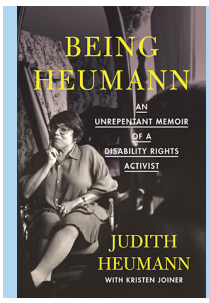
Discussion Guide



Being Heumann
Judith Heumann

Beacon Press
2020
240 pages
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Disability Health

Summary

One of the most influential disability rights activists in U.S. history tells her personal story of fighting for the right to receive an education, have a job, and just be human. Paralyzed from polio at eighteen months, Judy's struggle for equality began early in life. From fighting to attend grade school after being described as a "fire hazard" to later successfully pressuring the Carter administration to implement protections for disabled peoples' rights, sparking a national movement and leading to the creation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Questions

1. Discuss Judy Heumann's words: "I'm bitter about being handicapped, but not about having a disability." What do you think she means?
2. "The biggest barriers are prejudice and fear." What does Judy mean?
3. Describe how the public education system affected Judy's personal life and her advocacy work.
4. "Most things are possible when you assume problems can be solved." (Part 1, Chapter 1, Page 7). Has Judy's advocacy work affected scientific research? If so, in what ways?
5. What does Heumann's story indicate about the importance of persistence in achieving results and changing the world? Who and what helped Judith stay persistent and continue to fight despite countless setbacks?
6. Judith devotes the entirety of Part 2 to a detailed recollection of the protests that forced the signing of the Rehabilitation Act in 1977. Why did Judith choose to focus so much attention on this one event? How did this event shape Judith's future, her views of herself and the world, and the future of disability rights in the United States?
7. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act provides that no individuals with disabilities ". . .shall be excluded from participation in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance." Discuss why this provision was seen as radical and far-reaching in the early 1970s.
8. Judith's memoir recounts many shared experiences of achieving social justice in the realm of disability rights. She repeats throughout that none of it could have been possible if not for the community and collaboration that was prominent in what she calls a "disability culture" (23). How did this disability culture shape, inspire, and assist Judith in achieving results?
9. What about Judy's personality makes her such an effective leader and advocate for disability rights?

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