

OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

We are completing the second year of an economic downturn in this state. As with all state agencies, funds for agency services have been reduced significantly. However, the Office of Handicapped Concerns, in light of these reductions, still maintains an agency priority providing accurate, up-to-date information in a timely manner. This past year we have responded to 66,607 requests for agency services. We invite you to contact us on our website www.ohc.state.ok.us or to use our toll-free number outside the metro 800-522-8224.

Steve Stokes
Director, Office of Handicapped
Concerns

**OHC web site:
www.ohc.state.ok**

100 Years, Happy Birthday Robert Qualls

"Mr. Qualls, may I call you Robert?"

"Sure."

"You turned 100 years old on April 11. Was it a great experience achieving this milestone?"

"Well, not really, Will. I told my friends that I had put it off just about as long as I could. I guess I'm going to have to admit that I'm getting old."

"(Chuckle) Well yeah. Did you have a special celebration?"

"They told me they were going to invite a few friends and family here in Enid, but it turned out to be a real wing-ding. We had a large room reserved in a local restaurant, and I had lots of well wishers. I have worked as an advocate for people who are blind for many years in Oklahoma, and many of them came out to help me celebrate."

"Robert, I first heard about you in a media release from the Department of Rehabilitation Services. Their release said the Oklahoma Council for the Blind was planning a special birthday celebration for you at the Library for the Blind in Oklahoma City. I think Governor Brad Henry signed some kind of special citation for you which was presented that day. When I heard 100 years and I heard blindness, I knew I had to contact you. Will you tell me your story, Robert? Will you tell me about you and disability and our state of Oklahoma back at the turn of the

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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND YOU

The IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is federal legislation affecting how local school districts serve children with special needs in this country. It began as Public Law 94-142 back in 1975 and established education for children with disabilities in the public school system. Before this date, schools did not have to serve children with special needs as many parents were painfully aware. Today most of the larger school districts in Oklahoma have Special Education departments with teachers trained to work with children with disabilities. Children with a variety of needs are served including children with physical disabilities and children with mental disabilities. Classes are frequently small and may include a teacher's aid to help address the multiple needs which a single student may have. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is up for reauthorization this year—the first reauthorization since 1997. As Washington, D.C. focuses again on the delivery of Special Education services in the U.S. public school system, change is in the air. Change can be good, and change can be bad. Sometimes it can be a curious mixture of the two. And change plays out differently in the life of each of our families who have children with disabilities in the public school system.

I am with Sharon Bishop in her small but quite cozy office with a nice window all tucked away in a building which houses a bank together with offices in suburban Del City, Oklahoma. Sharon Bishop is the director of the Oklahoma Parent Center which advocates for parents and children with disabilities. (The main office which serves the whole state of Oklahoma does maintain some small satellite offices in Agra, Blanchard, Holdenville, and Wagoner.)

“Sharon, I came to visit you because I have begun to hear a lot about the reauthorization of the IDEA. I know you advocate for parents with children in Special Education in the public schools, and I wanted to come to you to get some information

about this.”

“Just for your information, the current bill in Congress which contains the reauthorization of the IDEA is **HR1350**.”

“I hear that HR1350 would make some changes in the delivery of Special Education services in the public schools. Is that true?”

“That is true.”

“How?”

“As HR1350 currently stands, discipline in Special Education classes becomes a focus. This bill allows school administration at the local level to exclude children with special needs who they feel are a discipline problem from public education at the public school site. It would allow the school to unilaterally choose the placement of a student without consultation with the larger Team of parents and concerned parties.”

“I guess what I have been hearing about is the elimination of a yearly IEP meeting and going to a three-year IEP.”

“You have been hearing wrong there, Will. The reauthorization of IDEA in HR1350 discusses a three-year IEP as optional, and allows parents to request a yearly IEP if they feel that is in the best interest of their child.”

“Are there other proposed changes in this bill?”

“Yes, under HR1350 as it stands, short-term objectives in the IEP (Individual Education Plan) would be eliminated.”

“What does that mean?”

“I understand short-term objectives as the mechanism which helps to get your child to achieve the

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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND YOU (continued)

broad objectives that the Team establishes as goals. For instance, there might be a broad goal for your child to read at a certain level, and a short-term objective might be to spend one hour per day teacher/student in one-on-one, directed readings. The short-term objective is how you would get to the broad goal you had established for this child.”

“What other changes might happen in the IDEA if the reauthorization remains as it is written?”

“The dispute resolution process is part of HR1350. Right now we have formal complaints, mediation, and due process as means of addressing concerns which parents have regarding the Special Education of their children with local school districts. Under HR1350, states would have to offer binding arbitration with no appeal and a one-year statute of limitations to resolve disputes with the school as one option. The Governor of every state would be empowered to set the amount of attorney fees a parent would be reimbursed if the parent won a due process hearing. As things stand now, parents who are successful in a due process may be reimbursed 100% of their attorney fees by the local school district.”

“All these things seem to put a little shift in things. It sounds like the relationship of concerned parties would be changed.”

“HR1350 as it stands would drastically change the way we offer Special Education services now.”

“What can I do?”

“You don't have to do anything. If you are interested in learning more about HR1350, you can download a copy at www.nationalparentcenters.org. You may contact your Congressman or Senator regarding how you feel about specifics of the reauthorization. You can find out how to contact your elected representatives by calling the county election board in the county in which you live. There may be local telephone numbers where you

**Every time I think about exercise,
I lie down till the thought goes away.**



can contact your representatives as well as numbers in Washington, D.C. Email addresses will probably be available for those who have online access.”

“Can I call you?”

“I can give you information on HR1350. My number here at the Oklahoma Parent Center is 405-619-0500 in the Oklahoma City area or 1-877-553-4332 statewide.”

The Oklahoma Parent Center is a statewide parent training and information center. They provide workshops across Oklahoma dealing with the IDEA and related laws, the IEP process, transition from school to community and other things of interest to parents of children in Special Education in the public schools. Sharon tells me that the Oklahoma Parent Center is sponsoring a conference September 19 of this year at the OSU Oklahoma City campus. Call OPC for more information if you are interested.

100 Years, Happy Birthday Robert Qualls (continued)

last century?"

Robert Qualls

It's hard to know where to start. I guess I'll need to begin at the beginning back on the farm in Marlow. I was playing with a pitch fork throwing it on the ground and listening to its tines vibrate and sing. My eye got bruised and my sight began to go bad. Today they might have called it macular degeneration, but back then they didn't know what to call it or how to treat it. In 1913 my family sent me to the Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee to go to school. I actually had some sight left then but soon became totally blind. I'll never forget leaving my family and taking the train to El Reno as a young boy. I had to change to the Interurban train in El Reno going to Oklahoma City. From Oklahoma City I changed trains again before arriving in Muskogee. Way back then you didn't get to come home every weekend like the students get to do now. We were separated from our families and actually lived on campus. We went to school on the campus of the School for the Blind and learned our regular subjects as well as things which would help us earn a living like piano tuning, broom making, and basket weaving. I first learned the trade of piano tuning right there in Muskogee, and I made my living from this during most of my adult life. I actually graduated from the School for the Blind in 1924. (Gosh, that was a long time ago.) I went to Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth that same year and was the first blind person ever to be enrolled at that school. I took notes in Braille and either answered test questions orally or typed the answers out. I used thread and cardboard to make the angles and graphs for my trigonometry class. I got my Bachelor of Arts degree from TCU in English in 1928 and this was followed by a master of arts in 1929 in philosophy. I had my hopes set on teaching English and/or speech and drama at the college level. With this in mind, I attended the Curry School of expression in Boston, Massachusetts on a scholarship. But, something got in the way of my plans, and it didn't have anything to do with my disability. It had to do with something that hap-

pened to all Oklahomans and Americans regardless of ability.

They called it the Great Depression, and I wasn't able to get a job teaching like I had planned. I didn't know if I was going to be able to get any kind of a job. Times were bad, and I had moved back to Oklahoma as a single man. I got a hotel room on North Broadway in Oklahoma City for \$14 per month. A man by the name of General Keyes and his staff person, Homer Heck, ran the Works Progress Administration in Oklahoma City. I was able to sell Homer Heck on the idea of hiring twenty-five blind people across Oklahoma to go into the schools, civic organizations, and work places to teach visual safety. We taught children and adults to be conscious of their eyes and to protect their sight. Our teachers in rural Oklahoma made \$38 per month. In Oklahoma cities the same position might pay \$80 per month. I actually got \$150 per month to administer the program. That was a lot of money, especially in the Depression. You could buy a full meal for 15 cents then.

Way back in 1934 or 35', I don't remember which one, up in Washington D.C. they passed legislation called the Shepherd/Randolph Bill. This bill was very important to blind people because it provided for the first opening up of vending stands to give blind people a way to make a living. In the process of implementing the Shepherd/Randolph Bill in Oklahoma, I talked to a state legislator from LeFlore County. I told this legislator that if we passed legislation right here in Oklahoma authorizing vending stands to be run by people who were blind that this would give them a job. I was lobbying hard for our cause. The legislator looked at me a long time and said, "If we gave a farmer 40 acres and a mule, he could make a living too." We got our money from the State Legislature to begin the blind vending program in public buildings across Oklahoma. They gave us about \$25,000. The first vending stand actually opened up in the post office in Muskogee, Oklahoma in the mid 30's. I opened

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100 Years, Happy Birthday Robert Qualls (continued)

up a vending stand in the post office right here in Enid in 1936.

Now let me digress a little here. I actually moved out of that hotel in Oklahoma City in the early 30's and got room and board at a preacher's home. My future wife was cooking and serving as a nanny to the preacher's children at the time for her own room and board. Layleth was attending Oklahoma University at the time where she was studying to be a secretary. She never became that secretary. Instead she became my wife and business partner for more than 50 years. We worked together those many years to raise our family and to establish our business. I told you we opened up a vending stand in the post office in Enid in 1936. I tuned pianos on the side to supplement our income. Finally, in 1947, we got out of the vending business and devoted ourselves to tuning pianos, and we were successful.

Layleth would drive for me. We had contracts with several private and public colleges to tune all their pianos. We went to Chickasha, Weatherford, and Alva to tune the pianos at local colleges. I did the work, and Layleth kept the books. Our two sons, Robert and George, were born in 1938 and 1943. We made a living.

I became a charter member of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma League for the Blind in Oklahoma City in 1949, and I served on their board for 40 years. I am still a member of the board emeritus. (The League for the Blind is a workshop for people who are blind.) During these times, we noticed that blind people had a lot of trouble borrowing money. In 1958 I became a charter member of the Association of the Blind of Oklahoma and Texas Credit Union. This credit union was a result of the efforts of the Oklahoma Council for the Blind of which I am also a member. That's about it, Will That's the long story of my life. I have been totally blind almost 90 years. I have lived in Oklahoma all of my life except when I went out of state for my higher education. I have lived in this

state since before statehood. Oklahoma has been good to me. I can truthfully say I have had a full life.

Robert Qualls lost his faithful wife of over 50 years in January, 1987. He himself had a battle with colon cancer back in 1990. He walks .6 of a mile everyday at the mall in Enid and faithfully climbs the eight stairs in his house ten times a day to supplement his walking. Robert still owns his own car and hires a driver to take him all the places he needs to go. He continues to operate his piano tuning business of over 56 years. He concludes our interview explaining that he has another piano tuning job scheduled tomorrow morning. Why doesn't that surprise me? Let this be a tribute to an Oklahoman who has served the disability community for a lifetime. When asked about his plans for the next 100 years, he answered, "When you think of all the changes that have taken place in my first hundred years, I figure we better just take one day at a time."



You know you live in the year 2003 if . . .

**you buy a computer and six months later it is out of date and sells for half the price.
or . . .**

if using real money instead of credit or debit to make a purchase would be a hassle.

Hire People With Disabilities. . . And Get a Tax Credit Too!

April was tax month. Nobody forgot that—at least I hope. Did you owe Uncle Sam? I know I did. How can taxes be a good thing? How can tax credits help a person with a disability who wants to get a job, and how can tax credits help an employer who wants to hire a person with a disability. It's a good time to give you some insider tips on little incentives which could help you get a job.

I'm here this fine morning with Marilyn Burr who is the Disability Program Specialist at our office who specializes on information about the employment of people with disabilities. Marilyn tells me she has some tips for you that might help you get a job. If you are an employer, she has some tips for you which might save you some money if you're willing to hire a person with disabilities.

“Marilyn, what is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)?”

“First let me tell you what a tax credit is. A tax credit is money off the top of taxes you owe Uncle Sam. If I owe \$3000 taxes and Uncle Sam tells me he'll accept \$600 instead, that's a tax credit. I have saved \$2400 in taxes. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is a tax discount Uncle Sam gives an employer for hiring a person with a disability. It is an incentive to consider hiring a person with a disability. As a person with a disability, I still have to be qualified for the job.”

“OK, Marilyn, let me get this straight. The tax credit goes to the employer of a person with disabilities and not directly to the person with disabilities?”

“The tax credit goes to the employer but the person who really benefits is obviously the person with a disability who is looking for a job. The payoff for the person with a disability is getting the job.”

“So they're going to hire me because I save them money on their taxes?”

“Will, they're going to hire you because you are the

best-qualified for the job. The tax savings is just an extra thank you from Uncle Sam.”

“So how does it work?”

“You get an ETA 9062 and an IRS 8850 from your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and present this to your potential employer. If that employer decides to hire you, he or she would complete their portion of these two forms and return them to Paul Williams at the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. (That address is P.O. Box 52003 in Oklahoma City 73152-2003). Paul Williams verifies the information and issues an ETA 9063 directly to the employer which can be turned in with their yearly income tax statement. It's that simple.”

“So how much money is this going to deduct from my potential employer's taxes due?”

“If your employer employs you 400 hours or more in a year, we're talking about a tax credit of up to 40% of the first \$6000 wages which your employer pays to you. In this case, it could be as much as \$2400 for one employee in one year. If your employer employs you between 120 and 399 hours in a year, we're talking about a tax credit of up to 25% of the first \$6000 in wages--\$1500.”

“You are discussing this tax credit for people who have been clients of Vocational Rehabilitation within the last two years. What about people with disabilities who have never had a case with Vocational Rehabilitation? Can they still qualify for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit?”

“Yes, they can. If they have never had a case with Vocational Rehabilitation or it has been over two years since they had a case, it is possible to qualify if they are an SSI beneficiary (Supplemental Security Income). The SSI recipient must have received SSI benefits any month during the sixty days preceding their hire date. In the case of the SSI beneficiary who does not have a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, the beneficiary would request an

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ALL CHILDREN TOGETHER DAYCAMP

You know, it just kinda happened by accident. I mean, I'm sitting here in my office working on my computer. The background music is going like it always is. I alternate between CD's, tapes, and the radio and today I am tuned into the classical station KCSC out of Edmond. KCSC doesn't have a lot of advertising, but today I notice a pause in the music. A beautiful voice announces the All Children Together daycamp, and then I hear the part which really gets my attention. The word is children with disabilities. This organization runs a six-week daycamp for children with disabilities out of two churches in the Oklahoma City metro. Wow! Did I hear this right? Is there a place where children with disabilities can go to have fun and which is willing to work with their special needs? Folks, I gotta see this. I want to know more about it. Check this out.

I'm thinking now from the viewpoint of a parent who has a child with special needs. There's nobody out there willing or able to work with my child in my community. There's all sorts of special summer programs out there for children and adolescents who are typical children, but there's practically nothing out there for children with special needs. My child has uncontrolled seizures. My child has emotional disturbances. My child is 14 and still uses disposable briefs. Who will be willing to change him? The list goes on. My child needs to be suctioned with her trache. My child needs assistance eating. Who's got the training to deal with these issues in the context of summer fun activities? That's why I don't work. I pretty much devote my life to my child. You may be a parent like this or just a parent looking for summer fun for your child. Well, it's out there. It does exist—at least here in the Oklahoma City area it exists. See what you think.

This morning I have gone to the Northwest Christian Church not too far from our offices at the Office of Handicapped Concerns located on the near northwest side of Oklahoma City. I am speaking with Kim Holmes who is the director of the All Children Together daycamp. "Kim, first I want to

know if All Children Together is a religious daycamp restricted to church members."

Kim Holmes

"Absolutely not. We are a private organization completely separate from the Northwest Christian Church and the other program location at the Del City Christian Church on the southeast side of the metro. These two churches provide us a physical location for our program. My salary and the salary of our daycamp employees are paid by All Children Together. We do not offer religious instruction."

"What is your program, Kim?"

"We offer a six-week daycamp for children with disabilities from Monday through Thursday, 10 a. m. until 3 p.m. beginning June 16 of this year and extending through July 24. We typically have modules of activities going on simultaneously where children may have a choice of coming and going into arts and crafts, games, or book areas.

Interspersed during the day are structured time periods where we might offer a cooking project or something else. This summer we are scheduling four field trips which might include something like the Omniplex, bowling, or the Sam Noble Museum in Norman. We have found that working with children with disabilities we have more success with field trips to indoor things. We do have outside play at our location here at Northwest Christian Church and at our location at Del City Christian Church, but these outdoor activities are for short periods of time considering the summer heat."

"Kim, here's a biggie for you. What ages do you serve, and what disability groups?"

"Our youngest is five years old. As a rule, we do not serve children younger than that. Right now we have a young man who is twenty-one who has enrolled for our daycamp beginning June 16. We do not have an upper limit, although young adults might not have the interest in our activities that a

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Hire People With Disabilities. . .And Get a Tax Credit Too! (continued)

ETA 9061 and an IRS 8850 directly from Paul Williams. You have Mr. Williams' address. His telephone is 405-557-5371. OESC has a website at www.oesc.state.ok.us. Click on employment service and on the menu to the left will be WOTC where you can download all the forms you need if you wish to get your own forms."

"You mentioned a dollar amount in one year the employer can save. Can I keep on bringing this tax credit to my employer for as many years as he or she keeps me on the payroll?"

"The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is good for one employee only for the first year they are employed by a particular employer. After that you're on your own."

"What if somebody hires me, gets the tax credit, and then lets me go three months later?"

"In order for an employer to claim the WOTC, he or she must employ you for at least 120 hours in a year. If the employer employs you between 120 and 399 hours in a year, they may claim the tax credit at the rate of 25% of the first \$6000 wages. If the employer employs you 400 hours or more in a year, they may claim the tax credit at the rate of 40% of the first \$6000 wages."

"Let me play devil's advocate Marilyn. If I'm an employer of a person with a disability, I don't have time to fool with all this. I'm thinking all the paperwork isn't worth it. Too many hoops to jump through."

"Too many hoops to receive a tax discount of as much as \$2400 for one employee right off the top of taxes due? Too many hoops to add that extra incentive which may give you a chance at a job you really wanted? Think about it. As a person with a disability, you only need to contact your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor or Paul Williams to get your forms. As an employer, you only need to complete the forms within 21 days of hiring the

person with a disability. Paul Williams at the OESC will give you what you need to verify that you have hired a qualified person under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. Last year Oklahoma employers benefited with over \$16,000,000 in taxes saved under tax credits. Tax credits make good cents."

Marilyn kept on reminding me of the benefits I could receive from the Work Opportunity Tax Credit—benefits which both the employer and the employee could claim. So if you have some questions about the WOTC, call Marilyn at the toll-free number of the Office of Handicapped Concerns 1-800-522-8224. She'd be happy to visit with you. She also promises me that she is going to give us some more insider tips in future editions of Will's Corner, Oklahoma on incentives to hire people with disabilities. Apparently there are several other tax credits which employees could use as an incentive to hire people with disabilities in addition to the fact that we are good, loyal employees who are qualified and want to work.

Love is that first feeling you feel before all the bad stuff gets in the way.



ALL CHILDREN TOGETHER DAYCAMP (continued)

school-age person might have. We serve people with all disabilities—both mental and physical. We serve people with severe disabilities as well as those with mild disability.”

“Do you serve individuals with medical involvements or with behavior problems?”

“We try to work with individuals and families to meet their needs. We do not have nurses, but if a parent will sign they are satisfied with non-medical personnel performing something like tube feeding and are willing to show us exactly how they do it, we are willing to work with that person. Keep in mind that the majority of our staff at both locations is either special education teachers in the public schools or paraprofessionals working in the public schools. We do have experience working with this population.”

“And what about individuals with behavior problems?”

“We realize that behavior problems are often a part of the disability an individual may have. We make every effort to work around the behavior problem. If a person is a danger either to themselves or to others, we may ask they provide their own staff in our program. We use rewards for good behavior and time out if behavior is less than satisfactory. This gives a person a time to cool down and re-think.”

“What is the cost of your summer daycamp?”

“We ask \$350 per child. We realize that many parents cannot pay this full amount in one payment, and we are willing to work with parents on a payment plan which will meet their needs.”

“What kind of enrollment are you looking for in your summer six week session?”

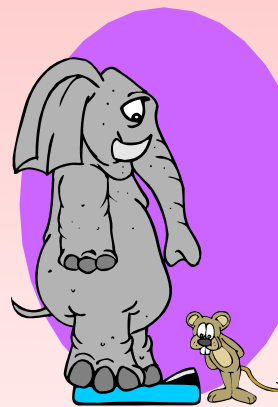
“We look for 25 to 30 people at each of our locations—here at Northwest Christian Church and at

the Del City Christian Church location.”

“Of course what everybody wants to know is if you have any openings. Do you?”

“We still have openings. But even if we fill up, complete an application anyway so that if we have a cancellation we can call you.”

Kim Holmes is an interesting woman. Her pastor at the Northwest Christian Church (Ryan Pfeiffer) tells me that she is passionate about what she does. Mr. Pfeiffer tells me that All Children Together daycamp is not run by any church organization. All Children Together is applying for a private, non-profit status as its own entity. In the meantime, the churches are providing a safe, comfortable place for kids with disabilities to enjoy themselves for six weeks during the summer. Check it out for yourself. For more information, call 405-943-4477 and ask about the All Children Together daycamp. I wish you and your children a wonderful summer



**Brain cells come, and brain
cells go, but fat cells live
forever.**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- June 6-8, 2003** 4th Annual Hanger Endeavor Games for athletes with physical disabilities at the University of Central Oklahoma. The Hanger Endeavor Games offers competition to amputee, cerebral palsy, wheelchair, and blind athletes. Contact Katrina Shaklee for more information at 405-722-8744 or www.sportsgroupinc.com.
- June 21, 2003** Make Promises Happen Family Adventure Day for people with disabilities of all ages, parents, and caregivers. Contact 800-299-2811 or 405-282-2811 in the OKC metro.
- June 29, 2003** 45th Annual Picnic of the Enid Association of the Deaf at Enid's Meadowlake Park. Contact jcoffman@pldi.net.
- July 19, 2003** The Bethany/Warr Acres Chapter of People First is sponsoring a dance for adults with disabilities at Mount St. Mary High School in Oklahoma City (2801 S. Shartel) from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. Tickets are \$2 per person or \$3 per couple at the door. For more information contact William Ginn at 405-521-3756.
- July 19-21, 2003** KAW Deaf Camper in Kaw City, Oklahoma. Contact jwynnkaburd@webtv.net.

If you have an event coming up relating to disability, let us know at 800-522-8224 and we'll help you publicize.

Youth is not entirely a time of life—it is a state of mind. It is not wholly a matter of ripe cheeks, red lips or supple knees. It is a temper of will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions. Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. You are as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fears, as young as your hope, as old as your despair. In the central place of every heart, there is a recording chamber; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, and courage, you are young. When the wires are all down and your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism, then, and only then, have you grown old.

Ann Landers