

## Look Beyond My Words

When I was 2 years old I lived in an institution. When I became an adult a psychologist had me do some tests. The results of these tests showed that I could make my own decisions.

At the institution, I was prevented from going on a trips with my friends. I was very angry and I really wanted my freedom. My friend asked if I wanted to get a lawyer. I said yes. My friend called many, many places before finding a lawyer.

I met the lawyer at the institution with my friend. He came to my room and I went to see the director of the institution but he did not want to talk to us at that time. The lawyer suggested that I get assessed at a rehabilitation centre and arranged this for me.

The Rehab Centre is a very good centre which helps people like myself to get communication aids and wheelchairs. They have a lot of experience with people who have many physical limitations. When I arrived, my friends, and I met with several therapists and doctors to decide about my assessment. I found the school there very interesting, but I found the tests hard. I could not read. And often I could not understand what was wanted. I felt very discouraged. During my stay, I learned how to use a computer and a large keyboard. I learned some reading, writing and more Bliss symbols as well as math.

My lawyer wanted to use this assessment during my court case. Besides the assessment at the Rehab Centre, I was assessed by six other psychiatrists. These tests and assessments made me afraid. I developed severe stomach pains during this time. Some of these doctors did not think I was smart. I found this hard. I did not like this. It was hard for me to do these tests because I could not understand,

and I had trouble pointing to my symbol board.

Finally it was time to go to court. My lawyer understood how important it was for me to make my own choices in life. For two full days I sat through the talks of psychiatrists who tried to prove that I was not smart. They gave me names like “a vegetable”. Some said that I was like an infant. On the third day, many people came to the stand to say that I was capable of making my own decisions. They were my social worker, other psychiatrists, the psychologist from the Rehab Center as well as my Bliss\* teacher who knew me for six years. They showed clearly that I could make my own decisions. All of the lawyers questioned me as well as the judge. My Bliss teacher, translated my answers as I pointed to my Blissboard. I was very hot and sweating. I cried and took a bit of a break before finishing. My friends and my family cried too. They were very proud of me. After my testimony, everybody knew how I wanted to live my life.

The following week we went to court again. I was feeling afraid and excited. Then, it was all over. The judge said that I was a thinking human being and had a part to play in our community. Finally, I won the right to make my own decisions. That evening, I could go out for supper with my friends. I was so excited and happy. I did not sleep that night.

The judge is a very important person in my life. He looked beyond my words. He heard what my heart and my soul were saying. People from all over came to help me. My friends, my lawyer, my Bliss teacher and many others.

\* Bliss refers to Blissymbolics which are symbols used by some people to communicate.