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Students in wheelchairs not constrained in activities

BY MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
Staff writer

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president for four terms. He led Americans through the dark days of The Great Depression and World War II. He created many aspects of government still recognized today as humane, good and right — and he did it all from a wheelchair.

Russell Rawlings, a junior computer engineering major, said he was born with Erb's Palsy, a neural disease that confined him to a wheelchair.

"I have never found my wheelchair to be a hindrance," Rawling said. "People know me for me, and on a whole, people are aware of students with disabilities. No one treats me differently."

Rawlings said people should use The Golden Rule when interacting with others.

"One thing I want students to know is to treat each other with respect," Rawling said. "Do not treat people differently. I consider myself to be an ordinary Ag."

At the age of seven, Kara Wilson, a senior agricultural journalism major, came down with Lyme Disease. At the age of nine, she needed a wheelchair for mobility.

Wilson said she does not like receiving special treatment because of her disability.

"I am the chair of five organizations such as MSC Executive Lecture Series and Vice President of Class of '98" Wilson said. "I do not want to be separate. We have developed into an overly sensitive society. I am in a wheelchair and people should not be afraid. I do not see myself in a wheelchair. I see myself educating thousands of people."

Wilson is from Oregon where her parents own a 17,000 acre ranch. Horses have always been an important part of her life.

"I have ridden with the Parson's Mounted Cavalry,

and I run barrels," Wilson said. "[Riding horses] has helped me overcome the wheelchair."

Her disability is what brought Wilson to Texas A&M University.

"In 1992 I came to A&M for hyperbaric oxygen treatment," Wilson said. "For three months I was at A&M and I got to know Dr. Koldus and student leaders. I fell in love with Aggies."

Dick Williams, the Associate Director for Facilities at A&M, said A&M has always been in the fore front of accommodations for students with disabilities.

"There are priorities A&M sets for students with disabilities," Williams said. "[These priorities are] to keep the road to their success clear and to make sure all public buildings are accessible."

The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 and requiring public buildings to accommodate persons with disabilities.

"A&M handled these issues before the Americans with Disabilities Act," Williams said. "It is difficult for us to equip all the buildings. It would cost us millions of dollars to fix every building. We do try to accommodate all people. If a building does not

have access, then we try to move the class so the student can attend."

Wilson said the only building she encounters problems with is the Military Science Building.

"I have one class in the Military Science Building, and I have to be carried in," Wilson said. "A&M students are great about that. It does not make me feel uncomfortable."

Rawlings said he has found A&M to be one of the best campuses in Texas for students with disabilities

"I chose A&M because it has the best facilities and it is the easiest in getting around," Rawling said. "I did have difficulty getting into the Psychology Building. On the first day of class, I had to have someone go get a key for a little lift so I could enter the building. But

"We have developed an overly sensitive society. I am in a wheelchair and people should not be afraid."

KARA WILSON
SENIOR AGRICULTURAL JOURNALISM MAJOR

Hearing impaired: the misunderstood classification

BY STEPHEN WELLS
Staff writer

In the Air Force, a crash is an "uncontrolled flight into the ground." A wild keg party held in a dorm room is recorded for posterity on an "incident report." In our culture, the hearing impaired are "disabled." None of these labels accurately describe what is taking place.

One of the myths about being hearing impaired is the classification means to the layperson "deaf." Some people who are hearing impaired experience only small loss in hearing.

Anne Reber, Interim Coordinator for the Service for Students with Disabilities, said the label "hearing impaired" is in some cases an exaggeration.

"There are some people who are classified as legally blind but still have some functional vision," Reber said. "Just the same, there are some people who still have functional hearing who are classified as hearing impaired. It's kind of a misnomer."

Scott Getten, a junior mechanical engineering major, described his type of hearing loss.

"I'm hearing impaired toward the high-pitched noises, but I can hear low-end noises," Getten said. "I can get along without a hearing aid."

Sometimes, the stereotypes others impose when they see a hearing aid can prove to be a nuisance to those wearing them.

"People look at a hearing aid, and they make an automatic assumption of what you're like, what you can do," Getten said.

Jenny Maki, Class of '96, said that sometimes when people try to help too hard it can become a problem. Reading lips is made more difficult when the lip movements are exaggerated.

"Never assume that just because a person is hear-

ing impaired we know sign language," Maki said. "I never over-enunciate your words because we used to it and it makes you harder to understand."

The routines hearing impaired students go through are not that different from a person who can hear. "When you are born with a disability like deafness, it's just a part of life," Reber said. "It's just like wearing glasses is a part of my life."

Getten said he is not embarrassed to ask someone to repeat themselves.

"I do miss some things said sometimes," Getten said. "But I can always ask them to repeat themselves if I want to know what they said."

Maki said she does not mind asking others to help if she needs it.

"If I need to use the phone, I just walk up to somebody and say, 'Hi, I'm hearing impaired. Can you help me make a call?'" Maki said. "And I can say 99% of the time they'll help me out. I think it shows how enlightened our students are."

Though she is not afraid to ask for help, Maki said students should not go out of their way to do things for her when she does not need it. "It's more harm than good."

"I want to be treated like everybody else. I don't want any pity," Maki said. "I'm really turned off by people who try to pity me."

Maki explained why she thinks college students are more open-minded to the hearing impaired.

"When you get to college, the cliques from high school are all gone," Maki said. "You realize it's a new world and many people are alone for the first time in their lives, so they open up to new things."

Reber described how hearing impaired students use other cues besides language to help them communicate with others.

PLEASE SEE HEARING

"Because I just can't hear all of what anybody's telling me, I have to think more. I think that translates to other things like friendships."

JENNY MAKI
CLASS OF '96

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