assistance joined the 504 Sit-In and stayed night after night

# Judy Heumann: THE Leader (4)

- Intersectional to her core
  - Intersectionality includes valuing all types of disabilities
    - “[D]isability culture’ is really just a term for a culture that has learned to value the humanity in all people, without dismissing anyone for looking, thinking, believing, or acting differently”
  - Judy learned Civil Rights organizing techniques by participating in challenges to racial discrimination and the War in Vietnam
  - Self-described as “better in a group”
  - Judy, ***valued diversity by building alliances*** with all types of other Civil Rights movements -- “[A]ny story of changing the world is always the story of many.”

# Judy's Other Identity: Jewish (1)

- “Judy was born in 1947 to two parents who had separately fled Nazi Germany as children in the 1930s; all of her grandparents and other family members were murdered in the German Holocaust”
- “She said she believed it was her parents’ experience that led them to reject doctors’ advice to have their daughter institutionalized after she contracted polio at 2 and lost the use of her legs. ‘They came from a country where families got separated, some children sent away, others taken from their families by the authorities and never returned — all part of a campaign of systematic dehumanization and murder,’ she wrote in her memoir, “***Being Heumann***.” ‘Their daughter, disabled or not, wasn’t going anywhere.’”
  - This is the likely source of Judy’s steadfast opposition to institutional segregation and “separate but equal” schemes for people and students with disabilities

# Judy's Other Identity: Jewish (2)

- Until the NY schools opened up to Judy, her father carried her upstairs to Hebrew classes in a Yeshiva (Orthodox Jewish school); but even there she was otherwise denied access
- Later Judy became an advocate for equal rights and privileges for women in synagogue, such as who can read from the podium from the Torah
- Primary source for all information in the two slides relating to Judy's faith: [Judy Heumann, Jewish disability advocate who spurred a movement, dies at 75](#)

# **Disability Rights Were Not Handed to Disabled Americans!**

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**THEY CAME FROM COURAGE AND BATTLE!**

**THE “SECTION 504 SIT-IN” AT 50 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA,  
SAN FRANCISCO (APRIL 1977)**

# No regulations, no effective protections

- A 35 word “sneaker law,” vetoed by Nixon in his first term, signed in his second term on September 26, 1973
- But without an implementing regulation, the 35 words had almost no value
- Though published for comment, no regulations adopted under Presidents Nixon or Ford
  - Lead by higher education, many of the comments were intended to weaken the draft regulations; most infuriating to Judy were proposals for more segregation
- President Carter and Secretary Califano appeared to be stalling and advocates feared the regulations would end up weakened
- In April 1977, instigated by the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, Judy Heumann (polio/wheelchair), Ed Roberts (polio/ventilator), Kitty Cone (Muscular Dystrophy/wheelchair) and many others, direct action by a diverse group of students with disabilities was organized to get the 504 regulations adopted



# Straight Out of Judy's Playbook: Intersectional Action for Social Justice (1)

- Deaf persons used sign language to communicate with the outside when phones were cut by the Federal Protective Service
- The demonstration was provisioned by the Mission Rebels (Chicano) and the Black Panther Party of Oakland, California (through Brad Lomax [MS]), the Glide Memorial Church (serving the SF "Tenderloin"), as well as Delancey Street (a rehab program for substance abusers and former felons)
  - The Panthers had long advocated for free healthcare as one of its "10 basic Civil Rights" (maybe they were the first to do so)
  - Panthers had been running hot breakfast programs in Oakland and L.A. School Districts

# Straight Out of Judy's Playbook: Intersectional Action for Social Justice (2)

- Security services were provided by the Butterfly Brigade of Castro Street (a gay organization designed to prevent street violence against homosexuals) who smuggled walkie-talkies into the building
  - Some leaders, such as Kitty Cone, were open about being gay, even in 1977 (she too had fire in her belly)
- 100 Federal employees working in 50 UN signed a petition to Secretary Califano to sign the regs.

# Intersectional Eloquence

Statement carried in the Black Panther newspaper, reported at the 504 Sit-In, attributable to Dennis Billups, a blind Panther reporter present throughout the sit-in:

“[T]o my brothers and sisters that are Black and that are handicapped: Get out there, we need you. Come here, we need you. Wherever you are, we need you. Get out of your bed, get into your wheelchair. Get out of your crutches, get into your canes. If you can’t walk, call somebody, talk to somebody over the telephone; if you can’t talk, write; if you can’t write use sign language; use any method of communication that is all — all of it is open.”

# A Creative Leader, Able to Clear Many Forms of Barriers



Judy Heumann, part of a delegation of 34 people from the San Francisco Sit-In coming to picket at the US Capitol (during the day) and Califano's home (at night).

The regulation was signed on April 28, 1977, largely unchanged, the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the occupation in San Francisco

# A Personal Recollection

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**In the Jewish tradition, we say, “may her memory be a blessing.”**

**Today, we offer an alternative coined by Rachel Stomel of the Center for Woman’s Justice, “may her memory be a revolution.”**