

Teaching others

by J.D. Cheney

An emphatic, encouraging voice is heard echoing throughout the halls of Chai House, a senior retirement home in San Jose, California. From the exercise room come sounds like a military cadence. However, the accompanying noises of body movement, heavy grunting, and the inhaling and exhaling of oxygen are oddly replaced by a silence accentuated by moments of laughter.

Enter the room of Chai House's exercise and motivational guru, Cappy Brazeau. The sixty-something dynamo, in her wheelchair, is in the front of the room, arms exploding up into the air in full height one moment, then bent forward in tiny circular movements the next. "That's it," she yells to her dozen or so eager students, caught up in her enthusiasm and duplicating her every move. Cappy deftly moves her chair from one direction to the next. Then, indicating the need to exercise the lower extremities, she barks out, "Legs to the left: one... two...three, forward: one...two...three, to the right: one...two ... three.

A few minutes later comes the long awaited command to relax and take in deep breaths. Her students, ranging in age from their late 60s to over 90, now begin to relax. They sit contentedly, either in their own wheelchair or on regular chairs, smiling at their efforts.

In the background, music from the forties and fifties add to the mix. In a short while, the class comes to an end and its "athletes" disassemble anticipating the following week of exercise with Cappy.

Cappy does her job well. But this is nothing new for her. Despite using a wheelchair for over 45 years, her infectious personality and drive to remain active are rock solid. Once, a victim of low self-esteem, Cappy has made incredible strides. It was while taking a class taught by a disabled person years ago that her own insecurities began to fade away.

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The surgery Cappy had following complications during child birth impaired the circulation to her legs which led to her using a wheelchair. She found herself not only a mother to her newborn daughter but physically disabled as well. To compound that, three years later her son was born with muscular dystrophy. Realizing that she had the God-given ability to nurture and love, Ms. Brazeau forged ahead, despite another set-back — a divorce that left her as sole provider for her children. However, as the years progressed, Cappy kept the family intact and is very proud of the fact that she was able to watch





**Cappy with Ken,
her dance
partner.**

both children graduate from high school. Many years later, her son Danny, died from muscular dystrophy.

With her children grown, Cappy began looking for new challenges to fulfill her own destiny. She took music classes at a local community college and joined a disabled drill team. She began to dance again and developed a dance and exercise routine. She com-

peted on the national stage, winning Ms. Wheelchair California, and appeared with Richard Simmons.

Cappy has found her niche, and in doing so is proving a great inspiration to those who take her classes. Ms. Brazeau admits to occasionally having her down moments but refuses to feel

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sorry for herself. She loves being independent and commutes daily to Chai House to work in the office as well. She says, “Because of my disability, I have a deeper and more beautiful insight than a lot of people have”.

“Make a difference in someone else’s life,” she reminds her students at the end of her session.

With hands held high moving with the rhythm she’s not only stretching with her participants, she’s reaching for the moon. *



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