

A fond farewell to an amazing advocate, colleague, and friend...

Many of you have gotten to know Charlie Reichardt over the years. Charlie has been the Center's Systems Advocate since he first started working at the Center in April, 2000. Charlie has touched the lives of those he came in contact with in many positive ways. One of the issues Charlie was most passionate about was the right of people with disabilities to be able to cast their vote privately and independently like everyone else. The Center has been a voice for inclusive accessible voting since 1992. Ironically, Richard Zachmeyer, the Center's former Executive Director died on Election Day, November 2000, the very day that, for the first time, all of the polling places located in the Center's catchment area were physically accessible to voters with disabilities. Over the years Charlie continued to work hard to see people with disabilities fully included in the electoral process and in every other aspect of community living. He worked with the manufacturers, researchers and developers of several voting machine companies to help them move to a more accessible product. He was a change agent, he was a role model. He was also a husband, a colleague and a friend.

"While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil."

~John Taylor

Many of you know that Charlie has been quite ill the last several months. On April 2nd 2011, Charlie lost his latest battle with cancer. His wife Laurene, who has also been with the Center since 2000, was with him.

I have asked the staff to share pictures and memories of Charlie. We have devoted this newsletter to remembering our friend and our colleague.

Thank you, Charlie, for your inspiration and your friendship. You will be sorely missed.

*Chris Zachmeyer
Executive Director*



CCFI Staff

"His absence when we go to Albany will be greatly felt."

*~Rima McCoy,
Center for
Independence of
the Disabled -
New York*



Because we both served on the Election Reform Committee and collaborated on all things voting, I have had the good fortune of attending various events with Charlie: voting machine testing, trips to Albany to visit with legislators and our Project Vote training to name a few. Over the years it has been my privilege to share advocacy efforts with him as well as better understand what it is like living with a disability; both have served to make me a better person and advocate. But there is one moment that stands out among the rest: witnessing him voting for the first time...privately and independently. I got to see firsthand how much it means to someone who follows the political process, votes in every election and urges others to do the same, but until recently had never been able to cast his vote without someone else pulling levers or filling out a ballot. Charlie always had to rely on someone else to assist him in casting his vote, bearing the indignities that go along with uninformed and insensitive poll workers. The image of Charlie after he cast his vote - fists raised high in victory for a long-fought, hard won struggle for accessible voting - is forever etched in my memory. That day, Charlie made history - for himself, for New York and for all of us.

*Helen Benlisa
Project HAVA Coordinator*



Charlie at a machine testing event

"Although it's difficult today to see beyond the sorrow, may looking back in memory help comfort you tomorrow."

~Author Unknown

I know many others will speak of Charlie's excellent advocacy for people with disabilities, and while I whole heartedly agree that he was a very passionate advocate, I will leave those observations to others. For me, I'm not sure words can ever really describe the level of respect, admiration and awe that I had for Charlie.

Charlie was a person that I will always remember as the keystone that makes up a man, a real man: a compassionate, hard working, caring man that never really spent much time talking about the hardships he faced. In fact, he spent his life challenging himself to lead a life as independent as anyone. I knew Charlie for seven years and a few of those years were shared in an office with him and his dog Wilson. Those years gave me the opportunity to know him better than I knew any other co-worker. He fascinated me. I remember laughing with him as he recalled his "wilder days" as a youth. One of my favorite stories (and there were many) was when he had bought a go-cart and drove it around in the city where he lived. He had a friend on the back of the go-cart that would tell him to go left or right or to apply the brakes. My favorite part of this story was when the police officer pulled them over and asked them what the heck they thought they were doing. When the policeman realized Charlie was blind he was speechless and all he could say was "Go home!" I can just imagine the policeman telling his buddies about that one!

Charlie amazed me many times. I still tell the story of a day we went to Albany together. Charlie had never been in my car before, yet when he got in he ran his hands along the interior for a few moments and said, "Nice car, when did you change the stereo?" HOW could he know that??? I had in fact changed my stereo a few months earlier. Later that day we were coming back from Albany and Charlie asked, "How fast are you going?" "70 mph," I replied. A few minutes later I noticed him touching his Braille watch and then he said, "Exit 25A will be coming up any second; watch for it." He literally said that as we were driving past the exit!

Charlie was ordinary to himself, but incredible to me. He would say, "Don, my life is all about adapting to the environments and situations I am presented with; anyone can do what I do." "Well, my friend that is one area I have to disagree with you. Not just anyone could handle all that you've faced with the same grace and unwavering determination to be independent."

Charlie, thank you, for all of the knowledge, the stories and the special memories: I will remember these for the rest of my days. You were and will always be inspirational to me, my friend.

"Someone so special.....can never be forgotten."



Charlie with his dog Wilson

*Don Wyckoff
Architectural Barrier Consultant*



I have had the great pleasure of not only being Charlie's co-worker, but his friend. Charlie had a way of lighting up the room with his infectious smile. I can remember him telling me stories of his youth and just listening in awe.

"When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure."

~Author Unknown

I remember every other Wednesday, receiving the phone call from Charlie asking for a help handing in his work. That was my favorite time with Charlie. We would joke around for a bit while we worked; he had an amazing sense of humor.

My condolences go out to his loving wife, Laurene. I know how much Charlie meant to her and always will.

What I will miss most about Charlie is his smile, and his belly-rumbling laugh. Thank you, Charlie, for being an amazing friend, advocate and co-worker.

*Meghan Staring
Vocational Services Specialist*



"Like a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memories survive in time of sorrow."

~Robert Louis Stevenson

In Memory of Charles Reichardt

It is with a heavy heart that I compose a memory about my dear friend, Charlie Reichardt.

I met Charlie during my employment at CCFI. He was an extremely inspirational soul and his visual disability was miniscule compared to his life-accomplishments. Along with his passion for advocacy, Charlie had amazing talents. I fondly recall his harrowing stories of electrical work he conducted on the 'money pit,' tinkering with car engines; the great flood of 2006; cottage house repairs; what's a ham radio!?!; JAWS (not the shark); obtaining masters degrees (yes, more than one); Mr. Wilson and the struggles with the infamous doggie Christmas cards; and so on...

So, how does someone pick just one memory about Charlie? It's impossible. With that said, my fondest memory of Charlie is simple...I will remember his smile.

My heart goes out to his wife, Laurene, and the family he left behind in Long Island, whom I got to know through Charlie's lunch-time tales. Charlie will live on, in the hearts and memories of those who knew and loved him. He suffers no longer; he is at peace.

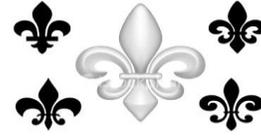
*Krista Gocal-Peeters
Friend*

*"As you
comprehend this
profound loss, let
yourself cry
knowing each
tear is a note of
love rising to the
heavens"*

*~Author
Unknown*



Demonstrating assistive technology during Visual Awareness Day



There is no way to perfectly express my sadness about the loss of Charlie. His sickness was very difficult for him to endure, and we can take comfort in the fact that he is no longer in pain. I had the pleasure of working with Charlie at the Center for almost three years. Charlie was the kind of guy who would always reach out to others and lend a helping hand. He had a vast knowledge and plenty of experience with the “ins and outs” of disability rights and he was the guy I would go to for assistive technology information.

I remember the first time I watched Charlie interact with young students at the Center, explaining technology and spreading awareness. I was impressed with how he shared his story so openly, explaining to the children what his journey through life was like, as a blind man. He down-played the obstacles and challenges that he overcame on a daily basis, shrugging it off as, “We all deal with challenges, some more difficult than others”.

He was a very caring and compassionate man who gave whenever he could and asked for little in return. I am thankful that I had the pleasure of crossing paths with Charlie. He was a valuable and respected member of our team at the Center and the effects of his loss are being felt here by his fellow employees and friends.



Demonstrating assistive technology during Visual Awareness Day

*Don't grieve for me; because now I am free,
I'm following the path that was laid for me.
I took his hand when I heard him call;
I turned my back and left it all.
I could not stay another day,
To laugh, to love, to work, to play.
Tasks left undone must stay that way;
I found my peace at the close of day.*

*My life's been full; I've savored much,
Good friends, good times, and a loved one's touch.
Perhaps my time was all too brief;
Please don't lengthen it with undue grief.
My endless journey has begun,
Lift up your hearts and peace to Thee,
My pain is gone, and I have been set free.
~Anonymous*

Charlie's acts of goodness and courage will never be forgotten.

*Christine Worden
Assistant Director*

Photos of Charlie



I will miss bumping into him in the halls of LOB on legislative advocacy day.

~Melissa Golpl, Western NY Independent Living



Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal.

~Anonymous