

**MEDIA, WHETHER IT BE A TELEVISION SHOW, A MOVIE, A BOOK, A PODCAST SERIES, A COMIC SERIES, OR ANY OTHER VARIATION, IS OFTENTIMES AN ESCAPE FOR MANY PEOPLE. MAYBE YOU'VE HAD A STRESSFUL DAY AND JUST WANT TO RELAX WITH A COMFORT SHOW, MAYBE YOU LOVE GETTING ENRAPTURED IN THE WORLD OF THE STORY, OR MAYBE IT'S A DISTRACTION FROM THE MORE DIFFICULT THINGS OF LIFE WHEN YOU NEED A BREAK. ALL THAT TO SAY THAT SOME PEOPLE LOVE STORIES, AND ALONG THE WAY, IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR PEOPLE TO SEE THEMSELVES IN THE CHARACTERS THAT THEY'RE WATCHING.**

**MAYBE YOU HAD A SIMILAR CHILDHOOD TO THIS CHARACTER, OR EXPERIENCED THE SAME HARDSHIP AS THAT CHARACTER. SEEING THESE CHARACTERS, WHO YOU FEEL ARE SO SIMILAR TO YOU, ACTING AS HEROES WITHIN A STORY IS AN EMPOWERING FEELING. IT CAN MAKE YOU FEEL HEROIC, OR EVEN MAKE YOU FEEL STRONG, LIKE YOU'RE CAPABLE OF GREAT THINGS, BECAUSE IF THEY CAN DO IT, MAYBE YOU CAN TOO! HOWEVER, FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THIS TAKES ON A MORE LITERAL CONNOTATION.**

**IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR MEDIA TO HAVE A CAST THAT INCLUDES DISABLED CHARACTERS. IN FACT, SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS FROM CERTAIN SERIES ARE DISABLED CHARACTERS. TAKE TOPH FROM AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER, FOR EXAMPLE. IF YOU ASK ANYONE WHO HAS WATCHED THE SHOW, YOU ARE USUALLY GREETED WITH AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT OF POSITIVE VIEWS ON HER. SHE'S A FANTASTIC CHARACTER WHOSE DISABILITY IS WRITTEN IN A TASTEFUL WAY THAT ISN'T DEMEANING TO DISABLED VIEWERS. TOPH IS ONLY ONE OF MANY DISABLED CHARACTERS, HOWEVER. OTHERS INCLUDE PROFESSOR X, MATT MURDOCK AND DOCTOR STRANGE FROM MARVEL, CHIRRUT IMWE FROM THE STAR WARS FRANCHISE, DONATELLO AND LEONARDO FROM RISE OF THE TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, TEO FROM ATLA, QUASIMODO FROM THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME, JOHNNY JOESTAR FROM JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE, IZUMI CURTIS AND EDWARD ELRIC FROM FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST, ONLY TO NAME A FEW.**

**HAVING CHARACTERS LIKE THESE WITHIN MEDIA IS SO IMPORTANT FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ALSO DISABLED. FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH PEOPLE I KNOW IN MY LIFE WHO ARE DISABLED, SEEING A CHARACTER THAT THEY PHYSICALLY CONNECT TO IS SUCH A WELCOME RESPITE FROM THE OFTEN ABLEIST SOCIETY WE LIVE IN, WHETHER OR NOT THESE VIEWS ARE INTENTIONAL OR UNINTENTIONAL. THEY'VE TOLD ME IT MAKES THEM FEEL SEEN, MAKES THEM FEEL UNDERSTOOD IN A WAY THAT THEY HAVEN'T ALWAYS HAD.**







**NOW, IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO: AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS TO USE A WHEELCHAIR DECIDES THAT THEY WANT TO GO TO A CONVENTION. THEY'RE SO EXCITED AND WANT TO GO ALL OUT, MAKING AN OUTFIT FOR THEMSELVES, PLANNING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES AND PANELS THEY WANT TO GO WATCH, BUYING ALL THE REQUIRED TICKETS AND PREPPING EVERYTHING FOR TRAVELS. FINALLY, IT'S THE WEEKEND OF THE CON! THEY GET READY AND HEAD OVER, SHOW THE ATTENDANTS THEIR PASS TO GET INSIDE, AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR SOME FUN! ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE SHOWS IS HAVING AN ACTIVATION ON THE SECOND FLOOR, SO THEY HEAD OVER TO THE ELEVATOR AND GET ON. EVERYTHING IS GOING PERFECTLY FINE.**

**...UNTIL THEY TRY TO GET OFF THE ELEVATOR AND GET STUCK BECAUSE IT ISN'T WIDE ENOUGH FOR THEM TO PROPERLY WHEEL THEMSELVES OUT.**

**THIS IS A VERY, VERY COMMON OCCURRENCE AT CONS, AND IT IS UNFORTUNATELY ONLY ONE OF MANY ISSUES THAT DISABLED INDIVIDUALS MAY RUN INTO. FROM ASKING SOME DISABLED INDIVIDUALS THAT I KNOW WHO HAVE VISITED CONS, I WAS ABLE TO RECEIVE A LOT OF INSIGHT ON SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES THEY FACE. A FRIEND OF MINE RECENTLY VISITED A CON A FEW WEEKS AGO, AND SHE TOLD ME ABOUT AN ACTIVATION THAT WAS INTENDED TO BE AN INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE. IT REQUIRED THE PARTICIPANTS TO RUN ACROSS A SMALL CLEARING, NAVIGATE THEIR WAY THROUGH FLASHING LIGHTS MEANT TO SLIGHTLY 'OBSCURE VISION,' AND AT ONE POINT TO HOP UP ONTO A SORT OF PLATFORM.**



**THESE THREE THINGS ALONE PROVIDE DIFFICULTIES FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITIES. OF COURSE, SOMEONE IN A WHEELCHAIR OR THAT USES MOBILITY AIDS WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RUN QUICKLY ACROSS A CLEARING, AND HAVING TO HOP UP ONTO A PLATFORM PROVIDES ITS OWN SHARE OF PROBLEMS AS WELL. THESE TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTS SIMPLY ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE. THE FLASHING LIGHTS ALSO CAN AFFECT DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITIES. FOR SOMEONE WHO IS EPILEPTIC, THIS COULD CAUSE AN EPILEPTIC ATTACK, AND FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED, IT EITHER ADDS NOTHING TO THE EXPERIENCE OR HINDERS IT EVEN FURTHER.**

**I'VE TALKED TO OTHER INDIVIDUALS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND I'VE LEARNED THAT MANY ACTIVATIONS OR EXPERIENCES ARE ACCESSIBLE, BUT NOT EASILY. IN ONE INSTANCE, A STAFF MEMBER WAS ASKED ABOUT AN ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE, CONSIDERING THE MAIN ONE WAS VIA STAIRS, AND THE ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE WAS AN INCREDIBLY STEEP RAMP THAT WAS NOT EASILY PASSED. CERTAIN ACTIVATIONS WITHIN THE CONS ARE NOT EVEN WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE, COMPLETELY CUTTING OFF AN ENTIRE GROUP OF PEOPLE FROM EVEN GETTING TO EXPERIENCE IT.**





**IT'S SOMETHING IRONIC, IN A WAY. DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEDIA INCLUDE DISABLED CHARACTERS AND GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO INCLUDE DISABLED VIEWERS, ONLY FOR THESE SAME VIEWERS TO BE SHUT OUT AT A CONVENTION MEANT TO CELEBRATE THESE DIFFERENT MEDIAS. THE DISABLED COMMUNITY IS UPLIFTED AND INCLUDED, BUT THEN THEY ARE SUBSEQUENTLY NOT ABLE TO BE INCLUDED BECAUSE CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE CONS SIMPLY ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE BY ANY MEANS.**

**THAT'S NOT TO SAY THAT ALL CONS ARE COMPLETELY INACCESSIBLE, OF COURSE. THE SAN DIEGO COMIC CON, FOR EXAMPLE, ESTABLISHED A DEAF AND DISABLED SERVICE FOR THEIR CONVENTIONS TO HELP ACCOMMODATE FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS. THEIR SERVICES INCLUDE PROVIDING SHUTTLES AND ASL INTERPRETERS, PROVIDING WHEELCHAIRS AND SCOOTERS, MAKING SURE THE STAFF MEMBERS ARE AWARE OF ALL ELEVATORS WITHIN THE BUILDING, AND PROVIDING REST AREAS. THESE ARE ALL GREAT THINGS AND IT'S GOOD THAT THOSE IN CHARGE OF COMIC CON ARE AWARE OF THESE NEEDS, BUT THERE'S STILL SO MUCH MORE THAT COULD BE DONE.**

**FROM THE INDIVIDUALS I'VE SPOKEN TO, THE THING THAT THEY BELIEVE WOULD HELP THE MOST IS SIMPLY AWARENESS. DESPITE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THESE INACCESSIBLE AREAS, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY NOT INTENTIONALLY DISCLUDING DISABLED INDIVIDUALS. HOWEVER, IF THOSE DESIGNING THESE AREAS WERE MORE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT DISABLED INDIVIDUALS WILL BE ATTENDING, THINGS SUCH AS STRICTLY HAVING STAIR ACCESS TO CERTAIN ACTIVATIONS OR INCLUDING PLATFORMS WITH NO METHOD OTHER THAN STEPPING UP ONTO IT CAN BE AVOIDED.**

**WHILE A LOT OF PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE OF THE DISABLED COMMUNITY, THERE'S STILL A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE. THOSE IN CHARGE OF THE CONS, IN MY OPINION, SHOULD GET FEEDBACK FOR THEIR ATTENDEES! I'VE HEARD STORIES FROM PEOPLE I KNOW AND I'VE READ SO MANY ABOUT HOW "THE CON WAS GREAT, BUT..." AND GO INTO HOW IF MORE EFFORT WAS PUT INTO MAKING IT MORE ACCESSIBLE, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN EVEN MORE ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE. SURVEYS COULD BE A GREAT WAY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS: ASK WHAT WAS GOOD ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE DOING, AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT, AREAS THAT WERE NOT ACCESSIBLE AT ALL, ETC.**

**EVERYONE DESERVES AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR INCLUSION, AND IT'S NOT FAIR THAT THE DISABLED COMMUNITY IS BEING EXCLUDED BECAUSE OF THINGS THAT CAN BE CHANGED OR FIXED**