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Chester Finn

9/28/2007

9:30 AM – 4:30PM

Albany, NY

Caldwell: First of all, do you mind saying how old you are now?

Finn: I'm 52. Just turned 52 in March.

Caldwell: Wow. Okay, so, where were you born and where did you grow up?

Finn: I was born in Castlebury, Alabama, in Kenekuck County. I was born at my grandmother's house. They told me that I didn't make it to the hospital. I was born three months premature, so they didn't expect me to live very long, I think something like three days. Then they rushed me into the hospital and put me in an incubator, or whatever it is that they put kids when they are born early, and I was in there I think they told me a total of three months. They didn't think I was going to make it that long, but of course, I lived longer than that.

I grew up part of the time in Alabama with my grandmother, because at that time I had enough vision to read large print and I could read some smaller print, so I had to hold the books real close. But I knew that at some point my eyes would change, or whatever. I wore glasses at an early age. Sometimes I had problems with them. I lost them. Or there was one time that I sat on them. I can remember when I first started school. One of my earliest recollections was of first grade, because I didn't go to kindergarten, I skipped and went to first grade because down in Alabama at that time, they didn't have kindergarten. So I went to first grade. I can remember studying some things and talking to my teachers a lot. I actually liked my teachers a lot. One of the things that I do remember, which I guess was the first beginning of my leadership, is that I used to have a few kids that I'd hang out with, on the sidewalk. I used to have them sitting outside, not steps, but on the sidewalk, but probably as high as this table, and we used to sit on the sidewalk. I don't know what I was drawing, but I would draw things on the ground and have a stick in my hand, like a pointer, talking to the rest of the kids in my class, and I imagine I was talking about politics.

At an early age I would watch the news with my grandmother and I was always fascinated by what was on television. I can remember one time watching stuff on the television about Vietnam, and I couldn't understand it. I knew that they were fighting, and I knew about wars from learning stuff in school, but I asked my grandmother, "Grandma, how come we're fighting gorillas?" Because when they talked about Vietnam and the soldiers, they wouldn't refer to them as soldiers, they would refer to them as Viet Cong; they would call them gorillas. So in my mind, I thought we were fighting gorillas until my grandmother explained to me that it wasn't real gorillas, it was soldiers. So in my mind, they were fighting gorillas, but I remember watching that. I was always fascinated by the President and who was in the White House and the flags, and even though I was not old enough to supposed to know about all those things, that's what me and

my friends, that's what we talked about, first, second, third grade, that's what we talked about, was politics. I remember knowing that John F. Kennedy was President, and I used to watch –and I don't know why –but I used to watch all of his speeches on television. When the President came on television, I would sit in front of the television quietly listening to what he was talking about. And I can remember in 1963 when he was assassinated, what I was doing. I was at school and I was in class, and I know that the principal came and made an announcement for all of us kids to gather in the auditorium, so he had an announcement to make. He told us that the President had been shot. So they actually let all of us go home. And I went home and sat down with my grandmother and watched all of the stuff about President Kennedy from start to finish. I even was watching TV when they were bringing Oswald from the jail and Jack Ruby shot him. I saw the whole thing on television. It was, like, it was fascinating. I used to remember watching the news. I used to watch Dr. King on television, and I knew all about the beginnings of the civil rights movement because it was like all around at that time in Alabama.

And one of the other things was... I experienced the civil rights movement because when I went to school the schools weren't integrated yet. So when I started out to school, I went to an all black school; and the white kids went to school downtown. So it was separated, and there was a group of kids that I went to school with from across the rivers. So, all of the black kids in the town from the different parts had to come to one school. Most of the kids were bused to the school. Of course, I could walk to school, but I caught the bus because it went right by house. So I could get on the bus, but sometimes my aunt and uncle walked to school with us. For the most part, I enjoyed school in Alabama until I was about nine, and my eyes at that point was starting to change, and I couldn't read as good as I could before. And sometimes the doctor would tell me not to try to read the books cause you know, I would take the books outside and try to sit in the sun to see a little better. And at school sometimes I would try to sit by the window so I could see the light from the sun. But when I was nine, my eyes changed, and my mother said, "Okay that's it. I let you stay with your grandmother long enough." Actually they came to try to get me to come live with them before my eyes got bad, but of course I knew Alabama and staying with my grandmother and my aunt was down there and my uncle and things like that, my grandmother and my great grandmother and all the other relatives I knew, I wasn't eager to leave all of that. Then my mother said, "You know, you have to come because you have to go to school." So I came up to the Buffalo area, Lockport, NY. I had been up there visiting, but I had never went to school there. So when I started to school, I started to school called George Southern, and it was a school where you had to take the bus. But I didn't go there too long. Maybe a week, 'cause at that time I couldn't read as well as I did and I would have had to have somebody help me with some of the reading.

Actually my parents enrolled me in the New York State School for the Blind in Batavia, NY. So I had to wait to start school and that was like, um, in 1966. So, I waited for a little while and then I started to school in like December. Um, which was interesting because at first, here my parents started me in school and not only did I have to get used to a new school, but I found out that my parents was going to leave me at school. And I was just getting to know my parents and, you know, see my other sisters and brothers that I would write letters to or talk to them on the phone, and I was happy to get to see them all the time, and they were like a little bit younger than I was, but I wanted to get to know them. And here I was going to school with people that I didn't know.

Caldwell: So this was a residential school where you go to school?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: And you were about nine years old?

Finn: At that time, I went when I was about nine to stay with my mother but then I didn't stay then, I went back and came back. Then I was about eleven.

Caldwell: Okay.

Finn: In fact, I had just turned eleven in March. So, it was real interesting to meet the kids and things like that, and uh, stay at school. I was afraid at first. Not so much of the school and not being able to handle the school, I didn't know what to expect because I had never went to school with white kids before. I mean I had a few friends that my grandmother had worked for, but outside of that, in Alabama you just didn't mix. You basically stayed with the people you knew in your community. I knew a few people that my grandmother knew –neighbors that lived up the street. I knew this lady named Miss Ward. She owned a store, so I used to go to that store all the time. But other than that, it was a whole new experience for me. My school was –I got to know the kids in the school after a while and teachers and things like that –but it was different, because I didn't have my parents. I didn't see them every day. I had to get used to going to school with people I didn't know, and people I'd never experienced so the learning for me, the education wasn't hard, it was just different.

But of course I soon learned how to adjust to the school and I made many friends –the teachers and things like. So, it was a fun experience. It was different, you know, staying at school; so, you had to get to learn things and then make friends that I saw every day. I think that's where some of my experience on being a leader started, because most of the times at school or whatever I was always one of the kids that other kids talked to. Or I always strategized about different things, but when I went to Batavia, they had presidents of the class and things like that and officers. So,

mostly all of the grades that I can remember, I was elected as president of my class, even in grade school.

Caldwell: Really? Wow. How many kids at the school, do you remember?

Finn I think that there was a total around 200 kids. But we were divided out in grade school and then you had the junior and senior high kids in the other building. So, I started out in the grade school at first. And then...

Caldwell: You said it was mixed black and white?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Was it pretty evenly mixed?

Finn: No. There was very few black kids in the school. I think I might have been one of five, maybe in the whole school. For me that was totally different. I mean, I learned to adjust to the kids and you know, got to know the kids. But there were still differences that you could tell, that we had to deal with, you know, all through school. But one thing that I do know that it didn't ... You know how most people, if they grow up in a certain area, they felt that if they don't like one race of people or the other, you know usually they'll say, that's the way I grew up, or that's the way my culture was. But I never got any of that as far as disliking people because of who they were. I think that I always listened to what my grandmother had told me, my great grandmother, and my aunt and my mother and my father, they told me that people are people, and that the differences between people, the color of their skin might be different than mine, but the person inside was the same. So I got along with people. I never got into singling out people. Of course, I still had my little things that people get into, you know, they might get into a fight or something like that, but you know it was totally for other reasons, other than just you know, because of race or something like that. I mean there was a few times, but for the most part, you know, school and things like that, was pretty good.

Um, looking back on you know, some of the leadership type things, I think at an early age for me, as I told you before, when I was in Alabama, I was really into watching TV and what was going on around me, I think that there was a couple of incidents that I still can remember today like it was yesterday. I think that shaped you know, how I feel today about civil rights and fighting for people and fighting for people's rights. I think the first experience was, I was around five years old, and my grandmother sent me up the street to get a fish sandwich. Of course I could travel a little bit, I had enough sight to run around and to walk around without a cane or something like that, and actually, at that time, I didn't know what a cane was, for people that were blind or visually impaired. So I just did things, and when it came to a point where I couldn't see, either someone in my

family would go with me, you know. But my grandmother asked me if I would go and get a fish sandwich. I went up to the restaurant, and I saw these people going in or out of the door, I didn't know exactly where it was. So I go into the door with the people and I get in there, and this man yells at me, and he's like, "What are you doing in here?" He called me the big "N." And I'm thinking to myself, why is he saying that? I was thinking that my grandmother and other people said that's not a good word. So I go up to the counter and I tell them I came in to buy a fish sandwich and he said, "Well I don't care, you came in the wrong door, and we don't service your kind in here." And then he used the big "N" word again, and he said, "Get out." This other man said, "That's no way to talk to him, enough is enough, he's only a kid." And the man was like, "I don't care." So all I knew was this man was calling me names and he was yelling at me, and I hadn't done anything, so I grabbed the money, and I said, "Well, if you're not going to treat me nice or going be nice to me, then I'm not going to buy your fish sandwich." And I took the money and I walked out. I went home, and my grandmother asked me, where was the fish sandwich, and I was upset.

But the strangest thing about it was I didn't cry. I just thought, I don't know who his man thinks he is, but I'll never be treated like that again, ever. So I gave my grandmother the money, I told her what happened, so they went back up there, and some other people joined with them, and talking about that they have to change you know how they get along or how they work with people, and that was –I guess at that time, me being a kid –what kind of brought awareness to what was happening. It didn't totally change anything for a long time as far as race and relations go, and you knowing the State of Alabama, but in our little town it brought awareness to what was going on. And everybody heard about what had happened to me, and you know most of the people in the town knew who I was and they knew that... At that time, they would just call you by your grandparents' or whoever you were staying with at the time, that person's child, and my grandmother was named Ida, and her middle name was Lee, so they would say Miss Ida Lee's grandson. So I think that was an experience.

Another experience I had was we were supposed to... Even when I came to live with my parents, I used to go back and visit my grandmother in the summer, and we were supposed to have vacation Bible school, because my great-grandmother, she belonged to the Holiness Church; and the Holiness Church was cool because it was different that the Baptist Church, it had music and instruments. They would play the drum and march in the church, and around the church, and singing stuff like that. So I actually liked that. And we were supposed to have Bible school, and we were supposed to have a march downtown. We had planned it for weeks, and all of a sudden they said we couldn't have it. They said that the KKK may mistake it for a civil rights rally. I could not understand that for a long

time, why, until one day I saw them riding down the street and I didn't know exactly everything about... I had heard about who they were, but something –just as I saw them marching by –something just told me don't sit on the porch anymore, go in the house. So I went in the house. But even before that, my first experience with the KKK was... My grandmother had a lot of land, and they had owned actually at one time, one whole side of the town. But I didn't know this until later. And we had at my grandmother's a big back yard, and other people's back yard, and in the back of yards were woods, and in the woods was railroad tracks. And on the other side to the railroad tracks was more woods. So we could go and play in the woods like that, but they said never cross the railroad tracks unless someone was with you because of the trains, like that. Trains were actively going through the town. So I'm back in the woods playing. All of a sudden I see a light, and I thought, hmmm, that's interesting. And of course, if you see something like that you're going to run to see what it was. So I was all curious to see what it was and started running through the woods, getting closer and closer to the lights. And all of a sudden I thought to stop and observe. So there was all these trees around. So I stayed behind these trees and I was real quiet and I was watching what was happening. So I saw these men, and they were singing something, they were chanting something. I thought, that's interesting. And then I said they must be having church, because I saw the fire and I saw a cross. And I saw these men dancing around, and they had these hoods over their face, and they were waving their arms. So the first thought to me was that they were playing ghost. I was like, oh that's interesting, they're playing ghost! So I was watching for quite a while and then all of a sudden, I said, "Oh, I going back and tell my uncle."

I ran back home, and my uncle was in the yard. Uncle, his name, his real name was Harold, but we called him Tom, because of the card game Tom; he used to play all the time and he used to be good at it, and he taught me how to play. Um, and so I was pulling on his arm, Uncle Tom, you gotta come with me! You gotta come! You gotta see this... you know, back in the woods there was this fire, and I said, there was these men and there was this cross and they was waving their arms and they're playing ghost, "Come on! Come on, let's go!" He goes, "No!" And that was the first time my uncle was ever, in that tone of voice with real like, rough, like "No!" I was like, "Come on, come on!" So I break loose and running towards the thing and he catches me, and comes back. And says, "You can never go into the woods, and you definitely can't go into the woods with those people out there. They're not good." I was like, "Why? They're only playing ghost, dancing around the fire." So that was the first experience that my uncle sat me down and talked to me about good and bad and told me about the KKK and why it wasn't a good idea for me to be out there. And it was a good thing I know now, it was a good thing that I didn't come from behind those trees, out there to see the men

playing ghost. I don't know what stopped me. But something stopped me from that, hiding behind those trees. But it still didn't sink in, about what my uncle told me, 'cause I was like five or six; I think I was more like five because I wasn't in school yet.

So it didn't sink in until the whole thing with the Bible school, it sort of sunk in but still didn't hit me until much later when I remember in Montgomery when the Church was bombed. Of course, I was afraid to go to church, because we had a church across the street from my great grandmother's house, and my grandmother and aunt and uncles and all the people from town used to go to church all the time. I used to go to church with them. I used to love church. I used to go to Sunday school, when it was time to go, I would get ready and get dressed, and I was always at church. But after that incident happened, I was afraid to go to church because I thought that our church was going to blow up, and that we would be in the church. It took me a while to get over that. And you know there was just a number of things that I learned you know, being down South. But it helped me later. It never made me where... Anything that happened that I thought particular race of people... And I still don't really let things that happen say, "Well, this is because of my color." I know those things happen and I figure out a way to deal with it. It's different, I think the most that I experienced as far as a lot of the prejudice around things, was more around this. Lot more people were a lot more critical of having a disability to say what I could do and what I couldn't do.

Caldwell: Do you have a story or experience where you remember first facing discrimination based on disability?

Finn: Yes. I had just moved up with my parents and I had been there for a few years, and I would come home on holidays and things like that, but I got along with all the kids in the neighborhood, and actually when I first started to school for that first week, one of the kids across the street helped me out. He would read to me, and he came and told his mother about me, that I lived across the street and things like that. I quickly made friends with him and his sister and his brother and other kids in the neighborhood and stuff. There was this one kid across the street that his mother knew my mother, and we became friends with him. One day we were going to the park and we were going to play basketball. Of course some of the other kids asked me to be on their team. I have to admit that I was pretty good. I knew what a basket was, you know, they couldn't hardly stop me because I was quick. I could shoot. I learned at an early age; back in Alabama, my cousin Allan used to play basketball, and of course I used to go to the court to watch him, and of course I was one of those kids that would run out on the court and grab the basketball and try to play. Everything... And of course the baskets were bigger than I was and actually if I hadn't had been a little bigger, the ball would have probably

been a hard thing, like kind of bigger than what I was, but you, I learned. And um, he got very upset, and he called me “One-Eyed Rochester.” And that’s one thing you don’t do. And I was mad. And I ran after him and almost caught him, but he was like, “You can’t catch me, One-Eyed Rochester, and my friends circled around him, all the kids in the neighborhood, and they said, “Now, you can’t get away. Now we’re going to see a fair fight. It’s not right for you to call him names and then for you to run. He can’t see you. He can’t get you.” So what happened was, they got a hold of him, and we started fighting. I pulled him off the bike and I started beating on him. Of course I won the fight. I tore his behind! So, you know, we didn’t have that much trouble getting along after that. He didn’t call me “One-Eyed Rochester” again, I know that. But it wasn’t a lot of stuff with kids calling me names and things.

They pretty much accepted who I was and a lot of times they forgot I couldn’t see, and I forgot it until maybe we’re walking or something, signs jump out at me or trees or things like that quickly reminded me, “You gotta be more careful of what you’re doing.” I think one of the difficult things was as my sight changed; that was a difficult thing for me. I mean I had adjusted to it, it was just: somethings that you can do that you can’t do now, cause I was used to running around and playing ball and things like that. And the one time I told my cousin down south and I told my sister, “You know I’ve met all the people in the world, and I’ve never met a blind person before.” I didn’t think about me. I mean I thought it was... I had to meet somebody that couldn’t see at all. And it never, I guess it was just my thought that the way that you not being able to see is how blind people maneuver.

I mean after I got to school that kind of helped me, I think, I think for me it was the best thing for me. I learned a lot about how to get along, how to maneuver, how to be independent for yourself. I wouldn’t trade the things I learned, and the people I met, and the teachers I had at my school, you know. I guess the teachers felt that I was always eager to learn and that I kind of helped, like that was always the way I was –the other kids, especially, some of the other ones that weren’t good when they first came to the school. Knowing where everything was, I would show them and take them different places. That was one of the times that I knew, or thought I knew; I didn’t know as well some of the other parts of the school and we would get lost, but we would find our way back. I think a lot of the...

History was one of my favorite things at school. I think I liked things that people are not supposed to like: I loved history, science, English, and math. I could do math and I was pretty good at it, but just for some reason, me and the math teacher didn’t get along. She actually told me to get the hell out of her class once. I got out. I slammed the door so hard

that the telephone rang. It wasn't that I was doing anything: I was talking. And because the girls would talk to me and of course I was answering them back, what I was I going to do, not say anything? And of course, she always saw me talking, even when I wasn't talking she was blaming me. So I learned also how to stand up and talk with her nicely, cause she could get on my last nerve at times. In fact, I see her. I saw her a couple of times. One time I was coming to a reading here on the train and she was on the train coming to some type of union meeting, and she sent the conductor back to say hello and that she was my math teacher. Strange thing about it was that I had her for math in high school, and in college; I had her husband for biology, which they were two different people. They finally got a divorce, but they were two different people. I got along with her husband very well.

Caldwell: Did you learn how to read Braille?

Finn: Yes. There was no talking –other than talking books on record or tape – but there was no devices and computers and things that they have now, so it was basically learning and using Braille. Which I would say for anything of survival and getting along and learning, Braille helped in being a leader. For when I started to work here, I had Braille to fall back on, when they didn't have my computer set up, I could go and take notes, and write information and stuff in Braille, which was a good thing.

I think as far as some of my experiences growing up I had a great time, I some interesting things, like everybody else, I had my share of troubles I got into of my own doing. But I figured a way to get in, and I figured a way to get out. Because I took responsibility, I think, one of my faults, not that I have any faults, but one of the things if I did something, I didn't know how to say, "I didn't do it?" They were like, "What did you do?" I was like, "I did this." "Why?" "I don't know, I just wanted to." That was more of a problem for me than saying, "Well, I didn't do it, or I don't know what happened." I remember one time my dad was like, "Who's making noise upstairs?" "I was watching baseball dad." Whoops! "But didn't I tell you not to have the radio on after a certain time?" "Okay." I still put that radio on under the pillow so I could hear the baseball game. I did that at school. I got caught, the house parents are like, "Are you asleep?" I was like, "Yes, I'm asleep." "Then why are you answering me?" "I don't know, I just heard you." And from under the pillow, "And the pitch! And he hits it long deep and its going, going, gone. It's a home run for Brooks Robinson." Of course I've always been a Baltimore fan, as long as I can remember, I was picking up the baseball cards and I like the hats and of course I saw the team on television, so that was it, it was over.

Caldwell: What else about your experiences when you went to the school for the blind and you lived there? Did you live there the whole year?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Did you get to come back at all in the summer?

Finn: Yes, we went back for the summer, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, or anytime in between that if your family could come and pick you up.

Caldwell: How far away was that from your family?

Finn: It was like 35 or 40 miles. It was far enough where you couldn't commute every day.

Caldwell: So did you lived in dorms? Or a foster family?

Finn: We had dorms and what we called house parents –house mothers and hose fathers, which was in charge of everything. Then they had set bedtimes and when to get up, study halls and stuff like that. I hated study halls at night. I mean in the daytime, I didn't mind, but at night my thing was, you wasn't supposed to have to study for an hour or a couple of hours. Because you know your bedtime was probably nine o'clock and you had dinner from five to six, and then from six to seven you would have study hall. Didn't like study hall. I mean, I would study like sometimes I would study on my own after school anyway. So...

Caldwell: And you were at this same school for all of your middle school and high school? That's quite a while.

Finn: Yes. And then later I took classes at the senior high school, which was fine.

Caldwell: You took classes at the, you said the..

Finn: Regular high school.

Caldwell: When you were a senior?

Finn: Yeah. Well, actually, junior and senior. They had a few courses that we didn't have. That was fine. And of course we got to learn how to travel around the city and stuff like that, so I made friends. I had lots of friends that I was bringing back on campus, play basketball and stuff like that.

Some of my earlier leadership was basically at Batavia when I was in grade school. I can remember one of the first elections was for student council and I was a part of running for that, which wasn't hard to be elected on student council as I knew a lot of the people at school and also I had been president of my class, as I told you, for most of the years I can remember. And student council was easy to be a part of. I mean we really worked on issues at our school and one of the things was getting to know the board of visitors. And most people were afraid to talk to the

board of visitors. Of course, I was walking down the hall and I saw this man, and he said he was there for the board of visitors meeting, and I proceeded to talk to him and showed him around. And I think after the board meeting, he had a lot of questions because what I had told him, or whatever. We kind of got a little thing about the board of visitors are busy and we shouldn't bother them. And you know, what our jobs are is: we talk about it on student council or let them deal with it. Of course I wasn't having it. I was going to talk to them whenever I saw them, and if I got a hold of their addresses I was going to write to them because we were always told that the money that supported student council, or some of the activities that we wanted to do at school, was kind of governed by the board of visitors, which we knew better than the activity money that the principal or even the superintendent had a part in that. But of course they would not tell us that, so I launched a campaign to have the student council more involved with the money. So we actually got that passed.

I think one of the real political things we did was when we were in eighth grade: not only did we have a president of eighth grade, we decided to come up with a constitution for all of the eighth grades classes that came up after us. And we came up with some nice things in our constitution. We came up with stuff that we wanted our leaders to follow, and then we actually was the first class to impeach a president. Not me! But another. We had voted to have another person be president because I was going to be on the student council, and there was some other committees that I was on, and I didn't want to be president and try to do all of that. So, what happened was the person that was elected president let the power go to his head and he wanted to control what people did, and he wasn't very nice to people, so the class was kind of upset with it, so part of impeachment was written into our constitution. Our science teacher, actually even more so than our history teacher, was a part of helping us with our class meetings and stuff like that. I wish I had a copy of our constitution and the stuff that we wrote, because actually if you looked at it, it was better than what the juniors and seniors had in terms of rules to follow. One of the things that we put in there: that if you were elected, you had to have a majority of the class vote to get things passed. Actually we kind of patterned after the constitution but we divided up equally among the –we had a congress in our class, believe it or not, and anything that need to be passed, if it wasn't passed by the executives in the class, it had to be passed by the majority of the class, which our teacher told us that that was a good thing.

Some of the other stuff outside of being leader, president of the class, I won citizen of the year for the whole school when I was in sixth grade. Which was a shock to me, because sometimes you know how the teachers and some of the people tell you, "Oh you're not..." I did a few things that year that... The governor came to visit the school; he would

come every year, Governor Rockefeller. And the teachers gave us rules and stuff you weren't supposed to ask the governor. And of course, I was talking to the governor and the governor said, "Son come on in. You can sit in my limousine." And I was sitting in his limousine and talking to the governor, and I had a question for the governor. And of course I made a mistake... The governor said, "Now son, now what would you want me to do if I could do anything for you?" And I would say, "Well of course, I would like some money for myself, but it would help if you would give the school more money and my teacher." Oh, she was mad! After the governor left, she pulled my ears and said, "Young man, didn't I tell you that there were appropriate things that you can ask the governor and things you can't ask the governor?" And I said, "The governor didn't complain. He said I could ask him what I wanted to." And she said, "Well for this you're going to have to stay after school." And I was like, I was thinking on my own, "I'm not staying after school. I've got work to do. I've got wrestling practice, so if you think you're going to keep me after school, I'm going right over to the gym." And that's what I did. I went to the gym and I don't think she could find me very well.

Of course, the next day, she made me sit in the corner: that was her punishment. I had to sit in the corner by the globe. And I was doing something, and my foot hit the globe, and the globe fell over. She wasn't happy about that, so she sent me to the principal's office. So at the end of the year, I didn't think that I would get the citizen of the year. I wasn't even thinking about the citizen of the year, the citizen of the year would get a watch. So I got this Braille watch that you push the button and the watch would open up and you could feel the dots on the hands on the watch. Of course, one of my brothers broke the hands because it was fascinating to them. But I was surprised when they called my name as citizen of the year. I think also that year I won Braille writer that they would give away. They had a number of things they would give away at the end of the year.

I think one of the other things we did was we had boycott of gym class, because somehow we was talking to the kids from the junior high school, and we went to the junior high, and we found out that they got credit for gym class, and we didn't get credit. We did it on our own for free. And I was thinking and I was talking with some friends from other classes and I said that's not fair. I said we should have to earn a half a credit or a credit for gym class. And we talk to the teachers, the gym phys ed teachers, and they said, "Oh that's a good idea but I don't think we could do it." So we organized a petition. We talked to the athletic director, and we said this is what we wanted to do. And one of the gym teachers said, "Well, I don't think you will be able to do it, because this is always the way it has been done, and it will continue to be done this way." And we said, "Well that's not fair. So, if we're not going to get what we want, we're going on

strike. We're not coming to gym class, and I don't think that you can make us." Somehow, I went to talk to the junior and senior high school kids, and I convinced them to join in with us on the boycott of not going to gym class. As it ended up, we had the whole class, the whole school working with us on it. And we got so many teachers to sign our petition, we had the athletic director basically agree with us. He wouldn't tell us what our stance was: whether we were going to get the credit or not.

So we were going to have a demonstration at four o'clock that afternoon, so we made our signs and stuff. The afternoon that we were going to go on strike... And of course I said, "We gotta have some teeth to what we're doing, so let's call the radio station." So, I know one of the DJs at WBTA, because he used to come, when we had socials or dances, he would use to come and do the music. So, I got a hold of his, he had someone to cover it from the radio station. I said, "That's not enough. Let's call the newspaper." So, we called the newspaper, *Batavia Daily News*, and I knew some people there; they came with their cameras and they interviewed a couple of us for the cameras and they put in the paper. They wanted to interview the athletic director. One of the gym teachers said we didn't need the credit. He said, "Well, if they're going to do it like a strike, after the strike is over, they're going to have to make up all of the days that they missed gym class." We were thinking to ourselves, I don't think we're going to make up anything. So, we're not going to do it anyway, but we're going through with this strike. So what happened was: it went to the superintendent, it went to the principal, and all the people got together and contacted the Board of Visitors, and we got to get credit for gym class. And I think they still get it to this day. But what happened was, after the strike was over, the gym teacher was saying, "We are having you make up the classes, the ones that we missed." They didn't make us do it. They didn't require us to do it, because some of us have basketball and cheerleading and other things afterwards, so you know, we always went to those, so they didn't make us make it up.

But I think that taught us a lot, and I learned about being able to organize and talk with people and get them to network. To help you follow through on what you wanted to do because that was a big thing to get the whole school, junior high and senior high, to listen to us as ninth graders, eighth and ninth graders. Get the teachers to support what we wanted, the whole school, and have some parents and have the community. We had everyone supporting what we wanted to do. But it did teach me the power of having connections and having people work together, I think that that might have been one of the beginning times, or first times that I learned collaboration was important and it played a part, definitely after that on some of the things that you wanted to do. And I know from reading the stories and listening to Martin Luther King that boycotts were very good,

because we've used them a number of times at school for different things that we wanted.

Another friend and I, we started off in our dorm, a little store. We bought candy from the snack bar and then sold it to people, but we actually also came up with the idea of having a credit card, and this was before really credit cards became popular. We would have the person... They would buy so many things on credit and then when they got their money or allowance, they would come and pay their bill. So we got more people buying things from us, and then they stopped going to the snack bar, because they know that they if didn't have the money, they could get it on credit. Then one of the house parents called us in the office and told us we couldn't do it anymore, that we were taking business away from the snack bar. I was like, "Isn't this America? Isn't this like free enterprise? Don't we have the right to do this?" So we just kind of didn't do it anymore. Later on, we started it up again and we got tired of it, and then some people started abusing the privilege of their credit cards, so we didn't want to fight with anyone or use tactics that –like the Mafia, something like that –we didn't want to have to hurt nobody, so we decided to get rid of the snack bar, the snack area.

I think another thing that helped me was junior high, as far as being the president of our junior class: we got a lot of things accomplished. One of the things we also voted on was having people have an opportunity to make their own decisions about what their class could sell to make money to go on their trips –you know, to do things for the junior class and the junior prom and stuff like that. So, we played a big part in working on that. Because most of the times that I knew, people would always sell pizzas and sometimes candy bars, but they didn't have a choice of other things that they wanted to sell, and have a limit on. And of course, me, I did not like selling pizzas. I think I won out a couple of times and I sold over 12 cases of pizzas, so I said, "That's my limit. I don't have to sell no more for the time that we were selling them." Everybody didn't sell that many overall, anyway, but we compromised on doing it. So, I think I was exercising my rights of advocacy then. I learned a lot on how to organize and get things together.

One of the things that happened to me when I was a senior was... We got a new history teacher and he was from the Maryland, Baltimore area, and his father had been an ambassador to England or somewhere over there in Europe. I learned a lot from him. He was a cool guy. He also was our scout master, and we had some interesting times going on camping trips trying to get our scout badges and stuff like that. I got chased through the woods by an animal and I ran right through the camp site, right through the tents, and I was stepping on people. I kept running, and they said, "Stop! Come back!" And I said, "Why? There's a wild animal out there

and it's chasing me." And they said, "Well it's not chasing you." And I said, "It's not?" And they said, "If you keep running, you're going to run into that river down there, that water, and fall off that cliff." So I turned around and started running the other way. And I thought, oh that wild animal is still out there, but I stopped. But scouts was fun.

But what we did was, we had this thing called a model Congress, and they had the Senate and the House, and what you did was you worked on getting information to do a bill to take to the Senate and a bill to take to the House. And of course, I was in the Senate. My teacher at that time, he said, if I got information on the project was that we were working on –we teamed up in two –I could provide information to them, and that might help get our stuff passed. So of course I did. I did research on what we wanted. We were talking about children receiving money from social services to do the programs for babies and things like that. So, I got all the information we needed so when we presented our bill, people were talking about just say, social security or whatever it was. I had information for it. I had a big stack of papers and our bill passed the Senate; and actually ours was the only one that passed. And then the House, I don't think. But one other bill had passed; I had given the person some information to help them get their bill passed and then they voted for a trophy for the person that did the most, and got the most votes. But for the other schools they had all the other people listed on the list, and you could vote for those on the list. I came a couple of votes away from winning the trophy, just by networking with the other people in the model Congress. No one from our school had ever come close to doing that at the model Congress or even came close to having a bill passed.

You know, they used to go to meet people, people from the other schools or whatever. So I got to meet a lot of kids from the high schools and the county and that area through that model Congress, but that did teach me a lot about how Congress worked at that time. I was interested in that stuff, but I got experience and one thing, even more so than the trophy, or almost getting enough votes to win the trophy, was that I got to get a hundred percent on my grade for that semester, plus what would add on to the test that would have my grade up there near perfect. And that was happy, that meant a lot to me because I looked at school and I looked at grades and things like that as fun, and also it was competition, so I was a very competitive person.

So much so, as in ninth grade, we organized as I told you before, I listened and read stuff about Dr. King, I also read Gandhi, I also read – and my friends used to tease me a lot about this – was Mao Tse Tung, *Red Book*, I read the *Red Book*. They used to tease me about that, how I could read all this peace stuff and then read Mao Tse Tung, and I said, "Easy, easy! I wanted to know." It was some interesting stuff in there.

What happened was, our science teacher, he was our advisor, had told us that we were going to do teams of projects when we were going to do a project, a biology project. We were going to make bacteria and some of these other things, and see all of this stuff about diseases. So, we partnered in teams and of course I partnered with my friend Karen, and I didn't want to partner with any of my other friends from the dorm, because someone had partnered with my roommate, and we were always the ones that wanted to get our work done first. We'd always talk about, "Well, we're not going to partner." If we weren't going to partner, we would partner with the girls, because they'd always want to get their work done, and it wouldn't hurt to be good friends with the girls, especially if they were nice. So what we did, me and my friend Karen, we got our stuff done, and Mark, him and his partner, got his stuff done. I think he partnered with Linda, or one of the other girls.

Anyway, there was a couple of my other friends, they didn't get their stuff done and they were fooling around. Our teacher at that time said, "That's it. You're fooling around you're not listening. We're going to drop the grade five points." And I was sitting there, and I was thinking: five points? Now if I have a 95 average and you take five points off, there goes my perfect score, oh I don't think so. So we kind of argued with him a little bit and told him I didn't think it was fair. Of course, I was leading the debate and the argument. So I talked to the other people in the class and I said guys, "We worked hard and he promised. We made this agreement and it's not fair. We said that if some of the groups didn't want to do it, their grades would change but not everybody's grades. He's going back on it. We're not going to stand for it."

So we had our signs and stuff; so we said, "We're not going to class until he brings our grades back." So I said, "Okay, here's what we do: we'll organize and we'll have a sit in at the principal's office." So we went down to see the principal. We asked to see the principal, and the secretary said, "Oh he's not in right now." And I said, "Okay, while I'm here, can I get some Braille paper?" She says, "Yes," cause that's where we got Braille paper in the office, and I said, "Well, since he's not here, we're not leaving. This is a boycott." We told her what happened and we handed her the papers and petitions that we signed and our, all the people in our class, so we sat down, everybody participated except for this one girl, Joanne. And she didn't want to because she was worried about it and she didn't know what her parents were going to say, and we said that's too bad, the rest of the class believes in this and we're going to have a boycott. The secretary was calling all over the school, "What are we going to do about them? They're all over the place and they're sitting on the floor and they won't move and I can't move them. I don't know what to do about them."

So the principal didn't come, we were in there for a couple of hours, and then finally he came in and he asked me, "What are you guys talking about, what happened?" Come in and sit down in my office and tell me about what happened. So we explained all about the agreements and the grades, and I said "In fact, we have it in writing. Here is what we said we would do. Here is what he said and he agreed with us and helped us put it on paper, so he can't go back on it now." And he said, "Go back to your classrooms and we'll give you our decision." We went back there and the teacher was mad. He said, "Sit down!" And he was yelling at us. I was like, "You're not supposed to treat us like that. The principal said that he would come to us with a decision, so we'll just wait, and we're not going to do anything until we find out what the decision is." We said, "Okay, we'll do work. We'll read. Do whatever. Go to class and then we'll wait for the decision." He was still mad, yelling, talking in a rough voice. And then the principal comes up, asks me to come out in the hall; so I went out in the hall, and he said, "You guys get your points back, because we don't think it was fair since he made an agreement with you. What kind of example is this setting for you if he is going to punish the whole class? That's not the way that it should be." So I come back in the class, and I have this look, a big old smile on my face. Everyone was like, "What's the verdict? What is it?" I said, "Well he said that we get our points back, and that it's not fair!" So the principal comes in and explains to the class and explains to the teacher, and says "I don't want to see this kind of thing happen again. You're supposed to be teaching these youngsters, not punishing them."

So the science teacher was so mad –cause at first, when it first started, I was the first one that walked out of class because I was mad. He said, "Oh that's okay. Its only one person, so I don't care." And then another person walked out after them, and then everybody started walking out and the whole class walked out, so he had nobody to teach, and that's when we walked down to see the principal. But I thought that was a good victory that we won that; and he was well known, popular teacher, but everybody in the school knew about how he lost the victory, and we were the class. At one time they called us: the most difficult class. This class is just too smart for their own good. This is the class from hell. Cause, if you don't do and work with them, they'll give you a hard time. I was like, "We're not going to give people a hard time. We'll just stand up for our own rights." It wasn't one person, it was the whole class. I was the leader, I had to set a good example for the class, and I stuck up for them no matter what. Couple of times, I took the heat for things, to stand up for the rights of the class, but it brought us closer together and we learned actually how to stand up and I think later in my life a lot of these experiences at the school taught me how to stand up for things that I wanted later in life in the community and how to organize, not just say and yell and scream, you had to be organized, you had to figure out how to do a strategy and a system.

In fact, in college, my first year, I had to organize a boycott and organize a petition against the president of the college, because we were going to go to Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois, to participate in the first annual games for the visually impaired, it was called the United States Association for Blind Athletes. And they had swimming, track and field, wrestling, and golf ball, which was a sport which we invented in Maryland. Our school and some of my friends from the school of Maryland invented this game. It was in between soccer and hockey. You had five people on the side, and a goalie. What you did was you could hit the ball if you were behind the line, but you couldn't come up to the center court line, or pass the certain line, that you had to score. Then the other people play defense. You could stop the ball with your hands, you could stop it with your knees, your head, your shoulders, but you couldn't stand up to stop the ball, to use your feet. You had to be on your knees. So that was one of the other things that was going to be at the championship, so we wanted to go, and so the president and the dean of the school said we couldn't go because they didn't have enough money to send us and support us. I said, "That's not right, because we paid tuition just like the other students, and the rules of the athletics at this college says that anybody that is in competitive sports that wants to represent the school that pay their tuition should be able to do that. So, you're trying to discriminate against us because you're not letting us exercise our rights as people with disabilities. We've paid, so we come under the same rights." "Oh no, no that doesn't!"

So, we got people at the school to sign petitions and we got people to talk about it. I wanted to meet with the president, so I go and ask the secretary, was he in. And she said, "Oh no. He's not in right now, he'll probably be back in a couple of days." And I said, "He is in." So I pressed past the secretary, and I went into the office, and I opened up the door and I told them I was there to see him, and my other friend was with me. So I went in and sat down in the chair and my friend sat down in the chair and we presented our side of the story, and I said, "You didn't want to meet with us either. You were going to tell us you weren't here, but we have rights, and we're willing to go as far as we can to prove that. Our next step is going to be to call the newspapers, because here's what it says in the thing, and if you don't have any other teams that you're supporting right now to do these supports, it says you have to support us in whichever ways we're trying to do this, and we're doing this actually independently. We're not actually asking you to pay because we've done that ourselves, we're just asking you to support and give us permission to go and represent. We don't even have to say that we're doing it for our school and our league. Give us permission to go."

So he hummed and hawed and took his time for while, so I said, "Okay." So I call my other friend on the phone, and I said, "Are the reporters

ready?” He said, “Yeah.” “We’ll, we don’t have time now, since you don’t have time for us, we don’t have time to be here, we have to go and have a press conference.” He goes, “Do you think the press conference is necessary.” I said, “Oh yes. It’s necessary.” So, we were getting ready to go to the press conference. We had this stage in the middle of the college, when you first come in, it’s called the Forum. All of the activities were held there, like if they had somebody come in singing, it was held there at the Forum. So we’re at the Forum and getting ready to go up to the Forum to have the press conference, and all of the kids were getting out of their classes because they wanted to see what would happen, to see if we won this if it would be good for them when they wanted something. So we got up there, got the microphone, and I explained what was happening. So the principal or the dean came up, and he said that he wanted to make an announcement. So we said, “Okay.” I said, “The dean wants to speak.” So we let him spoke. And he said, “He doesn’t agree with what the president said, and under their rules and everything whatever we wanted to do, the school and he was going to support it along with the board from the colleges.” He said that they got all kinds of reports and pressure from the community to support us to go, and we should be able to go because we do attend the college and were part of the college.

So that was a victory we won at the college. And after that, we had no more problems. That president would call us into the office, sit down, “Oh, have a soda with me. Or you wanna eat lunch?” And there was a couple of times –we never refused lunch, even though we talked about those hamburgers, we loved those greasy hamburgers, so if he wanted to buy them for us, we let him. So that was just another victory that we won at the college level. I think

Caldwell: What college did you go to?

Finn: Genesee Community College in Batavia. It was in the same town that I went to school.

Caldwell: Did most of the people that graduated from Batavia, did they go on to college or were you one of the few.

Finn: At that time, we were one of the few because they kind of supported more then. We were ready to come out of college. We went to college along with a lot of kids from this area, and people from all over the state, and then I had two friends from Baltimore move up here, because they went to our college. Cause we all went there because we wanted to be on the wrestling team, cause we were wrestlers in high school, and that’s how a lot of us met, traveling around the different states to the Eastern Athletic Association for the Blind. And we used to have a tournament every year. One of the states would have it –here one year, Philadelphia, Baltimore,

North Carolina, Connecticut, Massachusetts, any of the states that belonged to the Association. So that was...

Caldwell: So this community college, was a regular college...

Finn: Yes

Caldwell: But was there a large population of students who were blind?

Finn: There was maybe 20 of us, maybe 25.

Caldwell: What was your experience like there, going to that college, did they provide accommodations?

Finn: Yes. Yes, they were pretty good; sometimes it was late, but for my chemistry class and one of my other classes, I got the books on tape, but they came the day of the exams. But we had... We could hire readers or tutors; and I fired some readers cause I had this guy reading for me and he never come to class, and he was never there when I wanted him to read. And I was not happy, because I like to be prepared, so I fired him and hired this girl; and she drove so she would pick me up, so I know I was going to get me to class and she was gonna get to class. I found in my... Through high school, all through school, and even through college that most of the times I could rely on a lot of the girls more so to come to class and get their work. So, most of the time I hired them to be readers and tutors and things. Some of the guys I knew, ah, they loved their pub; after the classes were over, they would go to the pub, and if you got a ride with them you'd have to wait for them to get out of the pub and it was like, "No way. I'm not riding with you. Don't you know, you're not supposed to drink and drive?" We had a bus, called it the dial-a-bus, but at certain times, it would stop, and sometimes I also had night classes. So, if I went home and had to go back at night, I then would try to get a ride from somebody at the night classes. But overall at the college, it was the whole college experience: was fun.

Caldwell: Did you pay out of pocket, or did you get a scholarship or financial aid?

Finn: We got grants and financial aids because here in the state, if you can go to college, or qualify, the commission for the blind and visually impaired is very good at helping you be able to do that. I mean they will help you go to school faster than they will help you get a job. So, you know, some of the programs that they had, they were helpful and they were out there for us so we took advantage of it. So, that was a good learning experience. It also helped me be able to do things and organize in the community, cause after I finished school and went to some of the trainings I went through... I went through a number of trainings. I went through food service training, cause I thought I might want to work at one of the business they had here, where you would work in one of the state

buildings. In fact, I have a friend downstairs who runs the snack area, and he does all that by himself. So they had that kind of training. So I trained here, I training in Albany, and I trained in Rochester, and I trained in what they called on-the-job training in Buffalo in the Federal Building, and I also trained at the Erie County Medical Center. At that time, training at the Erie County Medical Center, and going to Buffalo, that was around 1980. That was a scary time, especially in the Buffalo area, because that was when the 22 Caliber Killer was shooting African-American men, young men and old men, so there had been a couple of times where I had been at the bus stop, and I had just left the bus stop, and I turned the radio on, and somebody had just been killed at the bus stop where I was at. So, it was kind of nerve wracking to go through the work program and the work training and have some of the people who were supposed to be working with you and for you, discriminate against you. I had more discrimination in the system holding you back than in the community itself. So that always bothered me.

Caldwell: What do you mean by that, you experienced a lot of discrimination from who?

Finn: The people from within the system who are supposed to be working for you, the Commission for the Blind would set up on-the-job training for you; well, some of the people that would set up the on-the-job training might talk with the people that hired you to do the on-the-job training. They might say, "Well are they doing their work?" Or talk with them behind the scenes, and say, "Well, we're paying you to do this but after this program, it's over, you don't have to continue that, or you don't have to say that this person is doing their best." You know work, might say that this person might not be qualified. I mean, they didn't think that you kind of knew what they were saying to the people, but I got to know the people really well, and I did a good job for them. So if they're telling you that you are doing an excellent job, and you're doing well on things, and you are looking at the reports that the counselors have wrote of, or evaluated, and it's a lot different than what the worker has been telling you, I had to go back when I finished and get an attorney and sue them for what I thought. I got my records and looked at the records and there was discrepancies what the employer had wrote down opposed to what the person that was working for wrote down. But you know at times...

Caldwell: Just so I understand, based on that, that's based on you being black, or your race, they were discriminating against you?

Finn: No, I think it was, I can't prove that part of it, I wasn't even thinking about that, I was basically thinking about they had certain people that they wanted to get through the program. And they wanted certain people that they didn't want to get through the program. And I was one...

Caldwell: And the program was just for people who were blind?

Finn: Yeah.

Caldwell: For training, for people who were blind for employment?

Finn: Yes. I wasn't... I think if I had have gone along with what they said –say “yes sir and not say anything... But I wasn't like that. If something was wrong or if they didn't like something that I did or whatever, tell me, don't call the counselor and tell them. They wouldn't say anything to you about it. Tell me! If you're not getting this right or if you're not getting what you need to, I could handle that, but I wasn't able to deal with someone talking behind your back. I actually, I did pretty well, but despite all of that... One of the things is when you finish, you're always waiting for them, you're always waiting for a spot to come open. I went to Rochester, I went through the program and the one that I got along with the teacher was in food service, but then I didn't get along with him as well because they had some kids come in from high school from the community, and I got along with the people from the community. I wasn't doing nothing different, I was just being myself, you know, talking to them. Cause at times, even though I'm speaking loud, at other times I'm quiet, and I observe. And I was doing my work, but I was a little more quite, and the people, the kids from the community, and girls from the community, those people always wanted to work with me. They said, “We'll help you on the project. We'll partner with you.” And the teacher didn't like it too much because I knew that he wanted to flirt with those girls, and if they were helping on their projects, he couldn't flirt very easily; he was upset about that. And one time he told me, he goes, “It's gonna be hard for you. I don't want you in my class.” I was like, “Oh well, that's nice, but I'm going to do what I have to do. My job is to learn what I have to learn while I'm here, to better myself to get a job. So, my heart don't pump no kool-aid. I'm not going to let you stop me. Didn't you hear: some monkey don't stop no show?” Well, he wasn't happy. He wanted me to say, “Oh you're right, please don't...” I wasn't raised that way. I think that I'm right and it's a matter of my rights that I'm fighting for. I'm not going to let him or no one else run over me just because they have a different opinion. I finished that program. I completed it and I did well. I just was waiting for someone in my town to retire who had been at the county courthouse for thirty years, before all that happened, and she retired. I got involved with a provider agency, and actually ended up getting into self advocacy.

But around my junior and senior year before I graduated, when I was younger I had headaches, and I used to get dizzy a lot, and I never knew what it was. I just knew that it would happen. I was like... It started really bothering me around sixth and seventh grade. Sometimes when I was in wrestling or track or swimming, a couple of times I had to take days out

because the dizziness and the headaches were bothering me so bad. I thought the headache was just part of my eyes –maybe my eyes were bothering me since they were changing. But later, all of a sudden, I was almost ready to get out of school, and I had almost seizures. Then all of a sudden, one day I was laying in the bed and I woke up... I was living with my sister and brother, my sister and I had an apartment together –and my sister would come down to Howard University, I had encouraged her to do that, and I was staying with my brother, so my neighbors and my friends were over, they stayed overnight with me. And I woke up in the morning and I went to get up, and I couldn't move. And I woke up and I was like shaking, and I was like, "What in the world is wrong? I can't move my arms and can't move my legs," and that's all I remember.

The next thing I remember I was in the hospital. My friends had called the ambulance. I guess they didn't know; they just thought I was either... They didn't say it at first, seizures or whatever, they just said I was having trouble and they thought something was happening. So they kept me in the hospital for a while and they found out that I was having the seizures and things like that. The doctor said to do a whole bunch of tests. So, seizures and things started after that, and after the doctor did all the tests, he said that I have epilepsy, but what he said was that it was amazing that it didn't bother me at first, but that's what the dizziness and the headaches was just signs of it. I had never had it happen before then. I don't know what I would have done to my life at that time. I know it would have been a big change, because once it started, it was a shock to me and I'm one of those people that don't like medicine. Oh, I hate medicine. If I had a headache, I just deal with it, and it just goes away, or I'll drink tea or something, and it just goes away. I'll frown, complain, do all I can not to take an aspirin for it. So then I had to take medicine, just since I've moved here the doctor start checking me out and I started doing well, and they check your blood levels all the time, and she said, maybe I could try it without being on the medication for while. I had to watch my diet and that if I had another seizure, I'd have to get back on the medicine, but fortunately I haven't had one. There have been times where I've felt strange, or if I get real tired, now I take days off and stay home –in bed and rest. So you know, that's been working for me so far.

When I went to workshop, that was a major change in my life. I think the turning point was when I end up going to the provider agency and attending the sheltered workshop. What happened for a while was after I started having the seizures and different things like that, that kind of changed my life for me for doing some of the things that I had been doing. I was just always outgoing but now I had to be watched where I go a lot of the times and you know some of the times by myself. I still lived at my apartment; I was still there. I needed to be around people. I had nurses come in. I needed to have people come into my apartment, like they

would send people from home care to come in and kind of do the cleaning things. I could clean myself, but there was certain things that I needed that I couldn't get to. So, all the stuff I like to do. I hate to mop. I'll do it, but I hate it because I can't get everywhere. I want to make sure it's clean and if I miss a spot, I'm not happy with it. So, I did that for a while. And then I went back home to my family's house. It was a good experience because I had left when I was younger, went away to school, and then after I finished school I was away at college, I went back home for a while but I had my own apartment. So, I never really, even though I spent time with my parents and knew my parents, I never stayed there all the time on a constant basis.

So, I went to the workshop that was at the agency that was around the corner from my house. I could walk there if I want, but they had a van or whatever that came and picked you up and left you there, and picked you up in the afternoon. That was an interesting experience for me, because I'm used to my independence, I'm an independent person. And the store was right up the street from my house and I'm used to going there myself, not needing permission to go to the store. So I'll have someone go to the store with me, and have had that happen in my life, that's a normal thing. But for the workshop to say, "No you can't do that!" It was like, "What? I live near here. I should be able to do that myself." Because I can understand if it was the workshop in Niagara Falls – they have two workshops, one in Niagara Falls is Opportunity Unlimited, OU1, and Opportunity in Lockport is called OU. So I started training for little less than six months or so at Niagara Falls OU1. I completed that training so I transferred down to Lockport. I met a lot of people at Niagara Falls, and I got to meet a lot of supervisors. I had fun which was different. The pay wasn't that good. I said, "Hey, I'm not going to a workshop," because under the Commission for the Blind they had sheltered employment and that just wasn't one of the things that I wanted to do, and I wasn't going then. Then I thought to myself, I wasn't going now, but then one of the nurses that came to see me, said, "Oh well why don't you come and visit? We'll take you to the workshop."

I went to visit at Niagara Falls and Lockport, and they said, "work." Of course, my mind clicked, work, yeah, I can do that. Then they said, "You get to meet people," and I thought, "Well, I don't have no trouble meeting people." So I decided to go to the workshop. When I went, the rules and the way they treat people was so different than what I'm used to. In the world of growing up living with my grandmother in Alabama, I still had independence. Even though I couldn't see very well, and I still had an experience of being blind or visually impaired, I just did things and I knew there were some things I could do and some things I couldn't do. If I thought I could do more things than I wanted, there were things to stop me –like trees and poles and things to run into. So I quickly learned how to

maneuver and navigate that world. In school we learned how to be independent, that was one of the things they always told us that we have to compete, that we have to work in the sighted world and live in the sighted world, and this is what it takes to survive. So we were prepared through school to be able to survive, and through college it was about getting ready to live and work and all those things that you need to do. And here was a whole new world: workshop, sheltered employment. So that wasn't hard for me to figure out how to adjust, but it was kind of an adjustment, more so for the mind than it was for the body to adjust. They wasn't preparing me to be independent in that there was no reason for me anyway. I had that. That I had all my life.

Well, moving along, I had a supervisor who worked with me. She was an excellent supervisor, because the jobs that I could do, she worked with me on. If we were doing mail or separating, like maybe magazines or pamphlets, or stuffing things like that, putting them in order, here's the blue ones, here's the green ones, here's the red ones, these go first. These, these, these... I got very good at doing those. I also had a job that they got from this one company... It was doing sponges that they sent out for these companies. What you do is put the sponges in the bag and then you did so many and then the other guys would take them and they would seal them up with this heat gun. Actually, I learned how to do that too. I was good at that. Most of the jobs they gave me I tried to do them to the best of my ability, but I wasn't happy. I wanted more of a challenge. They had a cafeteria in the workshop, and they had said to me at one time, maybe you could do this, but their thoughts went away from that. So one day I wanted to work in there, and my friend John had already been working in there –cause we had worked together on the workshop floor doing some of those jobs, and we were a couple of the best people that they had. So, I asked about the cafeteria, and they said, "Oh well, we don't know." And then finally they talked to me about it, and they said, "One of the supervisors said, I don't think you'll be able to do it because you're blind." And this was a shock to me. I said, "I'm what? What does that have to do with anything? These jobs that you do, I know that like the back of my hand. I took food service. I know how to do this. I could probably do it better than you." They said, "No." I went back to them a couple of times, they still said "no." So I thought to myself, that's the last straw. I have to do what I have to do, and they said, "Well you do what you have to do, this is our opinion."

So, I called the Labor Board, and I told them my story and what happened, and they said, "Well unfortunately this is bigger than us, and we don't know how to help you, but what we can do since its bigger than us, we're going to send you to the EEOC and give you a number to call." So, I call that number, and they said, "We have a local office that can help you at the Department of Human Rights, it's in Buffalo, New York, on 65 Court

Street, and you call and talk to someone.” So I call, and I told them what happened, and they said document it on Braille or on tape, and do a copy for us, and so I did this and I typed out a copy for them about what happened and then I went down there for my hearing for them to interview me. I told them what happened so they put it on their schedule. So then I went back to doing what I needed to do at the workshop, calm and collective, waiting. Finally I got a letter in the mail, saying they were going to have a hearing, and then a few days later they call me in the office in the workshop, and they said, “Um, we think that we might have something for you, in the cafeteria. We don’t know yet, let us know if you want it,” and I said, “Not at this time.”

So I went home and I call the person that I had been working with at DHR, and I said “I don’t know what they’re doing, but what my instincts tell me that they want to offer me this job now, cause they probably got your letter. So, they want to offer me this job so that I can say, “Oh I don’t want it” or something, and they can say, “Well we offered it to him, and he didn’t take it,” and they didn’t ask for any dates or anything like that.” He said, “You’re probably right, so document it.” So I documented that. I went back and it was close to the time, it was the day of the hearing, I went and I asked my friend John to go, because he was in the cafeteria, and he worked with me. So, he decided to go with me. We got there, and they had like six attorneys and the executive director, and my old supervisor, and my supervisor, and all of those people to come in, and they talked and gave their side of the story and everything. And they asked me, I got up and told my side of the story and what happened, and John spoke, and then they called me back up, and asked me what I wanted to do. I said, “I want the job. I want an opportunity at that job, at that cafeteria.” They said, “Why?” I said, “Because, I don’t want anyone else to go through what I had to go through just because they wanted an opportunity in this cafeteria, and I can do the job.” So he asked them, “So what would it take for someone just ordinarily just coming in there?” They said, “Oh, a two week evaluation.” And he asked me, “You think you could do that?” I said, “Yes, of course I could do that.” So they were all happy. They said, “Yes,” cause I was thinking they were thinking that I wasn’t going to pass the work week evaluation, and that would be the end; and I would just crawl back into the workshop and take what they had for me. Well, I had the evaluation, and it started, and I started on a Monday, I had actually almost finished before the end of Thursday, and had one more day to go.

When I finished the whole evaluation, they had to give me the job, they had to make things accessible. But I ended making things accessible, I ended up Brailing the numbers, or just a few numbers, to go into the cash register, so I could be able to use it, because at that time they didn’t have it the number five on the cash register. If I knew where the 5 was, I could maneuver around the numbers, because they were similar to a telephone

or a bank machine. So I did that, I put some marks on the microwave so I would be able to use it on the numbers and things and then I learned where the all the different foods was and where they put them, and they had me arrange some of them in the order where I knew where they were.

So after that, I worked in the cafeteria until I talked with the commissioner and designed a job to get a job here at OMRDD office –and that’s the last time I’m going to say that word, because I don’t use that word, but I have to say it some people know what I’m talking about. The big thing is, you know, people getting an opportunity. While I was at the workshop, my friend John, who is my assistant now, who works for me... Finally a job became available to help me with the reading and the filing and stuff like that, so I talked to him about coming from Lockport to come and work here. I thought he could do the job cause I worked with him, and he used to read stuff for me. I felt that he had been at the workshop to long, much longer than I had –he had been at the worship for twenty years or more. I thought it was time for him to be able to use his skills. I got an opportunity, so I felt that he needed an opportunity.

But at that time at the workshop, he was in self advocacy. He was the president of the group at the workshop. So he went to one of the first conferences, I think, down here in Albany. I asked him what he was doing and where he was going. I said, “That sounds interesting. That sounds like all the stuff I believe in and the stuff I like to do.” So he asked me about coming to one of the meetings and joining the group, and introduced me to the advisors at that time, another guy, John Hayden. I met him and they said, “We’ll be glad to have you in our group –but there’s one thing, and I said, “What’s that?” “We’re having the meeting on a boat.” And I thought, “Uh oh. I do not like boats. I like boats, but I don’t like water.” So the boat was on the water at the Niagara River. It’s time to go to the meeting, so we get to boat and I was like, saying a prayer. I was hoping that I didn’t have to get on that boat. So then they said, “Where’s the captain?” “He’ll be here, you guys go on and get on the boat.” So we get on the boat and we sit down, and I was still worried about the boat going up the river. Up the river without a paddle, I was up the river; I still had a hold of the paddle, I guessed. So then we were sitting there for about a half an hour, and the phone rang, and John got the telephone, and “Hello?” He was talking to someone, and he came back, and he said, guys I have good news and I have bad news. We said, “What is it?” He said, “The good news is that we still are going to have our meeting. I was like, “Yeah? What s the bad news?” And he said, “The bad news is that the captain is not coming, something came up, and he can’t make it, so we’ll have to go and have our meeting at one of the restaurants or somewhere else.” I was happy. I stuck my cane in the air, and I said, “Thank you Moses!” They said, “Why did you say that?” I said because remember when Moses wanted to go across to the other side of the sea,

and he stretched his cane and water moved, and they walked to the other side. Well, I didn't want to go on board, and the captain is not coming, so I'm getting off the boat and I'm stretching my cane out." So I get back on dirt.

Self advocacy in the western region, I went down toward Pennsylvania, helping to set up groups in the community –politicians, different people on our rights and what we believe and how important it is for self advocacy. I was invited to all different places to speak and then John called me one day and he said that there is a spot available on the board of SA and they are expanding, their board. And that he put my name in as one of the people to be considered from the western regions, so that called me up and I talked to them and they said they would let me know at the convention. So we went and rented a van to the Albany convention, and the convention was fun and I went to all the workshops and learned about all these things, about people's rights, and was getting all excited and pumped up. They said I was on the board. I became president of the board and we set some goals...

Caldwell: What year was this?

Finn: When I first started on the board, 1992.

Caldwell: This is the state board?

Finn: Yes

Caldwell: Do you know when they started?

Finn: Bernard Carabello –after he got out of Willowbrook in the community and that whole thing with Geraldo, the DD Council helped him with money for a while, and after they got money from here, from the State, and they have been supporting us ever since. One of my goals, or one of the goals, I felt that if we wanted to make an impact on the state and what happens, we had to be everywhere. We had to be a part of the decision making from OMRDD, this office, all of our local offices, our state. We had to be a part of what providers agencies was doing. We had to be a part of the parents. We set out some plans and some goals, we talked to the board and I said we had to network with the commissioner. We had a meeting with the commissioner; it was Tom Mall at that time. I told him that we wanted to work with him and partner with him, with the understanding that there is going to be some things that we agree on, some things that we don't agree on. We have to be able to make a partnership. So he said, "Okay," and we started getting invited to meetings and committees here, and he came to our meetings and talked with us. People were on committees and things, and we started a partnership, which has grown throughout the years.

We've had some very important moments, and each of the presidents after me... There was two presidents before me, but I was actually the third president, I was the president that really started to make an impact on how we worked with our state and our government, and being a part of that everywhere. We worked on self determination, which I brought to the state, and sat down with the commissioner and people from here to make that happened. It included family members and provider agencies, and we still continue to this day to play a big part and role in self determination and consolidated supports and services, that is the funding stream, to fund self determination in our state. I, as part of getting that budget, talked to them about giving us a budget under the pilot project. So, it's almost ready now to be turned over as a natural project. A natural service for people so that the supports that people need under individual services that we can do that. So that was just one part.

There are so many things that have happened at the state level that I've done and been a part of with self advocacy and then there's also a lot of stuff that I've been a part of on the national's scene. I'm getting into a lot of international stuff, and what I think is a new area is that people are underestimating us. As people with disabilities, not only should we be included in committees and things like that, I think we should be working in offices like this, helping making the day-to-day decisions and giving some advice on what it is with people's lives and how you work on that. And you know how important it is, because I've seen –since the ten and a half years I've been here –I've seen the change. I've felt the change and I've talked and worked with people to see how their lives have changed because of being here, being able to let people know that when you're talking about someone in a meeting that we're here. We need more of us, and that's why I'm working on getting people employed here, working on internships to push our agencies and other agencies to recognized that we can contribute and not only contribute by being on committees, but by being part of the system, because I really feel that we have to be here to change things –to add the input, to add that something that you need.

Caldwell: I think that is a key point. Do you know how many other states have done what NY has done, and hire self advocates, create positions?

Finn: There are a few states. I think one of the states that have done the most and I've worked with a lady to get this started, and then she took the ball, and their state is running with, is the State of Connecticut. I think they have pretty close now to maybe twenty people that are working in their department, and they created a separate division for to help people assist people where they can have separate support people to work with them. I mean, in my experience and the stuff that I work on, I consider that true integration. Because I learned from my coworkers; I've never had a job coach since I've been here. In fact, I've never had a job coach in my life,

even when I trained on the job with some of the on-the-job training for the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I mean I had a lady that worked with me at Eire County Medical Center, she was a nice lady, and my boss; they worked with me on showing me the jobs, and what I had to do. My boss worked with me on counting money, and here, you met Colleen, she's our secretary, but also sitting next to her is Dee, Richardson. She's been a big help to me since I came here to work. And you know, we worked on a number of projects together, we're working on projects together now, and a lot of this stuff about how things work around here. I've worked with her. When I didn't understand something, I would come to her, or go to Elizabeth, she's my friend, she passed away three or four years ago, but she was a big help. I used to travel around the state with her doing the Circle of Support meetings for self determination. I've had other people work here that was in our department at the time that I learned from. Overall unit supervisor, Gary Len, he had been instrumental on working with me on learning some of the things, how things work here, and getting me involved, and working with people and presentations. In fact, he recommended me to go with the team down to Baltimore, back in the spring, to present our Real Choice Grant, for the Center for Medicaid. I was a big part of that, which was interesting. So I mean there's a lot of partnership in our state with self advocacy.

Caldwell: Do you know, going back, how that developed?

Finn: Like I told you before, we set out a plan to work with this agency and we reached out to the commissioner. We reached out to them; so once you reach out to the commissioner, the head person, it started. We had different committees that people were involved in. I was involved in a lot of committees before I came here to work. That's how I got to know the commissioner, that's how I got to know some of the people from here, and we did that. Also we invited those people to our annual conference each year –that we've had for 17 years. Our organization is over 20 years, I think this is the 21st year, but we were networking with provider agencies and families and things before on a smaller scale, but then we stepped it up and each president after myself has continued to work with this office along with Steve Holmes. He's not the CEO, but he's the administrative director. He works for the board, so the board is actually in charge of self advocacy; and he does what the board lays out for him and the staff to do. And he supervises the staff from the office. Now we also have, through AmeriCorps, over fifty something people, pretty close to eight people that worked for self advocacy, people with disabilities.

Caldwell: Let me ask you this, have you ever run into any conflicts between your role here, cause now you're working as a state employee, have you ever run into any issues where the self advocacy movement didn't like something you did?

Finn: No, because my office, this office understands my job as I'm a self advocate, and I do those things, but also, I work here, so I figured out a way to combine the two jobs. That, you know, the jobs need each other. I mean you shouldn't do what you need to do and tell people about the services without knowing how they work and what things can work for them, but if there is something that I feel that is too hot to handle, that might be a conflict, then I know how to separate myself from that. I know the different roles, and that's what people need to figure out. Someday I will write a book on how to do that, because I have some very strong opinions and examples and experience how that works.

Caldwell: I think that's tough when you play an advocacy role and a state governmental role, it's always...

Finn: And what my job is, is partly to represent but also advocate for the people and the things that they need. I have the flexibility to work with provider agencies and families, and when they call representing them, and when I'm also at the meetings representing their viewpoint as well as being able to talk to them about what their role of the state is, because some things it's not necessarily this office that makes the decisions but it's also some of the state decisions. And it's also some of the decisions from the federal government. So for me, it's just an easy transition to be able talk with people and get them oriented to how it works, and it's just a matter of being able to do that. Some people have a hard time with that; they look at it one way. If you look at the advocate point of view, you can't. And if you look at it as though I work for the state, you can't. You gotta be able to mix them together, like making soup. You know how it is when you put all the ingredients into the soup and how good it taste when it's all mixed? Working in this job is like soup.

Caldwell: Yeah...does the state also provide money to support the self-advocacy movement?

Finn: Yes. Actually the state provides money for self advocacy to run the organization, and then once the state does that, they are out of it. They do not tell self advocacy what to advocate for, what to talk about. If there is an issue that self advocacy maybe wants to call the commissioner or someone here on, they do that, and they get opinions, but no one here ever makes up the decision for self advocacy.

Caldwell: Did that start, you said, way back with the Willowbrook closing, or did it start after your negotiations with the state?

Finn: It started when we negotiated with the state. They had support from this office before, when Bernard was here, they gave money. But this office never got into the politics of self advocacy. I mean, that's what most things come to that level. We talked about that there would be some

things that we would have to do, and that there would be some things that the state would have to do. We let them know our opinion and they let us know their opinion –that we’re not going to agree on. So you know, them being free to do what they need to do, and us being free on being able to advocate about how we feel, it’s an open dialogue. You have to develop that trust. It can happen. We proved that it can. We can always sit down at the table, even if the state would have meetings, and it would be controversial, we brought all the people together to sit down and talk about the issues. Now the state and the people look to us to do that. If it’s a situation that they really need and they want opinions from people with disabilities, they are calling us. And part of my job or my role is to, if there’s something this office wants to work with self advocacy, they’ll call me. Can you talk to the self advocates? Even with the language and stuff like that, people will call, they just naturally involve us. And then we have leaders all over, you know, it’s just not me, it’s a team, and we get together and we work as a team. When we get together with this office, the governor and other people have pointed out how well OMRDD and self advocacy works together. But we have the most integrated coordinating council which is called the MISS, for the Olmsted stuff. And the governor... Governor Pataki and Governor Cuomo had it where all of the state agencies will work together and they had representation at the meetings, and they had different organizations that they formed to represent them. We, OMRDD, have designated self advocacy as their liaison to represent them on the integrated coordinating council.

Caldwell: What’s the name of the statewide self advocacy group?

Finn: New York State Self Advocacy Association.

Caldwell: Okay, and so, are they able to hire support staff, or people that they hired for their office?

Finn: Yes. They have people that work in their office, which I kept bugging them that they needed to have.

Caldwell: First self advocate, is that what you’re saying, staff?

Finn: Yes, regular staff. And he works on special projects, which helps a lot. We have also the AmeriCorps members that come into the office, and the people in the office gets to know them, and then we have people from the speakers bureau, so there’s always people around all of our offices around the state. We have the statewide association office, in Schenectady, but we also have regional level offices, you know, around the coordinators around the state in the western regions, Buffalo, Jamestown, all of those in the Southern tier. We also have the Finger Lakes which covers the Rochester area; Central, which covers Syracuse; Broom, covers also the Central NY area; we have the Capital Northern, which is Albany; and then

the North County, Plateesburg and all the way to Canada; then we have Hudson Valley, which covers from here all the way down to NY City border; and then we have NYC itself, the five Burroughs, plus Long Island. So we cover the whole state. And we have representation and we just changed our bylaws. We used to have three representatives from each region, but now we have five representatives from NYC represented from each borrough, because they have the largest population of people. And then we have the other representation across the state accordingly. Some regions have three because they are larger and then others have two.

Caldwell: So how many regions?

Finn: Six. But we have large regions. If we wanted to, we could cut our regions into even more smaller regions.

Caldwell: How many local chapters do you think there are in NY?

Finn: I think the average being anywhere from 20 to 30 something per region, cause there's over, now we have over 200 something groups, so what we're doing now, since we changed our bylaws that they are really a group, we put a few things that they have to have. They have to have an advisor selected by the groups; they have to be registered in the region, as well as with the state association.

Caldwell: At the state level, you guys have a conference every year where all the self-advocacy groups get together?

Finn: Yes, we have different events. Let's just say something came up about budget, or something about legislation, and we do meet with our legislators. We meet with the Representative from the Assembly, and then we meet with the Rep from the Senator of the Mental Hygiene Committee, and we've been meeting with those people for years. In fact, they used to give us a small amount of money from the legislature to support self advocacy. I don't know if we still get it, but OMRDD made up for it, to get \$30,000.

Caldwell: How big is your conference usually?

Finn: We had registered 775 people. We had to cut the conference down because we used to average 800-900 people at the Marriott, and with that we were way over their capacity. And then we have overflow hotels, but you know we're waiting for them to build a convention center, and then we can have it here in Albany.

Caldwell: Is the movement growing in NY? Is it more and more people every year?

Finn: Yes, we had to turn away a couple of hundred people. The conference filled up before all of this first, which was the deadline, and we sent stuff

out May, beginning of June, this became so popular that people have to be there. And we have more younger people, too, being involved. Our local group had been around for about a year.

Caldwell: The group here in Albany? Are you involved with them at all?

Finn I started it. But we have some other groups around in the area.

Caldwell: So just want to go back and make sure I get the dates. So going way back, you've been here at the state for about ten years?

Finn: Yes, 10 and a half.

Caldwell: And it was before that when you were president of the state, right?

Finn: Yes. I was president from 95 to 97.

Caldwell: Is there a term limit?

Finn: Yes, each president serves a couple of years.

Caldwell: And then you came to the state after that?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Did you work, when you were president, were you working?

Finn: I was at the workshop.

Caldwell: At the cafeteria work?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: How long did you do that?

Finn: From 92 to early in 97.

Caldwell: I was just trying to put it all together. So you did that until you came here.

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Did they have... Were you the first self advocate hired here, or was that position here?

Finn: No, there were other people here in other departments, but I as the first person was hired to be in the position I am in now, special assistant.

Caldwell: Special assistant to the commissioner's office?

Finn: Yes, and now all of MRDD.

Caldwell: What is your title now?

Finn: Special Assistant to MRDD Commission and OMRDD.

Caldwell: Got it. So, um, before we move on to the national level, I was trying to think if there is anything else in the state that you want to talk about? I think it's really interesting and important about how the state is structured; a little bit of the history of the movement in the state... It is really interesting.

Finn: I think for a lot of people, is to understand that self advocacy was allowed to grow. Even on the controversial issues, they never hammered self advocacy or say this is what you have to think because we give you money. They let self advocacy stand on who we are.

Caldwell: You think it really goes back to that relationship you built with them?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: I think that is really key.

Finn: We understand that there are certain things that the state has to do, that we can't just come in and demand that they do it. We sit down, we are effective in that we sit down and negotiate and talk, but if we had to advocate or do civil disobedience, and some of those things, if there is ever a time to do that, we're not above doing that; but we don't have to do that. I mean it's there for us, but we don't have to do it.

Caldwell: With the self advocacy movement, what was it that really drew you to that movement?

Finn: I think people don't understand... And somebody in history maybe we will do it, we should kind of write and explore what it is about self advocacy that makes it happen. Because I was at a conference last week in Ohio, and I say if you really look at it: there's no ethnic or racial barriers to keep you down. As humans, that kind of stuff happens everywhere, but you don't really see it to hold people back as far as self advocates. In other disability groups and things, you see it up front. People will tell you, "I don't want to be involved with or bothered by those people. Who do they think they are?" I mean, most of the time, when we find out that people are self advocates, whether they belong or not, the first thing that we're telling them about is what is important: how they can stand up for themselves and what their rights are –before we look at anything. Before someone tells us, we're there to figure out how to help, what we need to do. And I think that goes back to looking at a person as a person.

Caldwell: You hit on something really important because one of the things I wanted to ask you about was when I look at some of the other movements, the independent living movement, or even other movements, and you look at

the leadership there, and then you look at the self-advocacy movement, it's very diverse leadership at the self advocacy movement.

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Just in terms of race and ethnicity and uh, gender, women leaders, African-American leaders, and one of the criticisms of the independent living movement that a lot have raise is that it's not a very diverse leadership at the top level. So, I wanted to ask you about that, like why, and I think you're talking about it now, but why, what's different about the self advocacy movement?

Finn: I mean, I don't think we understand the person. And we reach out to the person, and we understand what they had to go through –whether they tell us or not. In my job here, if I get a call from a person, I'm running to help that person. The only time that I might think I might be a little hesitant, and still that doesn't stop me, is if the person will do something or say something to kind of make me back off. But, they would have to do that. For the most part, I see people, we get along with no matter where we go. I mean, if the world could pattern themselves after self advocates, and governments like self advocacy, we wouldn't have wars, we wouldn't have the stuff that we have. Because when someone is down on someone else, or when we see people in our movement start this, we stop it. We are not afraid to say, "Wait. Look at what you're doing to people. You want fair, but are you fair?" You know, and I think no matter where you go, people respect that. I mean, I think no matter where you go, my opinion is that we're able to connect.

Back in March when we were in Kosovo, I couldn't speak their language. They couldn't speak my language –only through interpreters. But if you were in the room, you felt what we felt – understanding and communicating with each other. And when I went to go for lunch, a couple of the guys came and got me, and they were taking me out to sit with them and eat lunch with them. And when they got the interpreter and sat down so they could talk to me and I could talk to them, and the interpreter could tell us what we were saying. Their stories I could relate to. One of the self advocates was telling about how he was in the community and people were picking on him, you know, getting ready to beat him up. And knowing what they had been taught about policemen being there to help them, the policeman wasn't very much help, because the policemen said, "I can't help you or I can't do nothing. And he used the "R" word and said, you're that so, I can't help you." You know, and I felt that. I was upset about that. But I wasn't upset as far as getting ready to cuss out the policemen, but figuring out how, what we need to do to educate the community. One of the theories and the things that I have lived by is: yes, I've had some experiences in the community with some discrimination, but

not as much as some of the people that I talk to have. Because I've been out there. I've been a part of the community. I've lived in the community and I thank a lot of the people that I know I, grew up with. I figured out just being a part of what they do is that they accept you more when they know you and know what you do. Even if I do something that's silly or, you know, some people might say "stupid" is they know it, they grow up –they grow up with you in the community.

And if you're sheltered away and you're separated from this, and you're at an agency, it's different, because you don't get that. You know, "You're like us, you're part of us." You get, "You go to that agency over there, you're a part of "X" agency." I think you lose your identity, as a person. And for people knowing who you are and understanding you, that identity is so important. 'Cause it would be so important for me to relate to you as Joe, instead of relating to you as –well you're AUCD, you know, that's where you come from. So you're that organization. So I think for people with disabilities, it's all the advocates relating as people, and being more in the communities is important. That is one of the keys. Because, you know, I've been to Japan, I've been to Canada, I've been to Thailand, and all of the people, whether I spoke the language or not, we felt that kind of a unspoken language. I mean when I got ready to come back from Japan... You know, they had a couple of advocates stayed with us the whole way, and they felt it was an honor to escort us back to the airport, and help us with our bags and things like that. And, you know, for the couple of weeks, we had made such a connection. I had made such a connection with them. We had made connections, and they listened to us, and we worked with them and ate with them, and you know, chatted, talked, connected until they were like crying, upset that we really had to leave. So, you know, you don't see that most of the time with people that you meet. You know, people are like, "I've got to go home, bye," You know, "we're out of here." I think it's just the feeling that we get and the support that we know that people have some of the same issues, but we just connect and understand those.

I think it goes even beyond just ordinary having a disability, its understanding. I know we still have some people that sometimes, you know, they might get on our nerves and stuff, but that's not going to stop us, if they need something, or they need help, or they want us to work with them. You know, that's not going to stop us from doing that, 'cause that is who we are. We just do it. And when we do that, and people get on our nerves, we don't say it because of the disability. Usually, we say it knowing who they are, and that's the way that they, you know, do things. You know, if I'm doing something and I would expect my friends and I would expect people to tell me, let me know, don't do it or let me get away with it, just because, you know, they think of my disability. If I'm not doing

it right, kick me in my booty. So I think it's, you know, a lot of, you know, understanding where people are coming from.

Caldwell: What do you think the connection is? I mean what do you think that -- that bonds that you can feel the bond? What is it?

Finn: I mean it's... They know where I'm coming from. I know where they're coming from. We can relate. We don't have to, you know, you don't have to make up something. You know, when someone says, you know, they don't like the workshop, or they don't like their group home, you understand that. Or someone's telling them what to do, or the situation and they want to be in the community, and they want to have their own house, their own place, I can connect with that. 'Cause either we've been there, or it's happened to us, or we might be going through the situation now. I mean a lot of the things that people tell me, you know, it hasn't been stuff that I haven't, you know, experienced. And for a lot of times, you have to be a part of that and have that happen to you, to really understand it.

I mean a lot of times you get people who say, "Well, you must do this, as self-advocates, or you must do this as people with disabilities, you know, development disabilities." I think we kind of understand each other because most of the time people don't reach out. You know, they mention all different types of disabilities, but if you mention development disabilities, they quickly assume that people don't have the capacity to understand or know what's happening in their lives, or somebody has to help them, or somebody has to explain it. And that's not, you know, that's not the case. Sometimes that kind of thinking gets you riled up. Because we're always needing to explain to people that people are capable. You know, most other disabilities, people look at people as, "Oh, look what they can do, that's wonderful. Oh." You know, they sort of get amazed. You say a developmental disability and, "Oh! There's something wrong, or that's dangerous." So we all connect in that way, and we have to, 'cause most of the time, you know, they try to exclude you from just everyday regular things.

Caldwell: Can you talk more about maybe the difference between the self-advocacy movement and independent living movement or physical disability and developmental disability. Really a couple things, why are there two separate movements? Is it because people had different experiences? And then just what do you see the two movements working together on?

Finn: I think people have had different experiences. But I think when you mentioned development disabilities and the way people have been treated, they get the idea that people don't have the capacity, or they don't have, you know, they look at it as, "They don't understand it." They look at it as, "Well, they don't have the mental capacity, or they don't have the

capacity, people make decisions for them, you know?" And we do, we make our decisions. You know, a lot of the times people won't say it to you, but you get that, that feeling in their actions. Last week, when I was in Ohio, I was with one of the self advocates, and they were having a Brain Injury Association meeting right after that. And she was trying to talk to this guy that she knew, to get some information, because she also was part of the, you know, Brain Injury Association. And he was actually listening to her, but he really wasn't paying attention to what she was saying. And he was trying to get away and doing something else at the same time, but she knew that he really wasn't listening and brushing her off.

And I think, as far as learning how to do things, like I told you, when I was in school, the school was preparing me and preparing us to deal with people out in the community, don't matter what, who it was, but we were dealing with people in the community from the level of being sighted and non-sighted, and how people were going to treat you. So, you know, that was one preparation that I was ready for. The difficulty that I had, when I found out that I had to deal with a development disability, and this whole idea of medicines and things like that, I could still do those things, but I hadn't lost, to me, I hadn't lost my independence. But a lot of people that, to me, they were no different than me, they just had, you know, some other, you know, disabilities, but they could learn, you know, they could work with, you know, doing stuff. And I just didn't see people respecting them, and giving them the opportunity. And I think that, you know, when you have a development disability, people want to look out for your safety and protect you, more so than letting you be out there to learn things and do things on your own. If I just was a person with a visual impairment, there's stuff out there for me. They teach you how to be out there, and be in the world, and then you're on your own. They don't make anything else for you, or any places that you can go, you know, other than the Commission for the Blind, but they don't do that much for you after you learn all the stuff, or get through the stuff that you need to get through. You know, once that happens, after you get out of school or college or whatever you're doing, you know, they look at it as now you're out in the world. And I don't see, at any point, I think, when you're fighting for your independence, you know, when you have development disabilities, you're always fighting for something, to prove. And, you know, other disabilities, you don't. You might have to prove something sometimes, but you have to have some type of physical disability that they can see, for them to, you know, work on, you know, holding you back from what you need to do. I hope that explains some.

Caldwell: It's good thoughts. I mean these are things that, you know, people are thinking about more and more, about the differences between different experiences of different people with disabilities. And I wanted to ask you,

if you have you ever heard of like people use the phrase disability identity, have you heard that at all used?

Finn: Yeah.

Caldwell: Do you know like what, what that is kind of getting at? Like when people talk about it? Like disability identity or disability pride? Have you heard those things?

Finn: I think that, for me, it's just people haven't identified who they are and what their disability is, you know, how they can work with it. And they're not proud, because most of the time when you have a disability, you get "There's something wrong. You've got to be fixed. It's got to be changed. Don't you want to be different?" And it's hard to understand, to get people to understand you want to be who you are and what you are. I mean people are like, "Well, don't you want to see?" Well, it might be nice, but I don't know what it is, so if you just ask me straight out, and you wanted a straight, honest answer, "No." I mean I know what it is to not see as well, or to be blind. I mean I can't tell you that sitting here. Being able to see across the room, and see things as good as they are, and be outside and seeing a house and seeing a window, and being able to see somebody's T.V. No. I don't know what it is. I mean even having a little bit of sight, and being able to see, I can only see as far as what that is. You know, anything beyond that is hard to explain.

Caldwell: I think that the concept of pride or self-esteem are a little bit about sometimes when people with disabilities might feel bad about themselves or have low self-esteem, or are afraid to speak up or those sort of issues and versus feeling proud of who they are. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Finn: I think one of the things that made me happy was when I went to a conference, and, of course, I've always told people, you know, if you want to know something about me, ask, but I'm glad. I love who I am. I would not exchange me for nobody else. Uh, as John Hockenberry, who was giving his speech, and he was talking about, you know, having a disability, and being able to do some of the things that he did, but he was talking about knowing who he was, and being proud of that. I was happy to hear him say that. Because a lot of times people think, "You poor thing. Don't you want to do something different?" Or if you see movies and people are blind, either a miracle catches them and they do stuff that's way above or they are not going to get their sight, and they're going to be depressed and die.

And it's not like that. I mean life is so much fun and interesting. I mean I have a whole thing, a lot of things in my life that people will never do and experience, a whole life time. And I've met lots of people that relate to

that. And I just have the experience of people relating to me, as just who I am. You know, I talk to people at the airport. I talk to people on the airplane. And I just talk to them as people. I mean and people more now will ask, "Oh, sir, do you need any help," or something like that? You know, the other day the lady said that at the airport, 'cause the people at the airport that were supposed to be helping me, didn't, you know, help me. So, you know, I've always been able to have people ask me, you know, if I need it. Yes. If I don't, I tell them in a nice way. I'll never yell and scream and snap them up. It's like, "I want my independence, you'd better, you know, back away from me." But I do know people that will do that, you know, and I have to let them know, you know, it's okay to be independent, but it's another thing to be independent to the point, where you scare people from helping other people. 'Cause I've had people say that, because that's one disadvantage that I would say to being blind and visually impaired is, you know, they might ask for help, and the people go up one side of them and down the other and cuss them out. And here me come along that might need a little bit of help and wanted a little bit of help, you ask somebody something, and they're not going to help me, because the other people have told them off. And I think where from the self-advocacy level, I think people understand more that, you know, how to relate to people in the community and not, you know, get so independent that you tell people off. I think people have learned that, you know, there's a certain amount of help, no matter who you are, that you need. And you might need somebody to do something for you. You might need somebody to open that door, or make sure that you know where the ramp is, or something like that. And I think that sometimes people that can do a lot more with some of the physical disabilities, they get away from that. Or sometimes I think that they might even be ashamed, and not proud of who they are, so, you know, they don't want people to know. And I mean that has to be hard for some people inside. 'Cause you are who you are.

Caldwell: I wanted to ask you some questions about leadership.

Finn: Okay.

Caldwell: Um, you know, I think leadership is a word that means a lot of different things to different people. What do you think leadership means to you?

Finn: I think being able to work with people, talk with people, and coming up with ideas and strategies of, you know, having people to help you, you know, carry out what it is. I believe in not asking people to do something unless, you know, you can be able to do it, you know, yourself, or carry it out. I think a lot of it is also planning what you need to do, and also relying and trusting on other people to work with you on what you need to do. I've been fortunate enough to be able to utilize, you know, the people around

me on doing certain things. I, um, also was the captain of my wrestling and track teams, and that was a big responsibility, because not only did you have to set an example of, you know, participating in the sport... Take wrestling, for instance, you had to be able to set an example for the rest of the team. So that means you couldn't get into a lot of trouble. You had to set a good example. You had to keep your grades up, and, you know, it taught you a lot about leading people. And you had to be able to encourage your teammates when they lost or when they were down, which sometimes it was hard. Because we did have some people that didn't respect other people, and, you know, they thought they were the greatest. And sometimes when they got their behinds whooped, it was kind of refreshing to see them get knocked down off their pedestal. But you still had to do what you needed to do as a leader. So, you know, in some cases that was hard. Being a leader, as far as with the track team goes, it was a little different, 'cause you didn't have to work with people and things like that, but you never knew what was going to happen. Because you could be the best at something, and then that day somebody might be faster than you was, or, you know, they jumped a little farther than you did, and it was a little harder to kind of be a leader, you know, in that aspect.

Um, I think also, you know, being a leader, you also got to be able sometimes, when things don't go the way you want them to or the way you planned them, that you've got to be able to stand up sometimes and take the heat for things. Um, when we were, um, fighting with the Alliance and not going back to the table, there was a lot of pressure, a lot of heat that, you know, was coming down. And I said, "Well, I can handle this. I've got to be able to take it." You know, people were calling, and, you know, they were in my face like, "You can't do this. You guys just got to go back to the table. You're going to be missing out. You're not going to be a part of something." But I always believed that you'll know when's the right time to stand up for issues, or stand up for your rights. And it was just the right time. It was the time to stand up for what we believed in. And there was no way that I felt that we could back down. Or I had to stay strong to set an example for how we had to prove that, you know, we wanted to be respected, and we wanted people to have people listen to us. And that the goals and things that we set for ourselves, as an organization, was important, despite, you know, people saying you needed to be there, or you needed to go to the table. Yeah, we were going to do that, but on our own terms.

Caldwell: What would you say leadership means within the self-advocacy movement?

Finn: I think it's more than just a name or a position. I know a lot of people, they want to be the president, or they wanted to be the chair, or they wanted to

be the leader, they liked the name of it. Or if you get to travel, they like to travel. But people don't realize the amount of work that happens behind the scenes. They don't realize what you have to go through to get to that level. I've had a lot of people and, you know, some important people say, "Well, you, you're good at speaking for yourself, but you don't speak for my child, or you don't speak for the people that I know." And that's about one of the only things that really gets to me, that I really want to let people have it. Because they don't understand what it took to get us to the point where we're at now.

Um, I can't say that I've always been a person that didn't speak out, because I've always spoke my mind in no matter what it was in the way that, you know, I knew how. When I was younger, and my parents would tell me something, I would have a question for it. "Well, what happens with this? Why is this?" You know, I wouldn't do it in a nasty way, but I would question what it was, and wanted to know what happens, and why is it that way? You know, I just didn't take it and go on and say, "Okay, you know, you said so, so that's the way it is." I think people don't give themselves enough time to, you know, question, to think it through. I mean no matter what it is, I think about it, and I debate with myself. And then when I come up with the conclusion that that's what it's supposed to be, you know, that's what happens.

I think also for me setting the example and doing stuff, you know, what you're asking people to do is so important, if I was going to speak out on an issue, I wouldn't just do the issue, and tell everybody else, "Well, this is what you've got to do to be a good advocate." You've got to be able to do it. Well, I also feel that I have to say what I feel, but also show the people what it is to, you know, stand up for that, and, you know, be a leader. And, you know, you've got to be able to take the pressure, you know, as far as, you know, there's going to be some people that really, you know, get on you about it; and you've got to be able to stay strong and, you know, not back down. And I think a lot of people will say, "Well, you know, people want me to do that. My advisor... If I speak out, or if I do this in the meeting, and it'll make the advisor feel good." Well, you're not doing stuff to please the advisor. The advisor might, you know, compliment you on what you do, but it's your life. You're trying to change something in your life or other people's lives that you know. That it's a whole movement. It's a whole process, and it's not just about what's the director of the agency going to think about you? Or what the advisor's going to think. It's how you're going to feel about working and speaking for other people. I know, for me, uh, when someone calls me up and says, "Well, I got that job that I was after," or "I spoke up for myself at the workshop at the meeting." Or, you know, a lot of times I'm only thinking about it when it happens, when I'm talking to people, I like to tell them like it is. If I'm talking to an advocacy group, and they're not doing what they're supposed

to make things happen in their lives, I'm going to tell them. I'm going to say, "Well, you're saying something to the provider agencies or to the families about you want your freedom, or, you know, you want to be responsible for your life. And then when it comes time for you to do it and you don't do anything about it, then that's a waste of time. It's like why waste the energy? Why tell people that, if you're not willing to live up to it."

So, for me, it's so important to take a stance on something and really believe in that. Even though someone took a stance the opposite of what I thought or what I believed in, if they're standing up for it, I respect them more than if they say something, and it comes time to do it, and then they, you know, change their mind and back down, and say, "Well, I felt that the agency wasn't working for us." And, you know, they would say it at the meeting, but when it came time to meet with the director or meeting with the supervisor and tell them what it was, you know, backing down. I feel very strongly about, you know, standing up for it. You might not get what you want at first, but at least you had the courage to speak on what you wanted.

Caldwell: And just to go back to something you just said about you get really upset when parents say, "Well, you don't speak for my son or my daughter, or you don't understand their situation." Can you talk more about that?

Finn: Uh, I understand, because there's things that happened in my life. It's like if I call a cab, and I'm waiting for a cab and they're late, I'm dependent on them. If they don't come, I mean I probably could walk up the street. Well, just say if it's in the winter, I'm not walking up the street to figure out how to get home, 'cause it's going to be cold to get the bus, and the street that I would have to cross is dangerous, so, you know, I don't do that. But I'm dependent on the cab, so I know how, you know, plus jaded, I would get, you know, I'm waiting for the cab, and, you know, there's nothing I can do about it. So when people are in a situation, where they have to depend on other people to do things for them, I can kind of relate to that and know what it is, because it's a lot of times, when you have to rely on, you know, people that with vision, or, you know, as I say in the blind or visually impaired world, is that, you know, the sighted person, the things that people will be able to do, because they can see. And if you can't sometimes you're limited. So, I look at other people's situations or other people's lives to kind of, um, put myself kind of in that place. And, you know, feelings for people are the same, no matter what situation you're in. If you can't do something, and you have to rely on other people, no matter who it is, all of us get, you know, one time or another in our lives we get that, how can I get around this? And it's hard, and it's difficult. So, you know, I can understand where people might try to communicate with other people, and people don't understand them.

I know one time I was in the hospital for a few days. It's like my voice just disappeared, and there was nothing I could do about it. And I had to try to point out things, and try to make up my own type of sign language. I had to write things down. And I wasn't sure if people could read my writing or not. And I had to deal with all that until my voice came back. You know, and I'm thinking, oh, man, and I knew it before, but it hit home even more, when I couldn't speak and people trying to communicate what I thought and what I felt, you know, wanted people to know, and they were guessing of what I was saying. And when they didn't guess the right thing I was just frustrated on figuring out another way that I could communicate with people. So I will understand with trying to, you know, talk and communicate with some of my friends that, you know, don't speak, but try to communicate with people on what they want, you know. Sometimes I know and I understand that it can get frustrating, that it can be a hard thing.

So a lot of times, you know, parents will say to us, "Well, you don't understand." But we do understand from the standpoint of people having a disability, and trying to communicate with people that don't know us or understand us. I mean even if they understood who we were and some of the things that we had to deal with, they could, you know, relate that to, oh, maybe they don't have the same, uh, situation as my child, but they do have some limitations, as people with disabilities. I think we understand that more of dealing with each other, than trying to explain it to other people that don't, you know, understand that. I mean sometimes, you know, people will say, "Well, you don't understand, you're not in that person's shoes." True enough, but you have some similar situations that you can, that you can relate to.

'Cause a lot of times, you know, when I'm waiting for a bus or waiting for something, a cab or something, and there's people all around, it's like how can you communicate to those people that you might need assistance, that you might need help, unless you do something, or you get a look on your face. Even sometimes when you get a look on your face, you know, they might walk by, "Oh, something's wrong. That man looks different." And they just keep going. The only time is sometimes if you just, you know, hit say your cane on the floor, or kick the pole or something like that, and then people would see that you're frustrated and upset about something, and then they'll say, "Oh, what's wrong? Are you upset about something?" And then you would tell them. But we don't, you know, we don't do that. It's not a thing that you, you know, you naturally would do. I mean in our world if you, um, act out because of something, you're frustrated or upset, you know, people naturally say, "Well, something's wrong. We've got to get some assistance for that person. They're having a behavioral..." You know, they never think that, you know, you just get upset and frustrated about things.

Caldwell: Uh-huh. Yeah, you keep talking about this bond or connection between people with disabilities. And would you say there are positive things that come from being a person with a disability that, that you've experienced?

Finn: I think in my life, yes.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: Because when my friends and my brothers went out to play ball, I went right out there with them. You know, I used to play basketball with them. I used to. Sometimes we would play one-on-one basketball, and sometimes, a lot of the times, I'd kick their behinds, because I would practice at it, you know. And people think that you've always got to know, or you've always got to see something. But I learned the basketball court to the point of where I knew what position I was in, or even if someone was under the basket, and they made no noise, I knew which direction that you could throw the ball. And then if you practice something enough times, you don't have to see, you can just, you know, get in the different position and just fly through the air, or make it happen. You know, people think that eyes guide things, you know. And for me, you hear something, you know, sound is a very important part and smell, and, you know, you get clues from those things. I try to tell people that in the winter, summer, spring and fall that there's different sounds. You could be in the same area, like around this building when there's no leaves on the trees, the sounds are different. You know, they bounce off the objects. You hear them different. You hear more things. You can hear cars at a farther distance, than if you have leaves on the trees, and you don't hear, you know, some of the sound is muffled, or it bounces a different way. You know, it's hard to explain to people those kind of things. And other people with disabilities that, you know, have some things that they compensate. You know, the sounds out there was different. Did you notice how it bounced off the building or the trees? Or, you know, if somebody was, you know, in the wheelchair and they noticed about the sidewalks; well, this part of the sidewalk wasn't smooth, there was a lot of lumps, it was hard, you know, maneuvering your chair around on this sidewalk in this area. You know, they can relate to, you know, relate to those things. You know, and trying to talk to just ordinary people about some of the things that you experience and, you know, connect with is harder unless, you know, you find something that they would, you know, connect with. Or you point it out, and then they see what you're talking about.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: I think, you know, it's just easier to relate to someone with disabilities. I know all I've got to do, and it's the same for people with me, is find out that, you know, a person has a similar disability or something related, or they receive services at one time from an agency, or something, and then

we just ordinarily connect and start talking about it. You know, it's almost like a whole, you know, language. And I've had positive things in my life, because people have not so much denied me of doing things. They've always been interested, and they would tell me, "Well, you're different than somebody that I've met. You know, you seem to be independent." And they say, "Well, you don't act like you're blind." I'm like, "Well, what's that? Can you explain to me how am I supposed to act? Or what am I supposed to do that I'm not doing?" You know, they'll say, "Well, you're not bumping into things." And I say, "Well, I have my share of bumping into things. Sometimes it's that I might not be listening to my clues or paying attention, or maybe in a hurry." But, you know, they say, "Well, you're not walking real slow, you're not feeling around for stuff, and you don't look unsure of yourself." I was like, "Oh, is that how people are supposed to, you know, seem that, you know, they're visually impaired, as doing those things?"

I don't even think about it. You know, sometimes I'm lost, and looking for something, and people will walk by thinking that I'm okay. And I was, you know, sometimes I was thinking, maybe if I had some of those tendencies or kind of looked like I was out-of-place, couldn't see or didn't know where I was, maybe I would get some help. You know, people would ask, "Well, do you need assistance going somewhere or doing something?" And, you know, sometimes it doesn't work. There's been occasions where, you know, people will come up and say, "Well, do you need assistance?" Like the other day at the airport, when the people that were supposed to be helping me didn't come up, and, you know, one of the ladies that were flying on the plane asked me if I was going on the plane. And I let her see my ticket, and she said, "Yeah, I will be glad to help you." She said, "Why didn't they come and help you? They were supposed to, it said it right here." You know, so I've had positive experiences with certain things that I wanted to do that, you know, people, you know, recognizing me. You know, and then sometimes I would get where I would go in a place or a store or be somewhere, and the people would call, and they would say it quietly. "Well, we have a blind man here that needs help. Can you help the blind man?" I was like, "I'm fine, you can say it," you know. You know, I'm not going to get upset that you say, you know, that I need help, you know. These are the things that I'm capable of, and these are the things that I might need help with.

I like to tell my friends and tell the story, one time when I lived in Batavia, where as I said, I went to school, and it was a blizzard, and it was cold, and I was freezing, and I thought I was going to get frostbite in my hands, and my feet were going to fall off, and then my ears and the rest of me were going to follow. So I said, "I don't know, these cars are not stopping to help me. Can't they see or know that I'm lost?" And I said, "I know what I will do, I'll make a snowball, and I'll throw it at the first car I hear, or

the lights I see coming in this direction." So I got ready, and I positioned myself by the road, and I was waiting for the car to come up the road. All of a sudden, a car comes up the road, and it's getting ready to drive by me, and I reached back and I whipped the snowball at the car. Poom! And I was happy, 'cause I hit it. And then the car slows down, and the man gets out, and he says, "Son." "Yes?" "Do you know what you did?" "Yup." He said, "Do you really know what you did?" I said, "Yup." I said, "Sir, I'm freezing, I'm cold, and I think my hands are going to fall off and my feet are going to fall off, and my ears and the rest of me are going to follow." I said, "Where are the Police when you really need them? They're never around." I said, "Now I need one because I'm lost, and I want to get back to school, and there's no one to help." And he said, "Sir," he said, "young man, I will help you back. Where do you need to go?" And I told him, and he said, "Well, now, don't be throwing snowballs at no more cars or whatever." And I said, "Well, why? Can you help me?" I said, "I needed a Policeman." And he said, "Son, I am a Policeman." I was like, "For real?" So he showed me the badge, and he was a Policeman, and he said, "I'll give you a ride back to school." I said, "Can you do me one favor?" I said, "Can you not put your siren on, but can you turn your light on?"

So I learned a lesson not to throw snowballs at a car, but I didn't know what to do. I was freezing. I was looking for a Policeman. It was always when I was out walking and there was no snow and it was dry on the ground, I always got Policemen coming and saying, "Well, son, do you need help? Or can we help you?" And I'm like, "Oh, no, no, I'm fine, I know where I'm going." And the one time I need them, I had to throw a snowball at them to get their attention. But, you know, for the most part, even when I go in stores and things, I get to talking to people, and I meet people on planes, buses, trains. And I've been pretty good at being able to meet people, you know, talk with people.

Caldwell: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about, you know, the connection with other people with disabilities, or sort of a community of people with disabilities. You, had experiences, where you, through school or through when you were at the workshop, you connected with people with other disabilities, but a lot of young people today that have been, you know, kind of in mainstream schools or, you know, they might be isolated from other people with disabilities, and might not even know any other people with disabilities. So is that, you know, how is that important to who they are?

Finn: I would say it's a disadvantage. Even though people say mainstreaming is good and that they need it, and that they want it for their child. It's good to let the community know who you are, but you have to grow up with it, and have it happen kind of throughout your life. There's a time when you need to learn the things that you need to learn to survive as a person with a

disability. I probably would have got to do some of the things that I did, as a person with a disability, if I hadn't have went to the School for the Blind and learned the things that I learned, but it helped me better, you know, knowing the people I went to school with that was also blind or visually impaired. I talked to a lot of my friends; it's helped them a lot. Because it helped them learn how to do things for themselves and be independent, but also be, you know, proud of what they're doing. Because I know a lot of people also that I've met, that went to regular schools, and half of the stuff I was comfortable with and knew how to do, they never experienced it. You know, I had some people tell me, "Well, you went to gym class? You did all those things?" You learned how to, you know, do gymnastics and things like that, and, you know, work on a palmer horse or up there on the ropes way up in the sky and things like that. And, you know, learned in school how to jump on the trampoline and do flips and tricks and back flips and all of those things. They never got to experience those things, 'cause in gym the teachers were afraid that they would get hurt, and that they wouldn't be able to do some of those things. So in our school they taught us to experience some of the same things and the same experience that kids from, you know, the regular schools were doing or experiencing.

I experienced working in the woodshop, in the metal shop, you know, working on the blade, working on all of the table saw –which I was definitely afraid of that table saw, 'cause that thing made all kinds of noise. My teacher had to trick me into using it, because he had to have me practice with it everyday without it being on. And what safety precautions you had to take, you know, with your goggles and all of that. And one day I was going through the motions of using it, and he turned it on. And the thing was making that noise. I was scared inside, but I had to go through the motions of it, for the safety part of it, and it cut the wood and nothing happened. And he sat down and explained to me, and asked me what the experience was like. Yeah, I was scared to death, but I went through with it, because it was on, and, you know, if you didn't do the right thing, you could get hurt. I mean it seems like a hard lesson, but, you know, it taught me even something that you are afraid of, if you did the right procedures and did it the right way, that, you know, you could overcome it.

I think, you know, having those experiences, I wouldn't give up what I learned in my school, and how I learned it, you know, in working with the teachers, because that brought me to where I could do a lot more things now, and I was independent. I mean if I had stayed at my school, I probably would have learned things, but I probably would have had to depend on somebody always being around to help me, or being able to read to me. And, you know, as people got older, they would have drifted off into their own groups. So I didn't have to experience much of, you know, some of the things that people not accepting you for who you were,

or some of the things you knew how to do, because I did know how to do those things. And it kind of prepared me also, when I was, you know, at college, I was very independent. I mean I learned how to get around. I learned how to get to the classrooms. If I didn't know, I could ask somebody, but they would tell me, but I'd learned that college like the back of my hand. It had like three or four different levels, and it had three or four different sections, you know, three floors and everything. But the classrooms and the letters were kind of simple, once you figured them out. Because you had section A over here, and the room was arranged a different way. Then you had section B, which was similar, C, D, so it was kind of easy, you know, to learn some of those things. And I think that you just have to, you know, work and know people. You know, I got to participate in some of the community stuff, you know, the same as my sisters and brothers, you know. I participated. I used to go to the school with them to the recreational programs on Saturday, when I was home. The people at the school got to know me, and I got to participate in 4H. I got to go...

Caldwell: Are there still a lot of state schools like that, that are just for the blind?

Finn: No.

Caldwell: Or are they more likely now to go to a regular school?

Finn: They go to regular schools, but they miss something.

Caldwell: Are there still state schools like that, like what you...

Finn: Yes, my school is still around, but it handles also a lot of, it also turned over now to developmental disabilities.

Caldwell: Oh, really?

Finn: Yeah. In fact, this office is taking over the school from the State Education Department.

Caldwell: So most kids today would go to a regular school?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: You know, they would be mainstreamed, but there's a lot of stuff that they miss out on. Because people don't think that they should have to use Braille, that they have tapes and computers. Which tapes and computers are fine, but they don't do everything for you. I mean I wouldn't have been able to do as much, if I didn't know Braille. Because if somebody doesn't write it down for me or work with me, I can go and write a letter and go and write pretty much what I want to, and then save it until I get to a

typewriter or computer. I can type very well, because I've been typing since grade school all the way through high school. So before they even had computers, I had a typewriter. So I had ways of, you know, communicating with the outside world. And nowadays they don't teach those things, because they think computers will do everything. But if you don't have people around, or someone to read to you, or a way of scanning what's on the computer.... Yeah, you can get it from the internet, but just day-to-day work or independence, writing down numbers, you're lost. Like if I get a phone call, and someone wants me to write down a number, I go and get my Braille and Braille it. And once I Braille it and look at it one time, I've got it in my head.

Caldwell: Do you think that the self-advocacy movement, how it gives people an opportunity to be with other people with disabilities, does that help influence who they are makes them feel proud about themselves?

Finn: Yes. Yes, because there's always encouragement. I would say more than any other disability, people are discriminated against more with the developmental disability. But also, as a support organization for each other, there's nothing like it. I mean people support each other, and really support. If you need help, if we're out together, we're helping each other. We look out for each other. If there's no ramps, or it's not accessible, when I go somewhere, the first thing that pops into my mind or I think about, "Is this place accessible?" I wonder what the rooms are like? Or if I go to a restaurant, where's the accessible entrance?" Where's it, you know, what happens if some of my other friends are with me, what would they do? Could they get in? Is there enough room in this place with the tables? And I ask people, and I said, "Well, I don't have them with me here today, but they might be coming in. I have friends that use wheelchairs, or friends that, you know, use crutches, and, you know, other things, so what do you do for that? What are you prepared for?"

And I think that we create a different type of awareness. I know even in the blind and visually impaired community, some of the groups don't get along, because they have a difference of opinion, how they want things to go. Sometimes they can't agree on, um, what accessibility people need. But they also argue over where you –whether you belong to the National Federation for the Blind or the National Counsel of the Blind, and they fight. You know, you're supposed to be making things better for each other, but they can't even agree. Here in our state, the independent living movement, they have two different organizations that don't work together. They're starting to work somewhat together, but they don't work together on getting things done. And the biggest group and the closest group and the ones that are setting the examples are the Self-Advocacy Association. Self advocates all over this state. Even when the new Governor came in, he noticed how this office, OMRDD, had a big advocacy presence, as far

as self advocacy and parents –that there was no other network in the state that was as strong as self-advocacy. It's working with state government, and the legislatures and things like that. Everybody knows now about self advocacy, which before people barely knew what it was.

Caldwell: Let me go back to some of the stuff about leadership. Who would you say your role models or mentors were?

Finn: Well, I had many people that I watched, but I think the first group of people that I watched was my grandmother, great grandmother, my aunt and uncle, my mother and father, because those were the first people that I saw, you know, and learned things from watching and listening to them. And then, you know, had great uncles and things like that, and I listened to them. Because when I was in Alabama, even though I was a young kid, people told me things about history, and I saw stuff. My great uncle was a blacksmith, and he still had his shop, you know, right there on his land and his house. And I was just not too old, but I was still young enough to know and see the horses, where they still, you know, at that time in Alabama, they still had horses. So he still would shoe horses. So, you know, I sat and watched. And he showed me the tools that he used, you know, those things. But me, myself, I would never put the shoe on the horse and pound the thing in, even though I had the opportunities, because to me, it would hurt the horse. But he told me it never did. That, you know, they had part of their feet that were, you know, when they did that, it didn't bother them, you know, they were comfortable with it. 'Cause that's why they didn't kick you or bite you when you were putting it on. And I got to see horses. I got to see mules and cows. And I got to ride on wagons downtown. I got to see cotton. I got to pick cotton. But the time I was picking cotton, I went to reach down and touch something on the ground, and found out it was a snake, and I ran out of the cotton fields, yelling, "Snake, snake." I would not go back.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: I went to a cotton gin. I saw where they took the cotton and make it, you know, I got to experience those things. So everything I saw and learned wasn't bad. I looked at them as pretty good experiences.

Caldwell: Who are some of your other kind of role models? Maybe when you were a young adult, did you have any role models or mentors that you really wanted to be like?

Finn: I grew up reading, and what little I knew about, John F. Kennedy, and I read a lot about Abraham Lincoln. I read about Ghandi, and watched, you know, some of the stuff that I could sort of remember on T.V. I mean I watched and heard things about Eisenhower. But, you know, one of my favorite people and that it fascinated me, and I don't know why, was just

some of the stuff that Dr. King was talking about. Because he was the in the south. And he wasn't a hero of mine, George Wallace. I learned the things that he wasn't doing, and I always thought about well, why is he standing in front of the college to keep people out? But also on the other hand, remember, that I said when I started at the school and I grew up, I went to an all black school. So while civil rights and all those things was important, I also knew, at that time, that there was colleges that we could go to. So when you grew up around, you know, having a black college that you could go to, I mean you thought of going there. So you didn't think so much that you wanted to go to Notre Dame or something like that. It was either, you know, you wanted to go to, you know, Alabama State, Tuskegee or, you know, most people, uh, Grambling, Jackson State or Howard. You know, those were the, you know, Bethune Cookman, you know, some of those colleges. So my goals and dreams were to go to Tuskegee. I wanted to go there. But then, you know, when I moved, and I had to live with my parents, my goals had changed a little, but I still watched and, you know, followed, you know, Martin Luther King, because I listened to a lot of stuff that he said, because he was on the radio; even though I wasn't old enough to understand everything, I always knew that civil rights was important, you know, in everybody's life.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: So, you know, I connected to that. And another thing that I connected to a lot was, I connected to Bobby Kennedy, 'cause he was always, he was on T.V. And he was here, and I watched the stuff that he talked about. And he knew and connected with civil rights, and he stood up for those things, and to me, even more so, he was the one that was, you know, leading the fight and leading the charge for that. And I also know a lot of stuff about Malcolm X, and, you know, there was a lot of sports heroes from Alabama, you know, people like Hank Aaron, you know, Willie Mays, you know, some of those people were, born in Alabama.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And at that time a lot of people did not know, but James Brown was an important figure in the black community, because he sang music and everything, you know, at one time was James Brown, you know. You grew up dancing. You grew up with all these things. You knew about James Brown. You'd seen him on T.V. all the time. He was always in the newspapers. So, you know, you had some people that you really connected with. Aretha Franklin, she was one of the, you know, people. And then, you know, a lot of, you know, the people around the, you know, Black Panthers was important. And at that time also, President Johnson was an important figure. I mean he wasn't John F. Kennedy, but he was important to as far as he was signing the voting act and civil rights act, you

know, all of those things. So he was in the middle of stuff. And then also a great figure that, you know, most people don't think about or whatever was Muhammed Ali, you know, at that time. At first, he was Cashis Clay, but he started speaking and talking about the war, not going to the war. So a lot of relating to him in the black community, because sports figures were very, very important, 'cause you saw them all the time. And it was important, you know, what they would say, you know, what they would do was important.

Caldwell: What about in the disability community? Were there any leaders or people you met along the way that kind of influenced you?

Finn: Well, I think in the disability community, one person that really struck me in what they were doing, and I tried to be wherever he was, to hear what he had to say, and, you know, getting to meet him and talk with him, and then getting to be, you know, friends with, knowing him or whatever, was: Justin Dart. Because to me, he told us what we had to do, but why and how we had to do it. So to me, he was a real, you know, important figure, as far as disability rights, and, you know, civil rights and voting and stuff like that. You know, the first time I heard him, I saw him in Oklahoma at the self-advocacy conference, 'cause they had him speak in Oklahoma. I remember when I was doing Project Leadership training in Washington, when we did it for like three years or so, SABE, and, uh, Justin wasn't feeling well, and we thought a couple of times that, you know, we might lose him. We came into Washington, and we were going to have the training, and, uh, Justin was going to come to the training, and he was real sick. But he called up and said that he wanted to come and meet with us. And he came over, and he was going to stay for an hour. He came over and spent that time with us, even though he was weak and he was sick, he came. And, you know, it was, it was, it was a lot. It was powerful that him, in the condition that he was in, still took time to come and speak with us, and spend some time with us, and encourage us. You know, and I know he wasn't feeling that well.

Caldwell: What qualities and skills do you think are important for leaders to have?

Finn: Listening, understanding and patience. And figuring that you can do things together, and that you can't, you don't need to do everything. That you utilize the people that you have around you. I mean I learned that very well from Commissioner, former Commissioner Tom Mall. I mean not only was he a boss, but he also was a friend. So, you know, he would, from time to time, give me encouragement, as a friend, and you usually don't get that, you know? You get people being a boss, or people being your supervisor, but you don't get that as people giving you advice as friends. And I've got a lot of that from people around here. They get to know you. And, you know, they can't help but be involved. And a lot of

times you don't get that, because the advocate sort of people with disabilities are not able to get that close.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: So I've been real lucky to have supports in my life that enabled me to get where I am. But also me, as a person, have to not forget how to utilize and how to work with people. And also, how to give back to people, what I've learned and the opportunities that I've experienced make it possible for other people coming up to have those opportunities. I mean that was one of the reasons why, when I had an opportunity to sue the agency, that I didn't want to go through a long lawsuit or ask for any money. For me, it was opportunity for someone else. I mean I was so happy and proud to show those people that I could be in that cafeteria, but also, that whenever someone else asked for the opportunity that they got it.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: I mean it wasn't about how much money could I make off of a lawsuit? Or how long would it take? I wouldn't have been happy. I mean you get money, and you figure out how you got it, it wasn't making me happy. Because if a person would still be told, "No, oh, well, you can't see or you can't walk, or you're in a wheelchair, so you can't do this job." I mean that was more important, and it's still the most important thing, the opportunities for people. Someone gave me an opportunity, made it possible to do, to be able to do the things that I do, so it was, you know, just that important to me.

We, as national leaders, we have to be able to set an example. It's not about the title. It's not about being chair, and people invite you everywhere, or your name is in the paper and the headlines. I think it's your works. They speak to me, for who you are. And you've got to be able to be compassionate with people. You've got to be humble. You can't think that it's all about me. People can't get this job done without me. Maybe when I, um, left as president of this self-advocacy organization, I didn't leave the organization entirely. I mean I came here to work, but the board invited me to come back, as long as I wanted, as an advisor, to work with them. They insisted that I do that. And, you know, every board after that has looked to me as being an advisor. And I try to put into being an advisor what I wanted to see in an advisor, as far as, you know, listening, giving advice, but not telling the organization and the group what they had to do. Or using my experience to tell them, this is what I experienced, but this is what you have to do.

You have to carve your own goals and your own footprints in the way you want the organization to go. And it's about guiding, it's about not being jealous, and always want to be the one. I mean it's for me, starting out

working towards, you know, being the chair of something, or the leader, for the way at the time is good, but taking it where it needs to go, and watching it grow, and watch other people and encourage other people to do that and do their best. You know, it meant a lot more to me than always trying to hang on. I think sometimes people try to be the one at the top all the time for the wrong reasons. And if you can't make a difference, and you don't want to make a difference, why be there? Because you're only there, and people know who you are, but they don't know what you have accomplished, what the people have accomplished. What you have accomplished as a group.

I think one of the hopes I have for SABE and the national, that someday we be able to get an organization, where we can hire some people to help us do what we need to do, but have a presence in the country like we built here in our state. Because I think that it can happen and it will happen, but we just have to put the right things in place. But I think right now we have too many people that come to the table or come to the board with their own issues and their own goals. And to be a successful national organization, you have to be able to put some of those, a lot of those personal things aside, and think about what it will take to drive a national organization forward, and how to look forward to what will work here in my state, as well as Maryland, California, Alaska, Hawaii, all of the other states that we can make a difference, and that we mean something. When you say SABE, people know what you mean. People know what you have accomplished. And it takes dedicated people. I think we're getting to that point, but I think before it was about people being able to travel, people being able to do a lot of the stuff. You know, doing all the workshops and things like that. And it's, you know, not about that. I mean and I told people, "I can stay right here in my state and still be able to do the things I always do, rather than being on a national board or whatever." But I'm on the national board to work with people to set a foundation that will carry itself forward. 'Cause I always tell people, whether it's this office, OMRDD, or the Self Advocacy Association: the cause, the fight for freedom is greater than us, it's bigger than us. We're part of the fight, but we're not the fight. The fight itself has to come from everybody. It has to come from a lot of people sacrificing and giving up a part of themselves to make something happen. And I think until we learn how to do that overall, as a national organization, we won't grow as far as we want to go.

And, you know, giving back. One of the models, I learned early from our local, the first local Self-Advocacy group I was in, was always work towards giving something back to the community, because people always look at us, as people that want something, people that take something. They don't know or understand or look at that we give a lot back. We contribute a lot to the community. And I try to tell a lot of people that the people in the community that I've run into, they look to us as models, role

models. They look to us as examples. Because I've had a lot of people stop me on the bus, or stop me on the streets and say, "What are you doing? I see you, I see you everywhere doing things, going places?" And I explain to them about our work and advocacy and things like that, and they listen and accept. But I think that all of the bad experiences that some people have had, have turned them, you know, off or negative towards people in the community. And I just think that it's up to us to be able to educate and reach people. When I run into a difficult person in a difficult situation, I look at it as a challenge. How far can I reach down to teach that person? How far can I reach down to change that person's idea about how they feel about me, or how they feel about other people?" And it's a goal to accomplish that as, you know, to work hard, to make that happen, and it's most of the time I can work to succeed to make that happen.

I mean we make examples just going in the places. I go to the store down the corner, Italian store, uh, buy pasta, stuff out of there. I might go every day. They know me now, and they'll say, "Oh, how you doing?" They even know, "Well, where's your friend that comes in here with you?" You know, she's usually there. I said, "Oh, she went on vacation." You know, they get to know who I am, or they get to know who my friends are. People come and visit me, they're going take a tour through my neighborhood. They're going to look at the things that I like. They're going to go to the places that I like. See the people, meet the people that I know. Because that way, you're educating your community, and you're educating people to what, you know, your community is like. And you can't teach people, if you're not there, if you're not out in the community. If they don't see you, they don't know that you can do things, or that, you know, they don't see you, they don't know.

When I go to the polling place to vote, if people know me, or they did in my neighborhood, but they moved now to a different school, but they still know me. But they're not going to be seeing me that much, because I'm going to follow the accessible voting machine, so that's at the Board of Elections, so that'll be my new voting place. Because since I have my independence and voted on the accessible machines, I'm not going back to the primitive way of pulling those levers, or having someone tell me what I should do. You know, they're not telling me what to do, but they have to read and see what I'm doing. Like to go in there and that curtain closes, and I do what I like to do. 'Cause when I was in the polls voting, the ladies were worried about me. They said, "Are you all right in there, sir?" I said, "Oh, yes, I'm fine. I'm having a great time." I was. I looked at everything I could see in a great amount of time to cast my vote and be happy –then only to find out that they didn't count it, when they were supposed to count it. They treated our vote as absentee. So we're working hard to make sure that that don't happen again in this state or

anywhere. And, you know, a few weeks ago they tried to go through, you know, Nancy Pelosi's office, to make sure that, you know, they would give the state more time until 2010 to comply. And they know that they never would, but we're fighting with them here in the state. So we won the first round of the battle, and we're going to win others. But that means that we unify as a disability community.

We shouldn't just unify when something happens, but we should unify for all the time to get the things that we need. If we did that, we wouldn't be fighting as hard to get our civil rights. Or we wouldn't need to fight as hard for ADA, because the ADA has worked in my life to make changes. I was able to sue the workshop, while I was still going there, under the ADA, and they couldn't do too much about it. And it's other things. I was able to get accommodations here. Not that the people wouldn't have provided the accommodations for me here, but just the idea of the ADA out there, and that you can do something with it, you know, changed their minds. So I think that's even a part of, you know, leadership and making things happen. That we have to trust more in the things that we have available for us. If we don't get out there to fight, to restore the restoration of the ADA, we're not doing a service to ourselves or other people, because that was put there for us. That's our civil rights law. That's just as important as the civil rights law, and we let people get away with tearing it down. That's like slapping us in the face, and saying that we're less than.

Caldwell: Can you talk more about the sort of your vision for the future of the self-advocacy movement? What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the self-advocacy movement?

Finn: I'm worried. It goes back to something you said earlier: pride. I don't think we have some young people that have pride in themselves in who they are, and they go through some of the fights, and they fight for the stuff, like some of the things that we have, but we have a lot more that's hiding, to be accepted by the community. To be accepted by people out there, they're willing to give up who they are, their rights and their heritage of people having a disability, to say that they don't have a disability to try to fit in. I think that that's more dangerous to us than even we are, or a provider agency or a family or the government or Medicaid. We can do more damage to ourselves, when we deny who we are, and deny fighting for what we want. When we do that, it's almost like giving up, and saying, "Yes, cuff our hands, tie our feet, drag us back, throw us in the institutions, because we don't believe that the lives that we have, that the freedoms that we've gained are worth fighting for." We'd rather have people say what we should do, or put us in a place that, you know, they feel we need to be. So we've got to work with the young people. We've got to talk with them.

We've got to impress upon them how important freedom is, because they don't have the institutions to point back to a lot of the times. They're there, but they don't see it. They don't see where we fought to be in the community, to have housing. All of the things that we fight for, they don't see some of it. And when they do, they're caught up in the world of what they need to do, as far as look good in the eyes of the kids in the community, to be the cool kids, and that a disability is not cool. But we still have some kids, and we've got to work with them, that knows what the fight is about. That knows that they should be included in schools. That they should have jobs. That, you know, they don't want to be in sheltered employment, all of those kind of things. But there are some people that don't fight as hard, and that's what the community sometimes relies on, and that's the danger.

Caldwell: Well, what do you think would be helpful, or what's needed to kind of reach the younger generation and get them involved in the movement more?

Finn: We have to work with them, but we also have to impress upon some of the people that, you know, some of the music, some of the people that we know, us doing things. Us out there, showing examples of what we can do. That's what I said before, that that's more important for us to be out there, or, you know, if I'm out there in the community and kids see me, or they see me being successful, that gives them encouragement, what can happen. I've had families and people say that in other countries, for the disability community it's a harder fight for us. 'Cause you heard that, you know, the guy from Iran, Ahmadi-Nejad, say that, you know, first of all, you know, he said, "Well, we don't have gay people in our country." And then you know that they're going to say a lot of places say that they don't have people with disabilities in their country. That it doesn't exist.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: So...

Caldwell: Do you see... You said you were worried, are you worried about not enough young people getting into the movement? Or do you see young people coming in?

Finn: I see young people coming in, but I also see a lot of young people not coming in, but they're coming in the wrong way. They get caught up now, which we didn't have so much of before, is the criminal justice system. They done things and get into trouble. Then they're turned over to the courts, and they send them to these facilities, where they stay, because now they have something on their record. Now they're saying something and they'll use the excuse that they're not competent to understand or, you know, be accountable for what they've done. And they've been, now

they've been taken out of, you know, society, but they're also taken out of the pool of learning. You know, some of them were just hanging out, trying to be cool with the kids in the community, or be accepted by someone. Where, you know, the organization and the groups accept people, but some people say, "Well, that's a cult. You know, you don't want to get caught up in that." You know, which is also scary.

Caldwell: Well, what about what the schools are doing? Could they do more to promote self-advocacy?

Finn: Yes. But they've first got to understand what it is.

Caldwell: The schools?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: I think you have a group of young people that know, they know how to do these things; but it's going to take more of them, because it's not like it was. Sometimes kids get knocked down easy, and that "R" word is still out there, and it still has an affect on people, especially younger people.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And, you know, some of the ways that they know how is with their fists. And some people have weapons, they're the ones that get caught and lose. So I'm a little worried, but I haven't given up, because we still have lots of opportunities to work with young people and make an impression. I mean that's why one of the reason I'm looking forward to going to Vermont is, that they have a lot of young people involved. In our count this year, there were so many young people involved that are springing up with groups, and they're coming up, talking to us. So I figure I have an opportunity to make an impression to be one of the people that the people listen to, that the young people listen to. Just like we're so fortunate here in our state, because they spread the word about what we're doing. But the people in the self-advocacy movement are looked up to now as role models and heroes, so we have to be able to take that and work with it, and use it, you know, as an example.

Caldwell: Yeah, I think that's definitely true. I mean you guys -- a lot of you guys at the national level are really kind of the first generation of people -- leaders at the national level, you know? And do you get that? Do you get people like saying that you're a role model, or they look up to you?

Finn: Oh, yeah.

Caldwell: Yeah?

Finn: A lot. I mean I connected so much with those advocates, you know, from Vermont. They're looking forward to me coming, I'm looking forward to, you know, going there. I mean the young people now it's refreshing I know, that some of them they're not going to take, you know, just people handing stuff down to them, and say this is what you have to settle for. We just have to keep educating, and especially in those places where it's harder to make it happen.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And we have to be willing to go to these places.

Caldwell: What about the history? The history of the movement, and the history of institutions and things that they might not know about?

Finn: We have to be able to keep those things where we can show what happened there. I did a presentation the other day with one of the ladies from one of the agencies from the state. And we're working on the project of, you know, getting monuments for the cemeteries, where people were buried at the institutions. We don't necessarily want to put gravestones on, you know, all of the graves. But we're putting monuments and plaques with the names on it. But we are also preserving the history, the way it was, to show this is where people came from. This is where you have to go to preserve the fight. And that a lot of people, and a lot of young people, are getting into what we're doing, because they understand it, because they see a little bit of it. And we've got to keep things like Willowbrook, you know, alive, not to forget it. This is the anniversary, the year of Willowbrook.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: So we're going to do something to commemorate it. I don't know what. They are working on some plans.

Caldwell: Then just to go back, when did you get involved in SABE? Like was it after you served as president of New York? Or was it before that?

Finn: I was involved before that. I mean I was going to go to the first one of the international conferences in Toronto, since it was close; but I was unable to go to that. So I went to the conference in Washington, D.C. And I've forgot when that conference in Washington D.C. was. It might have been '92, sometime in '92, shortly after I was on the board.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And then I've been involved. I mean I wasn't on the board that first meeting I went to in Washington, D.C., somebody convinced, Perry Whitaker.

Caldwell: Is that one where it was just forming SABE? Was that one of the planning meetings to form it?

Finn: No, this was a conference in Alexandria.

Caldwell: Right.

Finn: Uh, northern Virginia put the conference on for SABE, so...

Caldwell: And that was one of the first ones, right? Or was it might have been the first one.

Finn: Well, it was one of the big ones. I think they had a couple and they might have had one in Tennessee or a couple in Tennessee, or some of the southern states. But this was one of the first overall conferences.

Caldwell: So they were just forming. Were you one of the first board members, or did you come on later?

Finn: No, I came on, you know, after that. I really started getting involved, you know, in Washington, but even more involved in Oklahoma and, um, Rhode Island. We had the conference and many conferences after. You know, I really got involved when we had our conference, you know, as far as being on the board in 2002. But I was advisor to the Board to do Project Leadership. And before that, I, um, kind of, you know, helped out off and on. And I was an alternate before that to the board.

Caldwell: And then did you serve any of the offices before you became chair?

Finn: Um, no.

Caldwell: No?

Finn: When I ran for the board and got elected, I, um, ran for chair.

Caldwell: And who was before you? Was it James?

Finn: James Meadours

Caldwell: So then you became Chair then in...

Finn: And Tia was before him; and Nancy was before her.

Caldwell: Okay, so there's really only been five chairs?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Is that... Like do you serve for a certain number of years?

Finn: You can only serve two terms, which consists of, uh, let me see... What my terms were, two terms which was four years altogether.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: I mean you can be on the Board for four years, your first term of four years, you know, eight altogether, and then you have to go off. And then you can come back sometimes later down the road. 'Cause it's not like the Presidency, where you serve eight years and you never can serve again.

Caldwell: Right.

Finn: See like next year...

Caldwell: So you served as chair for four years, and then you went off and now you're co-chair?

Finn: Right.

Caldwell: In 2005 you became co-chair?

Finn: Well, yeah.

Caldwell: Or 2006, last year?

Finn: Well, I became co-chair in the conference in Atlanta.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: So in Indiana, if I want, I can run for chair.

Caldwell: Okay.

Finn: And then I can serve...

Caldwell: So you guys have a conference every other year?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: And that's when you select officers?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Okay.

Finn: Or they select, yeah, every time we have a conference.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: I can, you know, run my last two years, and then I can, um, take time off until there's a next election, and come back and run again, but I don't know. I don't know if that'll happen.

Caldwell: Yeah. And, um, just more about, you know, we talked about right now some of the stuff that SABE's doing, to try to get funding for the self-advocacy movement?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Can you talk more about that? And, you know, why do you think it's now that this is coming together?

Finn: Well, the board wasn't –even though we wanted to do it, some of us wanted to do it –the board wasn't ready overall. You know, they wasn't at that place, where they wanted to move the organization along.

Caldwell: Some of the things they're working on around the funding issue. And, well, you said that's something that's been talked about or a long time, and you talked about it for years, but now it's starting to develop.

Finn: Um, people thought about it, but even just say five years ago or six years ago, we talked about it, but the board wasn't ready. We didn't have the people on the SABE board that really thought about that we need the funding, that the funding was important. So, you know, now's the time because we have a new board. We have people that believe that. And we also have an opportunity, you know, through, you know, working with the DD Act and other things to make that possible. The need for, you know, having an office. And also is self-advocacy and People First all over has moved to the point, where we need a national organization to move us forward, as far as we have the states and the, you know, support from people to have that happen. We've grown over the last few years. Even from '92 until now, to where, you know, we've made that possible. You know, I know before that we were talking about it, but we didn't have the people in the position or on the Board to drive it forward. So now we have, you know, the people, the desire and the opportunity to, you know, make that happen.

You know, we've worked hard, and worked hard to make sure that, you know, we connected with Commissioner Morrisey and actually had the board have overall meetings with her, to see what the board was capable of. I mean that's what really helped us, as far as, her understanding the importance of having self advocacy in the DD Act. You know what we are capable of overall. And the meeting that we've, you know, as a board had with her, because we had met with her before in the past, and one of the things I was listening to, you know, some of the other board members were thinking, well, ADD was there for you to get money from. But they wasn't looking from the standpoint of, yeah, they are, they support DD Councils and Protection and Advocacy and Universities, but they wasn't looking at was we've got to have a way to build that foundation, to be able to support and have people that can support us to do that, and, you know,

be accountable for the money. And, you know, I have learned from the structure that we set up here, you know, how it's supposed to go and what it takes, and how much dedication that we needed. So setting up meetings with Commissioner Morrisey I had had meetings with her before, but then I talked to her about the board, and what the board was doing and setting up a meeting. I could have very easily had the meeting with her, but I wanted her to experience and see the power of the board. And we set up the meeting, and we went through the agenda, and we talked about what we needed, and she was impressed, because that was one of the things that brought us back to the point of, when she said we needed to be at the table, you know, to talk about the summit. Because we had showed her, at the meeting that the board had had with her and her staff at ADD, that we were now a professional organization, and we needed to be at the table.

Caldwell: What do you think the biggest barrier is going to be to accomplishing that?

Finn: We have to show the politicians and the candidates how important this issue is to us. I know that there's a lot of other issues out there that are important, but we have to show them that the Self-Advocacy Information and Training Centers are one of the most important things to us right now. And that it's important to be able to move our organization forward. Because we're not going to get a lot of stuff accomplished through grants. They just don't think that way anymore, and they don't really feel that they should be able to give us money to tell them what to do. They just haven't come to that level yet.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: But what we do have the opportunity to do is influence the, you know, talk with our Congressmen on how important that point is to us. And we've made that point, um, when here in this state and other people around the country writing into the Speaker of the House Pelosi's office, to say about the voting thing, not to change it. That was powerful. You know, politicians think in thousands. So in phone calls and votes and things like that, you get there, you get them interested in thinking that, you know, there's a lot of people out there, then, you know, those kind of things happen. So I think it's important for us to network, you know, work with the other, um, agencies, like CCD, because you guys are doing some things that we need to be involved with, and show that, you know, we have ideas and viewpoints on these things.

Caldwell: Do you think there'll be, would you like to see a national office in D.C.?

Finn: Yes. I think setting it up in other states, where it is, works to a certain extent, but it works better, when you can go to D.C., and have an office. Because not even when we changed our address to D.C., even though we

wasn't there, it was powerful in the respect that it had Washington, D.C. on it. It changed how people perceived who you are. 'Cause when you say national, what do you think of?

Caldwell: Yeah. Where do you guys have a national office right now?

Finn: We have the address, but we work from, you know, all over.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: Like Julie's in Arkansas, so right now...

Caldwell: It kind of just depends on where the Board members are at?

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Okay.

Finn: Um, I think that it's important to have an office in Washington, and definitely have an address. Because when we got that address in Washington, that just changed the status of how we were viewed, how we were looked at by organizations. Organizations that didn't respond to us before was responding to us different, and we got more response when they thought we were in Washington.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And when you think of national and national organizations, you think of Washington, D.C., that, you know, that's where it's at.

Caldwell: Uh-huh. And what else do you see, in terms of your vision for the future of the movement? Are there statewide organizations in every state now? Or are they still developing?

Finn: Close to it. I mean we still have some work to do in places like Hawaii and Alaska, and some of the states in our, you know, Montana. And, you know, they have pockets of self advocacy, but we still have places that we have to work on. But most of your major states and major cities and things have self advocacy organizations that are People First that are strong. Um, which is a lot farther than we were, you know, just say five or six years ago.

Caldwell: And it also seems like there are some states who've gone back a little bit or are struggling, because of the money issue.

Finn: Yes.

Caldwell: Illinois, for example, you know.

Finn: Yes. And I think that we, like some of the organizations that we give money to support, have too much power. I was, uh, talking to someone last week, when I was in Ohio, from Wisconsin, and they were saying how they support the advocates, and they support self-determination and some of those things, but the key is, they're trying to get the people with disabilities out and to be more involved, which is unusual. In some places, you don't have to ask the people to be involved, they're naturally involved. So I think we have to encourage and set the examples for the organizations nationally. The stronger we are, the stronger the national, you know, organizations will be. And it takes an effort of those of us that will be able to be dedicated. I'm fortunate enough to be able to work on the national and inter-national level, and with what I do for my work. Because people think that it's different, but it's all related, one connects with the other. So that's what I talk about. That's what I've portrayed to my office. That's what I show the connection between all of the agencies above, because you need your local level, you need your regional level, you need your statewide, you need your regional at the national level, and you need your overall national organization, and then that feeds into the, you know, inter-national organization. So it's ways that all of the pieces of advocacy can be woven into, you know, what you do.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And it's important. How can you be an office, and this is what I tell my work in my office, how can you be an office that represents developmental disabilities, which comes under the ADA, which all offices, and a lot of people don't know this, that has developmental disabilities on it is governed by ADD, I mean the DD Act, which has all developmental disability services, 'cause it says it right at the beginning. But we always look at the state, uh, developmental disability, you know, offices that are ran by Commissioners and things like that as different from your DD Council. But in the state our DD Council is all part of Development Disability network that serves people. So we look at our DD Council as a branch of, you know, what happens here from our office. They supply some of the money for us to do some of the projects that we need to do. We include them in on committees and things like that. And, you know, everybody comes together to help make the decisions. So that's what we need, and we will have to have on a national level. And I think that the Self-Advocacy Information and Training Centers will be a big test of this, to see whether the national organizations are going to put their mouth where their money is.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: Notice I didn't say it the other way around (chuckles)? Because it's true. If you're going to put your mouth where you, what you're talking about,

where your money is, you're going to really be able, and be at a point to support. So, you know, that's important. And you can have a few organizations say, well, we support, we support and not the overall, you know, network supporting. And it's more than just money. It's being able to work with people on how to get materials out, videos, T.V., radio, movies. I went to our New York State Rehab Conference, and they had this guy there that was a Veteran, and he had his friend, they made a movie about them. They premiered the movie the other day. But now it's going to be showing in New York City. I can't remember the name of the movie, but I'm going to see it. And when it comes out on DVD I'm going to buy it, because it's all about their lives, you know, when he was in the war, and they got out of the war, and how they tried to fight for the rights of people with disabilities. How they helped with the ADA, and some of the things that they experienced in the community. But one of the cool things that he said happened, when they made the movie was, they had people with disabilities that was actually in the movie, that actually had wheelchairs, that went through the experiences, because they didn't have the money to pay for all the equipment that it would have been needed to use to make the movie. So it was just cheaper for them to actually have people with disabilities act in the movie, and play the part.

Caldwell: Uh-huh. And then just to talk a little bit about the international level and the self-advocacy movement, is there an international association, or a group of self-advocacy groups?

Finn: I mean they have them in different countries, but we haven't been organized yet to come up with a international organization for people with disabilities, but that's being worked on through the International Treaty for the Human Rights of People with Disabilities.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: They've actually sent out some proposals to have some people with some ideas that are really willing to work on this. And, uh, that's going to be something to look forward to in the future. You know, with the countries I've been to –Kosovo, Japan, Thailand and Canada –there are some interesting things happening. I know people around the world really want to get together. And I'm actually interested in the international conference you were telling me about that's going to be in South Africa next year.

Caldwell: Right.

Finn: And, you know, how to be a part of that. I think figuring out how to go to that, or maybe get sponsors for that is the first step in meeting other people from across the world and around the country, to get connected with them, and then maybe we can figure out how to get connected to make some of those things happen internationally. And then I think I have

a few connections also, to figure out on maybe having an international meeting or to start an international steering committee, to start talking about, you know, having an international committee for people.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: Because other people can do it, and some of the candidates have said, you know, during their administrations they would work to make this happen. And I know one of the questions were, do you support United States being a part of the International Treaty for Human Rights for People with Disabilities? And all five of the candidates that I saw before said, "yes," and they kind of outlined what they wanted to see. So we've got to keep pushing the buttons and keep them focused on those questions. And somewhere, I know we didn't write it down and send it in, but somewhere those questions should come up at the forum.

Caldwell: Uh-huh. And can you talk about something you told me about, your connection with the self-advocacy movement in Africa?

Finn: Yes, our state got involved with this group in Mali, Africa, and the group is called Jigiya. And, they're made up of people with disabilities. And what we did was sent them some money, like \$250, which is a lot of money to them, every quarter or so, to get them started. And what they did was said that they wanted to set up a co-op, so that they could act as a bank, to give money to people that needed equipment, like if they wanted to buy pots to cook stuff, or tools to, you know, do gardens and things like that. And then the people would borrow the money, and then when they got their business started, they would pay back the loan. And, you know, it's helped people get started. But what we did at our conference, and if you go to our website, you can connect and see the interaction between Jigiya and the United States on the web. So, you know, that was very important. But what we did was, we had the guy from Africa connect with someone in Georgia at I think Emory University; he's an anthropologist, Steve Lacey. And he worked with us on, you know, putting things together, and he's going back over there, and he's been here to visit with us. So somehow they want to actually talk to our government, and talk with some of the press agents here in this country to maybe do a documentary or something. You know, but they were talking about something big happening with that. Because here we are, a self-advocacy organization that has a little bit of money, and here they are, a self-advocacy organization that nobody paid them attention. Until we did, nobody noticed them. And that here we are trying to support them a little way to be independent, and try to help them get some other money to support their organization. I know that we were at the rehabilitation conference, one of the agencies or providers that came up that had some money, they wanted to donate to help support Jigiya, which was a good thing after they

heard about it. So we might be getting those kind of questions asked of us. And I was thinking also, maybe there could be something nationally that we could do, or set up as SABE. I know we don't have a lot of money, but to be able to have people support a couple of groups in other places. I know that Kosovo is one of them. And I know people in Japan and Thailand and stuff like that, that we might be able to connect with, and, you know, do some type of video conferencing on, uh, the network that Steve used, that we use to connect with Jigiya.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: I think it's called Skype.

Caldwell: Right.

Finn: And that you have the camera, and you can do that.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: So it would be very easy to connect with them, and, you know, have some meetings.

Caldwell: What did you do with Kosovo? Did you actually go there?

Finn: Yes. Tia and I went with, uh, Vicky and Lisa and Topper. You know, they were our support people. And we went there, and Tia and I did the trainings, and we talked with the People First organization in Kosovo.

Caldwell: Did they have an organization?

Finn: Yes. We helped them start it. They had one already, but they had about 50 people. And the name of their organization was Ne Per Ne, We for Ourselves. And so, actually self advocacy gave me some money, 'cause I asked them, I told them, you know, they had nothing, they didn't have any money. They gave me about \$300, and Tia donated some money, and Vicky and Lisa donated some money from Alabama, so altogether, you know, we gave them around \$600, to help them get started. So we -- we're not sure of what they were able to do, but, you know, it would be good to connect with them again. And, you know, I made some friends, and, you know, from that organization that I really would like to connect with again, and see how we could get some organizations or some people to be able to help them.

Caldwell: Was this through that Mental Disability Rights International?

Finn: It was through, um, MDRI.

Caldwell: And were these people that were in an institution or got out of an institution?

Finn: Well, there were a lot of them that were in the community, but we did go to an institution to visit some people, and we really wanted to get those people out.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: We kind of felt bad that, you know, they were in there. And we talked with the director for a while, and had some suggestions for him, how to get the people out.

Caldwell: Yeah.

Finn: And, you know, I am still connected with my friends in Japan. They had another annual international conference for people in Asia, but it was around the same time as our statewide conference, and there was no way that I would give up my statewide conference to go anywhere. I would not be able to come home. I would not be able to sit in this chair and work in this state and live in this state. They would whip my behind. I don't want 770 people kicking my behind. Besides our conference, I always look forward to it. I think if I was on my deathbed, I would leave my casket to come and go to my conference.

Caldwell: So what are your personal goals for the future? What do you want to do in the next ten years? Or where do you see yourself going?

Finn: I want to, number one, here, be able to finish up working on getting people employed with this office and the state and all of the other state agencies, which I'm working on now. We have the first person, starting their job. And I want to be able to do that all over the state, and get people jobs and things similar to mine. You know, people working in these offices. Then that way I think, the funding will change, the attitudes will change. And I think that we'll take a big step towards, you know, making things happen for each other in the other states. And then organizations won't have to beg as much for money. And I also one day might want to maybe run for some political office –maybe not a big office, but something.

Caldwell: Yeah, I think that'd be great.

Finn: But it's only after I see the disability movement, and especially for people with developmental disabilities, have more freedom, more flexibility to do more things, they really want to do.

Caldwell: Uh-huh. Well, I think, you know, we covered a lot of stuff. I think we've covered most everything I wanted to touch on. Is there anything that you can think of that we didn't talk about, that has to do with your history or becoming a leader, or the future of the self-advocacy movement? Is there anything?

Finn: I think that we covered most. What I would like to see for the future is that we figure out some way to utilize all of the leaders and all of the people and the networks that we have created out there, so that we don't have people sitting, doing nothing, after your terms have ended on boards or things like that. How to even get jobs, how to put people to good use, to maybe teach younger people or something. And I think that what I'm going to do for the future is, work hard to maybe get my story out there, or to get this story out there, of what you can do.

Caldwell: Uh-huh.

Finn: And, you know, do one of those statewide books or national books that talk about what it takes to move advocacy forward.

Caldwell: I think that'd be great. But that is an issue. Like, you know, there's so many self advocates out there, that I think have reached a level where they're great self advocates, but in terms of employment, there's few places where, you know, you can get a job. There's some state offices, like New York that hire people, and there's some universities like the University of Illinois that hire self-advocates; but, you know, there's not enough opportunities.

Finn: Yeah. And I think hiring us is one thing, but listening to us and value what we say and put it into practice is another thing. I think I've been fortunate enough, and especially now, with a new governor coming on, a new commissioner, a new executive deputy commissioner, that they have been able to work with me, and let me do the things that I need to do, and working with me, and teaching them, you know, how to work with people. So that's what they asked, and that's how they've been able to utilize my skills and abilities to help, you know, make things better for other people. So, you know, I just thank them for being able to do that.

Caldwell: I think we talked about this a little bit, but who would you say were the closest people in your life, and closest people to you, or closest supports you've had throughout your life?

Finn: I think one of the things that have kept me going in my life is when I was born, like I said, I had my grandmother, my great grandmother, my aunt and my grandfather, when he was alive, was important. I mean even though later in my life, you know, he had had a stroke, but I still visited him in New Orleans, and to me, he was probably my first taste of people with a disability, trying to communicate with him, with him not talking, and people interpreting what, you know, he was saying. I think my mother and my father encouraging me, or even sometimes telling me the things that I had to do, and me being able to prove to them what I could do. I think as far as this office, the state giving me an opportunity to prove and show my abilities, instead of telling me that they don't have anything for me, or

trying to steer me in the way of, you know, a greenhouse or being a telemarketer. And I had to tell them don't call me, I'll call you. And when I did call them, I had good news, and I had got this job with this state, and they were no part of it, but then they wanted to take credit. I told them, "Uh-uh, it wasn't you, it was me." So, you know, I think that those were the people, you know, and another thing that was big in my life, like I talked about, watching and seeing Dr. King and knowing and believing some of the things that he talked about, and listening to all of his speeches and those things. You know, fighting for people's rights, even though, you know, sometimes his life was in danger. I had the pleasure of in 2005 at the Summit, being able to meet his son, Martin Luther, King, III, and actually talking about him, and talking to him, and talking about the community. And one thing he did say to me that was important, that stuck with me, "How are you going to get your message out to the community? Who you are and what you stand for and how to work with you? How do people work with you? How do they perceive who you are?"

So, you know, I thought that was really important. And, you know, I got to meet him, and knowing, growing up, following his dad, it was a pleasure to be able to get to talk with him. I still communicate with him on occasions, because he gave me his cell phone to keep in communications with him. And I talk with him on a number of occasions. And my friend saw him on television, and I was telling her about what I said about him at the Summit about, we know the history of his father, but we also should recognize him, as his own person, creating his own legacy. And now he uses that in his speeches. So I like to think in a way I had an impact on him. So I think those would be, you know, some of the people I look up to, as far as getting the inspiration.

But I think the most important person that drives what I do is, of course, you know I look to God. But I also admire me for being able to go through some of the things that I had to, to keep going, because it's so easy to say no sometimes and give up. Until you have to have that initiative inside to keep driving. I also thank all of the advocates and all of the people that support us, those are the real heroes; we keep each other going.

Caldwell: Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you can think of, or any last words?

Finn: Well, we didn't talk a lot about sports, but I don't think we should go there.