

2021 ULOBA Pride Parade

Independent living festival, Oslo, June 2021

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Hi friends, I am Adolf Ratzka joining you in my powerchair from the comfort of my study in Stockholm. Too bad, we can't wheel down Oslo's streets together this year! Too bad, we are not visible right now to Oslo residents and tourists. Visible and proud.

We are many and our numbers are growing all the time. We, disabled people are getting tired of being locked up in our homes. It's not only the virus that keeps us locked up. Since long before the pandemic, we have been isolated and excluded from the rest of society. Many of us spend their childhood in institutions, away from their parents and brothers and sisters. Many of us waste their lives in these places. Why? Because their local governments believe personal assistance is "too expensive". Too expensive! We live only once! Our lives may not be valuable to taxpayers but they are dear to us. We are not satisfied with just surviving in an institution where they keep us clean and fed. We demand a real life, a life in the community with education, work, friends, relationships, and a family of our own. The kind of life that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors take for granted. We are ordinary people, not special people! We demand ordinary lives, not special lives in special places.

Like other ordinary people we want to contribute to society. But to make our contribution and help make the world a better place for all, we need to live included in the community, we need control over our services, for example, personal assistance; we need accessibility; we need to liberate ourselves from over-protection, paternalism, prejudice and discrimination.

So what can we be proud of today? As for myself, I'm not proud of being disabled - I find my disability pretty inconvenient. But I am proud of having been able to turn my seemingly hopeless existence as a paralyzed 17-year old in an Iron Lung into the person I am today. In July, it will be 60 years that I have been disabled. During these 60 years, I have had - and still have - a good, rich, exciting, and fulfilling life with work, interests, a family of my own, and with love and affection.

Together, we can be proud of not having given up this endless work of trying to change society to the better. We can be proud of still fighting - like David against Goliath - our uneven fight against the State for equal opportunities, for our rights. Let's have a look at each other and be proud of another - we all are putting up a pretty good fight as individuals and as a group. We have already won many victories, and many more are bound to follow. Keep up the good work!