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Joe Caldwell
Adjunct Research Assistant Professor
Department of Disability and Human Development (MC 626)
University of Illinois at Chicago
Jcaldw3@uic.edu
selfadvocacyhistory@gmail.com

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Linda Kunick

10/18/2007

4:00 – 7:30 PM

Cincinnati, OH

Caldwell: The first question I want to ask is: do you mind saying how old you are?

Kunick: I am very happy to say how old I am. December 3rd this year, I am going to be 60 years old and I am very, very excited about it.

Caldwell: You look good for 60. I am telling you. I wouldn't have guessed that. So, where were you born and where did you grow up?

Kunick: I was born in Cincinnati, in Clifton, not St. Mary's, the big hospital in Clifton. It is by Eden Park.

Caldwell: The University hospital? Good Samaritan?

Kunick: That might be it.

Caldwell: But you were born in Cincinnati?

Kunick: I lived downtown when I was real little. I don't remember it. Then we moved to Northside. We lived in Northside for a little bit. Then we moved. I can't think of that school. We moved on McHenry road. You know where McHenry road is. Then when I when I got to be 16 we moved on Colerain and Groesbeck. I moved in with my sister. I went to school in Colerain and I graduated from Colerain High School. Do you want me to talk about school now?

Caldwell: Yeah. Whatever memories you have from your childhood and school and what it was like growing up?

Kunick: It was hard growing up at that time because people didn't know about disability. They liked me because they liked Debbie or my family. They wouldn't play with me because I couldn't finish the game. That was hard. I remember crying a lot cause they would not play with me. I finally gave up and went home and played with my dolls. My dolls was my friends. The kids in the neighborhood would not play with me. They made fun of me a lot. They called me a lot of names. I remember how upset I was. At that time I couldn't talk right. I couldn't hardly talk. People could not understand me. I have good memories with my family but I don't have memories playing with kids. I do have memories going to people who were older in the neighborhood and sit on the porch and talk to them for hours and hours. The older people in the neighborhood –I would help them rake the leaves, pick up stuff in the yard, and be with them a lot. I talked with them a lot, because they treated me like a little girl not as a disability. They never made fun of me. They took me as I was –just a

blond little girl who is sitting on the porch. At that time I didn't talk very well. That is a good memory; but playing with kids in the neighborhood, I don't remember that. What I do remember a lot: when we were playing they would say, "Linda is it time to go home because the street light is on!" We had to be home in five minutes in the house or apartment; if we wasn't we got in trouble. Even I would have got in trouble if we was home late when the street light came on. That was my rule and we know we had to follow that. That is what I remember: "Time to go home!" I remember that a lot.

Caldwell: So, the other kids said, "Time to go home?"

Kunick: Cause they know we had to be home; they didn't have to be home. They had no rules. They could stay out to any time they want, but we had to be home. I wish today that families have that rule. There wouldn't be so many accidents during the night.

Caldwell: So you have pretty good memories of your family?

Kunick: Yes. Yeah.

Caldwell: You mentioned your sister. It was you and your sister. Do you have any other brother and sisters?

Kunick: I have two sisters: one is Debbie and one is Sandy. Sandy is three years older than I am. I know where she is today, but when I was growing up I couldn't tell you where she was. But I could tell you where Debbie is. Debbie has always been by my side. If I was somewhere, Debbie was there. Now, Sandy was too, but Sandy was three years older so she had her friends growing up. But Debbie, we are thirteen months apart so that made the difference from me and Sandy. Now, Sandy will help me to do whatever I want to do today, but Debbie helped me a lot. Sandy did too.

Caldwell: How did Debbie help you? What are some memories you have growing up?

Kunick: Debbie make me do a lot of stuff I didn't want to do because she knew I had to learn that. One is go to restaurants by myself and order food by myself. Before that I would not order food. Today, I will order food. I cannot read the food on the menu so Debbie will read the menu to me and then I pick whatever sounds good to me, or sometimes I know what I am going to get. But she told me I had to order. And I wouldn't order. She

said, "You have to." So, I did. I remember that one memory with her... They taught me how to iron and how they taught me was: "Iron this for me! Go iron this." I went to school many times with a burnt belly. That is another memory I have. So I can iron clothes before I go to work now. Tying shoes –I don't remember when I learned how to tie shoes. I don't even remember if Debbie taught me how to do that. I think it is something I just did. I don't know who taught me that.

Caldwell: Did Debbie ever help you when the other kids were calling you names or picking on you?

Kunick: Yes. Debbie would always come to my side. On the way home from school, I would be walking home from school and a group of kids would meet me at this one certain place every day. Then somebody would go get Debbie and Debbie would come to the place and beat them up, because I would not beat them up. That was every day. And we never told mom and dad that. You don't want mom to know that. She would make it something bigger than it was: "Why are you picking on my Linda?" My mom always wanted to protect me. I couldn't do a lot of stuff because she didn't want me to get hurt. Debbie would let me get hurt, just so I know. She would protect me if people hurt me, but if it was something I had to get to know in my life, she would let me get hurt for that reason.

Caldwell: And what about your parents, you said your mom was protective?

Kunick: She was very protective. My father let me do what I wanted to do. Mom didn't want me to get hurt. Daddy know I have to get hurt or learn how to do that. Mom would let me be a little kid if she could. One thing I can say about mom is that when I was older and when I was working at the resident home and I had been there for 33 years, I wanted to go to Michigan to see my friend and she didn't want me taking an airplane by myself. She did everything in her power to talk me out of taking the airplane by myself. There even was a ground assistant. Every time she gave me a reason not to do it, I always gave her a reason why I was doing it. I did take the airplane by myself. Was I scared? Yes. Yes, I was very scared. But what happened was my friend invited us to her house and showed slides of where we were going to be and that helped mom –slides of Michigan. But they went on vacation the week before I went on my vacation; the day I went to Michigan they was there at the house. I didn't know they was going to come, but they came just to make sure I was alright.

Caldwell: So they came all the way to Michigan just to make sure you were okay?

Kunick: Because they went on vacation and went to Michigan.

Caldwell: What about going to school? Were you in regular classrooms with other kids or in a different classroom?

Kunick: No. I was in a classroom of 35 kids who all had disability, all kinds of disabilities. I was in the back of the room coloring –all day long, every day. I had to go ask mom for another coloring book and crayons. And she asked, “Why?” Well, she didn’t ask me why. She told dad, “I am going to go find out why she needs crayons and a coloring book every day.” So mom took me to school and she took me home that same day. I was in the back of the room coloring. Well, a long time ago, crayons and a coloring book was only five cents, but in them days five cents was a lot for everyday of the week. And not because she didn’t want to buy it, but she just wondered why: why I was coloring and not learning anything? It was for kids who had all kinds of disability. I was always in the back of the room. I never bothered anybody.

Caldwell: So your mom was upset because they were not teaching you? And she took you home?

Kunick: Yes. She took me home and then I went to a private school. But the private school didn’t cost much –maybe a dollar a day. It wasn’t very much to go there. I do remember that, but not being in that classroom.

Caldwell: Was the private school better for you? Did you like it better?

Kunick: I liked it because they finally helped me read, but they had to close because the state made them close. They ran out of money or something. I did like the school. I remember a young lady there. Her name was Sandy. I helped her everyday because she had braces on her legs. I helped her go down the steps or up the steps. I remember doing that.

Caldwell: What other things do you remember from school?

Kunick: It was lousy. We was in this one room the whole grade school, even in high school. The teachers didn’t know how to teach us so we watched a lot of films. Some of the films, I could tell you what they was because of how many times we saw the film. They didn’t know what to do with us. We had to be in school so they just made this room and we have films. We didn’t watch TV because they didn’t have TV at that time. But I

remember films –a lot, everyday, and some of them didn't have anything to do with school, just stories, and you get tired of watching films everyday of the week. So, me and two other girls would sit there; I would polish my fingernails the night before and we would scrape off my fingernails off to have something to do during the film –because we was bored. They didn't know what to do.

And that was all though my grade school; then when I was in high school it was the same, but the last three years it was different. They had a guy who came in to be a teacher. His name was Jim. He taught us what we needed to be taught. He took all the baby stuff away, all the papers away, and put in desks. We were treated like we should be treated. My class was job learning. So you had to have a job during school –some kind of job. My job was working in the lunch room. We all had time to sit. We had a paycheck and had to do a timecard. Everybody had to do that, even when you didn't know money and figuring out stuff you still had to do that. My job was working in the lunch room. I worked in there for three years. I loved it. I liked working with the ladies. I had a job to do every day –the same job. I finished all the jobs, except for the eggs, because the bell rung and I had to go back to class. Then we had to have gym in high school. I never did like gym. I did stuff because I had to do it, not because I wanted to do it.

I did graduate from high school. 1967. Then I didn't work for about five years after graduation, maybe longer. Back up... I did; I had one job when I was in high school. I always wanted to work with kids. That was my goal. The only job I wanted. So, my teacher found this job for me and we went to see about the job. He didn't want me to do that, but he couldn't say, "Linda, I don't want you to have the job." So what he did was he tried to talk me, all the way home, not to say yes about that job. I said yes. It was a live-in job babysitting three kids: one girl who couldn't talk very well; two girls and a boy. The other boy and a girl were pistols. They gave me a lot of problems. I had the job for two months.

Caldwell: That is a hard job taking care of three kids. So you took care of the kids while the mother was at work? You were like a nanny?

Kunick: I live there, but I was only making \$20 a week. That was a lot of money then. It was in the 60s. Then I didn't have a job... I babysat my niece for a couple years, then I didn't have a job; and it was time for me to get a job in my Uncle Harold's store. My mom worked in the store too and she

said, "You have to find a job for Linda." So he found one for me. I worked there for five years and then I went to the Resident Home.

Caldwell: So, what kind of store was it?

Kunick: A grocery store.

Caldwell: What were you doing at the store?

Kunick: On a busy day I would pack groceries on a slow day I would clean shelves, every day. I liked it but it was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to work with kids. It didn't matter if they have a disability or if they were regular kids. I never made the difference. I just knew I wanted to work with kids; and I have done that ever since.

Caldwell: It is the Resident Home? And you have been there since?

Kunick: Resident Home. Since 1974.

Caldwell: And what do you do?

Kunick: I was a TA, Teaching Assistant. Then they closed the nursery, and then I got to work in the office –that was copying, shredding, filing. It was not my thing, but I did it. Then I got to be an advocate for people who have a disability. That is where I am at now.

Caldwell: So when you first started and you were a teaching assistant, what did you do? You worked with kids?

Kunick: I worked with little kids learning how to get dressed and how to feed themselves.

Caldwell: Did the kids have disabilities?

Kunick: They all had disabilities, all kinds.

Caldwell: Did they live at this place or was it day care?

Kunick: They lived there. They came in Monday morning and went home on Friday.

Caldwell: How old were the kids?

Kunick: They were from three years old to 16. All different kinds.

Caldwell: They would come for the week and stay all night from Monday to Friday?

Kunick: And they have to be home by 3:30 on Friday.

Caldwell: And they would go back?

Kunick: With their parents. I did that for 20 years.

Caldwell: What are some stories or memories from working there?

Kunick: I tell you one I just love. There was a little girl named Kelly and she didn't know where her mouth was. My job every day was to feed her, put the spoon in her hand and then say, "We are going to feed you. This is where your mouth is." One day, over a six-month period, I let my hand go and she brought the spoon to her mouth. From that day she could feed herself, not by herself, but at least she knew where her mouth was. That was my favorite day I ever had. I went home and said I have to go shopping. I need to find a spoon, but I never found the right spoon for her.

Caldwell: And then you got hired as a disability advocate for them?

Kunick: No, not really. I was just a lady who came in and worked with them.

Caldwell: I mean later, after the filing, you said you became an advocate for people with disabilities?

Kunick: When I got involved in People First of Ohio, that is where my advocate work begins. We had a boss who knew Essie. Essie worked at the Resident Home many, many years ago. In fact, she was the one who hired me. So she called Peg up and says, "I would like to have Linda begin People First of Ohio with us." And Peg says, "Yes." So I was sitting at my office, where the telephone lines come in. So I was sitting there and the telephone rang. I called Essie the day before and she was in Columbus, Ohio. She said, "I know you called me yesterday, but let me tell you what I am calling for." She asked me if I would like to be in People First. She told me a little about it. The only thing was she said I have to come to her office my six o'clock. So I called Debbie. We got on the telephone and had a three-way conversation and I said "yes." Debbie understood. So, I had to go home and get ready. I had to call my cab because at that time I had a cab take me to my house after work. So he picked me up and then we went to the meeting for the weekend. In the meeting, we began People First of Ohio. I sat in the back of the room and didn't talk. I talked to people who was by me, but I would not talk out loud.

No way would I talk out loud! I would say “yes” or “no” to whatever the thing was, but talk out load? No! I did that for three years.

Caldwell: So they were just starting the whole group?

Kunick: People First of Ohio. Yes.

Caldwell: So how many people were at this meeting?

Kunick: Thirty-five members, board members.

Caldwell: Were they from all over the State of Ohio?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: So they all came together?

Kunick: And formed the meeting. We elected a secretary, a president, a vice president, the money guy - the treasurer, and a sergeant of arms. Four years later, I wanted to be at that table. So, I am now at that table. I am the president. But I was the secretary and the vice president. I am now the president.

Caldwell: Do you know what year People First of Ohio started? About what year was that first meeting?

Kunick: I don't know right now, but I could find out for you. I could e-mail that to you.

Caldwell: That would be interesting to know about how old People First of Ohio is. About what year it started. How long have you been president?

Kunick: Just two years. Not last month, but the month before that.

Caldwell: Do the officers have certain time limits?

Kunick: Yes. You only have the president about two years. I would say about two and a half years. Everybody has a conference; on Sunday they have election. Everybody who has a disability can vote.

Caldwell: So, they vote at the conference. And you have a conference every year?

Kunick: Every two years.

Caldwell: And that is when you vote?

Kunick: Yeah. This year my term is up in 08; so in March they vote again.

Caldwell: Will you be able to run again?

Kunick: I have to be off for a year and then I can run again.

Caldwell: I think that is how some other states are and the national organization. So what is your conference like?

Kunick: They have speakers every year, and they have workshops, and they have a big party. This year it is going to be "Under the Big Top," like the circus. They are going to have a 50s party; the circus big top is going to be Saturday morning. Wait a minute.... It might be on Friday. The workshops are on Saturday and the big top party is going to be on Friday and run the whole weekend.

Caldwell: Do you get a lot of people coming?

Kunick: I think so.

Caldwell: Do you know about how many people usually come?

Kunick: Last year it was over 600.

Caldwell: What is it like for people to come to the conference?

Kunick: They love it because they learn a lot of different things and they have fun. They love the party afterwards.

Caldwell: So, let's go back. When you when to your first meeting you said you were quiet and didn't say anything. So what happened?

Kunick: What happened was... I have to back up to that. I went on a mass walk. Have you ever heard about it?

Caldwell: No.

Kunick: The mass walk is when after Jesus died and he has risen. Him and two guys are walking to the mass walk and the two guys are telling him what they just did. When they got to the mass walk they said let's eat. So they went into the house. At the table Jesus broke the bread and he was gone. They realized who that was. Now there is a walk you go now on that is just like that. It takes three days and you listen to talks. That weekend I found my thing to make me wiser, not grown up, just wiser. That made me know what I wanted to do. That gave me the confidence to do what I

do now. Cause if I didn't have Jesus I could do nothing what I like to do. He is my gift. My gift is to talk to people who have a disability and tell them to be a butterfly. Here is by butterfly. I was in a cocoon. I cannot get out. I wanted to get out, but I was in a cocoon. And this was before I ever talked to anybody. That is why I am in a cocoon. I wanted to tell everybody what I know, but I couldn't. I wanted to so bad! Now I can. Now I am a butterfly. This is what I did. This is my workshop. Each one is different. This is me today. I don't name it. It does not have a name. I cannot come up with a name.

Caldwell: Do you think People First helped you come out of your cocoon?

Kunick: People First did and the walk that I went on. And the Lord did. And a lot of people I got to know in my life did. It was overnight, but it took a lot of time. Because that I was just a follower. I would follow you anywhere you want to go. I would not lead, because I could not lead. Now I have a lot of people I lead. I do a lot of stuff every day. People say, "You got many hats." I say no I only got one hat: that is Linda, because if I ever make myself so tall, I have a person who will put me down in a minute. She will not blink her eye –Debbie. She not let me be so humble and think I am the only one who does it. Many people helped me through the door. And the butterfly is not just me, it is everyone. I talk with the butterfly, but it is for everybody. I have a lot of words I can say. When the time comes I can tell you. Am I making sense?

Caldwell: I think so. Can you say more about the butterfly is for everybody? What do you mean by that?

Kunick: I would like everybody to be free –to be a butterfly. A butterfly is free. It can go many, many places that it wants to go to. That is what I would like for all the people with a disability: to be free, so we don't live in a world who goes, "Oh, you have a disability!" I would like all the people to live where they like. They can go anywhere they want to go and do anything they want to do, and not be afraid.

Caldwell: How do you think that will happen? How do you help people come out of their cocoon?

Kunick: I just tell them that they can do it. People have to have faith to go and talk to people. I was a little scared to come here today. That is why John came with me. I am not afraid now I am relaxed. It was hard to come

here and meet someone I didn't know. That is why Debbie was concerned.

Caldwell: Do you think that getting involved in People First helped you come out of your cocoon? How did that help?

Kunick: Yes. I wanted to be at that table. I was getting so angry at every meeting. Even at home I would say, "Debbie, why am I not at the table?" She said because you are not on the board. I said, "Yes I am. I am on the board with the 36 people." She said, "Yes, you are on that board, but you are not on this board." This is the board I wanted to be on. So I finally asked how to get to the table. They told me I had to run. So I said, okay I will run for sergeant of arms, because I knew that was easy. That was just keeping everybody quiet. She said, "Run for something else, Linda. Don't run for sergeant of arms." I said, "Okay." I couldn't run for president because I was not ready for that that. I couldn't be vice president because I didn't want to run for that, but I knew I could be the secretary. When I worked my part out to be the secretary, I was fine with it. What I did was I got a tape recorder. First, I had to go to work and ask them because I would miss work many times. They said yes. So I got the tape recorder and that will be my secretary at home. So that is how I got to be the secretary. They all voted for me. Well, that day only one person wanted to be the secretary in the whole room. So that was easy, but it could have been hard. And then the vice president, I had to really run for that one. I had fun with that one. When I was running for the vice president, the guy I liked was running for the president. So when he was running, I said run for the president and we both got it the same day. The president was the hardest. I run for it and I was the chairperson of the conference. I had my whole family come to the conference and since they was there I cried the whole weekend. Not because I was sad, but because I was happy. So I got that.

Caldwell: And why do you think you won? Why do you think people voted for you?

Kunick: I think they all know me. It wasn't that they all liked me, they knew who I was cause I talked the whole weekend. I said "hi" to everyone when they came in, so I think they got to know me. So that is why they said "yes" on that one, and I was scared. We went to a conference that started with a "P" in Columbus, Ohio. I was learning to speak with People First. That year my boss was going to the conference and I said I was going to speak at the conference. He found out what time it was and said, "I will be

there.” He heard me talk; he came up to me and said, “You got the wrong job. You ain’t going to do the copying anymore.” He changed my job; so now I am an advocate for people who have a disability. I thought I could do it in my office by myself. I did the best I could. What I found was if I go with Leaders in Action a lot, I went out, so I went to Leaders in Action. I finally got busier and busier. Now I have a calendar I have to follow every day and I have to make sure I don’t book somebody on the same day. So I have to say, “Wait I have to look at my calendar first,” because sometimes I will book stuff on the same day. Now sometimes I couldn’t finish it -the second thing, but the first thing I could. If I booked the first thing I could have done that, and then sometimes I could do that other. It all depends. Like today...

Caldwell: So, what kind of things do you do as an advocate for people with disabilities?

Kunick: I talk to them, like they can do it. That is what my goal is, that is what I always say: “You can do it! You can do anything you want to do.” And I will not say reasons because that is something you should never do, not: “Because you have a disability you shouldn’t do it.” That is my goal: they can do it. And I won’t say, “Because I do it you do it.” I don’t say that because I don’t want them to do it because I do it. I want them to do it because they want to, not because I do it. I don’t want anybody to do it because I did it. No, I don’t want that.

Caldwell: You want people to do it for themselves?

Kunick: For themselves. I call it the wiser for themselves; cause I don’t know what to call it, so I just say the wiser. I think when you get wiser that you can do a lot of stuff you didn’t know you could do before.

Caldwell: So, what would you say self advocacy means?

Kunick: Self advocacy means how people, we can do what we want to do –live, work, eat, what shows we want to see. That is what advocacy means is: powering people up. Power means getting other people to know we want to do it, can do it. We always have to explain to people: “I can do that.” Everybody has to, even Marvin who you are going to meet; everybody has to. Telling other people we can do that, because we know we can do it, everybody with a disability, but we have to teach people we can do it – whoever it is. We don’t do stuff right away because we have to think. You have to make sure if that is what you want to do, because if we make a

mistake we will feel horrible cause we will think that everybody is watching us to do it. And we don't like that. And I know that everybody who have a disability will say that. They don't like making a mistake cause we don't want people to say, "Oh, she didn't know how to do that or he didn't know how to do that." And we always have to make sure that we do the right thing or the best we could. That is what we always do. You don't wake up in the morning and say, "Oh, I have to do the right thing." It is just automatic. Cause it is a lot harder for us to get friends, just ask my sister.

Caldwell: Did you have a lot of friends growing up?

Kunick: No. The only friends I had in high school, in the neighborhood, were who Debbie had. If Debbie had friends that is who was my friends. They weren't really my friends. They were Debbie's friends.

Caldwell: But what about now? Do you have friends now?

Kunick: Oh, yes. I have a lot of friends now and not because Debbie has friends. Debbie has her friends. I have my friends.

Caldwell: So when did that change do you think?

Kunick: I really can't say. I don't know when that changed.

Caldwell: Where did you meet your friends that you have now?

Kunick: A lot of friends I have now were in Leaders in Action.

Caldwell: Is that in Cincinnati?

Kunick: Yeah. We don't have a president but we have a secretary. We have somebody who leads the meeting, but anybody can do it. They don't have a set person. So you could be the leader of the meeting next week. You don't have to talk, you don't have to read, you don't have to see to do it. There is somebody there who will help you out. They will tell you what to say so you don't have to know.

Caldwell: And how often does that group meet?

Kunick: Every month. They have a day group, a Tuesday night group, a Wednesday morning group. They have all them groups that do the same stuff, but they cannot get to all the meetings. Like if you want to just go on a Wednesday night, you just go on a Wednesday night. But People First is different.

Caldwell: Were you involved in that group before People First of Ohio?

Kunick: After.

Caldwell: That group formed after?

Kunick: Yeah. Well, how I got involved in that group is I went to teach people how to vote and then my friend Mel, who is not the leader of the group, but one of the helpers like John is. Mel quit and then John took her place. She had me come to the first meeting to tell them about the weekend I just had and I loved it so much I went back, and back, and back. All of a sudden I am in a lot of stuff with Leaders in Action.

Caldwell: What was it about it that you really liked?

Kunick: I liked the people and I liked how they did their meetings. I liked to be involved to do stuff for people who live in the city, so that is why I kept going. I liked it real well. When Mel was working for Leaders in Action I went to every meeting –a Tuesday night meeting, a Wednesday night meeting. So I went a lot, and I learned a lot too doing it, but now I don't have time to go to the meetings now because I got busy.

Caldwell: What kind of things did you learn?

Kunick: How to be a butterfly. See, everything I do, I learn how to be a butterfly. Butterfly is my passion.

Caldwell: So did you picked up some skills by going to those meetings? What kind of skills did you learn?

Kunick: Yes. I learned how to talk more and speak out more, and go places, and go to workshops, and a lot of little stuff like that.

Caldwell: When you look back at how you became a leader, where do you think you picked up your skills as a leader?

Kunick: I don't think I picked it up. I think it was always there. It never came out. So, all of a sudden it went sky high. Did that make sense?

Caldwell: You said it was always there but you were in a cocoon and it never came out. So, you really just got the confidence or the ability to come out?

Kunick: Yes. I found how with a disability I can say "Oh, I can do it. Let's go. Let's go with it." I remember the first time I did the butterfly talk, when I

was vice president I went to California with People First and they had a workshop I went to. At the workshop they had a lady who lived in some kind of home and she was telling us how she got out of her home. And all through the workshop I kept saying, "I can do it. I can do it," not knowing what I was saying. So I kid with our friend who went to California with us. We was going home in the van and I said to my friend, "Do you know what a butterfly is?" I explained it to her and then she sent me a butterfly, not this one, another one I was using. I used it the first time, I don't remember, it was for People First; then I got this butterfly and said my thing and opened it. When I got done and it was over with I said, "What do you want me to say?" They said, "Linda, you don't have to say nothing, you did it." Now, my butterfly talk is different every time. You can see 10 and they will all be different, because I don't write nothing up. I say it from the heart. Debbie will ask me, "What are you going to talk about Linda, today?" I say, "I don't know." You see, we used to spend hours filling the paper out, write the story, and when I get up there I would take the paper in my hand and somehow would put it down. I had a friend who told me I ad lib well.

Caldwell: Some people are better that way. They just go ad lib and do it.

Kunick: I don't read or write, so I just go that way, but sometimes you get stuck. You get stuck in the middle and then you have to pause and think real quickly and then you can go on. My fun thing is –if I am in a group of people before I talk –I sit back and I don't say anything. I sit and look at all the people around and then I wait to hear something. It could be anything and then usually I remember that and that is my talk. That is where I pick up and that helps me and they don't know that.

Caldwell: Let me go back to some of these questions. When do you think you first became aware of discrimination against people with disabilities?

Kunick: You mean what they say to us?

Caldwell: Yeah, that people with disabilities are treated different.

Kunick: That was when I was little. That started when I was little. I hate it when they called me a name. I hate it. I hate it today. My worst was when I was walking though Northgate, a shopping center, and I hear young people in a conversation. They are not talking to you or talking to anyone, but they say, "Oh, I am a retard!" That claws me to death. I want to go over there and tell them, but I don't. I want to say, "You don't do that. You

don't say that. You don't say that to people." I know they are not talking to me and I know they are not talking to the people around the names, they just come out and say it, and I hear it a lot. People who know me now, they don't call me that. They respect me enough. My favorite thing to do, and I got this from Leaders in Action... It would have never come out if I didn't have Leaders in Action, is: "People aren't jars." The label is on the jar, not us. Leaders in Action, we go around and talk to a lot of organizations and tell people about people and jars. That is my committee and we named it and had a lot of fun with it. My fun is last October... Well, at the Resident Home for two years I had to clean the Resident Home. They lost money and they had to find a place for me to work there. I told this story many times, so I am not saying anything new. One day when I got done working, cleaning I went back to my office and I had a phone call message. I listen to it and the voice of the lady says, "I got your name, someone gave me your name, and I want you to come and talk to our third graders about bullying." So, now I have to find a way to go there. So first, I called Debbie, and then I had them call her, to find out where it was and what it really is about. And then I had to find a way there, so I called John and he took me there, and he loved it. I loved it too. There was 50 third graders and I talked to them about bullying, about calling people names. When I got back I got my job changed. It is another long story, but I can't go into that. That is not right to go into that story... It is not a bad story, but I don't want to tell that story. It is a good story, but I don't want to, but all I can say is my job got changed. I didn't have to clean anymore.

Caldwell: Let me ask you, how do you think being a person with a disability has influenced how you feel about yourself?

Kunick: I have to answer it this way: having a disability is very hard. Why it is hard is cause I cannot read; write very little. I can read some but not a whole bunch. That was hard in my life. People didn't understand why you couldn't read. If you were a grown up, why you can't read? But to have a disability, it was alright. I think to have a disability, it got me where I am today. To have a disability, you have to feel, not okay, not okay, you have to feel perfect. We have to be perfect. Not because we want to, because we have to. We have to be more perfect than you.

Caldwell: Say more about that. What do you mean by that?

Kunick: If we weren't perfect, we will get in ourselves, and not do what we want to do.

Caldwell: Say more about that. What do you mean by that?

Kunick: To be perfect you have to do everything right. You have to do everything right because you didn't want to get laughed at and also you didn't want to feel ashamed. You didn't want to go home and feel so ashamed of yourself. I can remember the time I would go home and be ashamed because I have a disability. Why I had a disability? Why this happened to me? That is cause, you didn't have it. You couldn't be perfect. You can't be perfect and you want to be perfect.

Caldwell: Do you still feel that way or was that just when you were younger?

Kunick: I think when I was younger, but today I have to be okay with it. I have to be okay with not reading. I have to be okay with not spelling.

Caldwell: What do you think helped you be okay with it?

Kunick: I have to say my family. My family did a lot. I don't have any bad stuff to say about my family like some friends I have, they can say other stories. I don't have that. My family never, ever put me down. My family never, ever made me feel like I was stupid. They just didn't. Other people who I met over the years, who didn't know nothing about disability, made me feel stupid. That is what you never want to feel like. I think a lot of times when people kill themselves, I think it is because they feel stupid. The probably never would be stupid, but they feel like they are stupid. Stupid is not a word I use very often, because I don't call anybody stupid. But if you feel like you are stupid, you feel like all you want to do is go into a corner and hide forever. You don't want anybody to see you, and that is how people with a disability feel all the time. They want to go and hide. For anything... If somebody says, "You look pretty," you still want to go hide because you will take that as something bad when you was little, because sometimes when you was growing up you don't feel pretty. And that is hard to live with; it is something you just have to live with every day.

Caldwell: How do you think the self-advocacy movement helps people? Do you think it helps good about who they are? Or accept who they are and feel proud of who they are?

Kunick: I feel proud of myself because I have power now, and if we have power over our life and what we want to do, we will feel good, and Leaders in Action has power. Everyone in the meeting has power and they are an advocate, some more than others. But we have to feel power too, we have to feel we can do it, and I know I keep saying that, but everybody has to feel that way. I know my sister, Debbie, has to feel that way too. She was kind of leery of that at first, when I first began stuff with Leaders in Action, and when I got more into my advocate work she didn't understand it. And now they are cool about it, now Debbie helps me a lot with it.

Caldwell: So, she just wasn't sure what it was about or what you were doing?

Kunick: She didn't understand.

Caldwell: Has she ever told you if she has seen you change because of your involvement?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: What did she say?

Kunick: She loved it. We have a different kind of argument now. And I can't say it because I have this power over me, I can't say that to her because she won't let me say it, if we have an argument, and we do have arguments.

Caldwell: Well all brothers and sisters do.

Kunick: Yes, and she does help me. She read all the questions for me today and then she called me up today and asked if I scanned the questions for today, and I said, "No. I have them in my head now."

Caldwell: Do you feel you have a connection or a bond with other people with disabilities?

Kunick: Yes, and I have a bond with people who do not have a disability.

Caldwell: How so?

Kunick: I trust people more now, the people I know. I always meet new people in anything I do now. I do a lot. Sometimes it is hard to be a person who have all this. Did you hear what I just said?

Caldwell: No.

Kunick: Knowledge. All the stuff I do know. I am trying to say this one big word, but it is not coming out.

Caldwell: Say it again?

Kunick: Confidence! All the confidence I have now, I didn't have that many years ago. Not ten years ago, no, I didn't have all that. And I think it happened too when I went to Nicaragua for the first year.

Caldwell: Yeah, can you talk about that? What did you go to Nicaragua for?

Kunick: It is a country, Nicaragua. It is a very poor country, and I went ten years ago –the first time. Well, the year before I went, my friend went, and I went to church to pack suitcases up with baby clothes to give to mothers who just had a baby. On the way home, I says, "I would like to do that someday," not knowing what I said. It went out of my mouth and I forgot it, didn't even think about it, till one day she called me and said, "Linda, would you like to go to Nicaragua with me?" I thought about it for a week, and I said "yes. We had to raise money up to go for her and me, but she didn't get to go because her health got in her way. So she didn't get to go. It stormed really bad; they had that hurricane. We went the week after that, and everybody says, "Are you still going to go?" I says, "Yes!" I took the whole week off the first year before I went, because I left on Saturday, so I took the whole week off. I had to prepare myself for it, and how I prepared myself was I didn't do anything that week but think and be ready. And Debbie couldn't say she was afraid for me to go, and I couldn't say, "Debbie, I am afraid to go." So we didn't talk about that. The whole summer and all that year we was getting money to go, we never talked about it. And I got scared many times, but I never said it. And the day I left, it was on Saturday morning, and I had everything ready and had everything packed the night before, but when I got up and it was time to leave, I said, "What have I got myself into?" But I loved it and wanted to go back. That was ten years ago. This is my tenth year.

Caldwell: And so you have gone every year?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: And this was though your church?

Kunick: Yes. Well, at first though my church, but now I go on my own.

Caldwell: And what do you do? You raise money and then?

Kunick: We raise money for me to go, and then we get clothes together for mothers who just had a baby. Then we will do work in Nicaragua –make buildings, fix walls, put walls together, clean a building off. Whatever has to be done we will do that week.

Caldwell: Is it through a certain organization?

Kunick: Yes... I am not saying that right.

Caldwell: Is it Habitat?

Kunick: No, not with Habitat. This organization they put around in all the churches, this trip, and everybody wants to go, and it is fun!

Caldwell: And how long do you usually stay?

Kunick: We leave on the third and come home on the fourteenth.

Caldwell: So about two weeks?

Kunick: Yeah, and you work very hard for four days. You get dirty. You get crummy, but you have a good time. Then on the weekends you go see stuff, cause we don't work on the weekends. We get there on Saturday night and on Sunday morning we do something. And what we are going to do this year, I have no idea, but we will get in the bus and go somewhere. Then on Monday morning we will get up and everybody will have a job to do in the morning. Then in the evening is when you talk about how your day went. Now some people talk and some people don't, now I do. And I love it. I think going to Nicaragua changed my "I can do it," because that was a big step I made. That was out of my comfort. This is not what I do. I prayed about it and kept saying I am going to do it. People said, "Why you want to go to germs with people?" So, I didn't talk that year to nobody. I didn't talk very much the first year. I just sat and listed to everybody. I couldn't help people because they told me, "Why you want to go with germs?" I had two people call me up that week and say, "Are you still going to go, Linda?" I said, "Yes, I am!" From that, I think that is where I got more into advocate work.

Caldwell: Yeah, you have had some great experiences that helped you build your leadership skills. Are there any other things that you think really helped you build your skills to be a leader? Things throughout your life?

Kunick: My teacher.

Caldwell: In High School?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: He helped you build your skills?

Kunick: Yeah.

Caldwell: And it sounds like your church and the leadership group here in Cincinnati.

Kunick: And my family. Everybody I meet now helps me too.

Caldwell: Would you say you had any role models or mentors you looked up to?

Kunick: I would say just one. I look up to her all the time. I want to be just like Debbie.

Caldwell: Your sister?

Kunick: Yeah.

Caldwell: What is it about Debbie that you really want to be like?

Kunick: The way she taught class.

Caldwell: She was a teacher?

Kunick: Yeah, she was a teacher for a while. She has a great mind, and I learned a lot from Debbie. If I had a meeting, going to have a meeting, I would say, "Okay, what would Debbie begin the meeting with?" Paper. So, I would get paper and I would get pencils, and I would get all that stuff ready for the meeting because Debbie did that. One thing she finally got me to do -our church. We go to a new church and I am going to have a group at our church for people who have a disability who go to our church. Now, I don't know them, and never met them, but I see them in our church all the time, so I want to have a group at our church.

Caldwell: A what group? A support group?

Kunick: A support group and I just went to a support group meeting to teach me how to be a support person. So, after March that is what I'm going to be doing, and that kind of will be with Leaders in Action and People First. Debbie got me to do that and also Jesus told me to do that, because if I did not have Jesus, I could do nothing like this.

Caldwell: Let me ask you some questions about leadership. First, do you consider yourself a leader?

Kunick: Today, yes.

Caldwell: And why would you say that?

Kunick: I am more confident in myself. I know what I am doing. I don't tell anybody to follow me, but I likes to lead them in the right things to do or the right place, and that is what I does all the time.

Caldwell: Sometimes people say leaders are born or leaders are made. What would you say?

Kunick: People who are leaders just got to be that way. They weren't born as leaders. They were made to do that, they just have to be leaders.

Caldwell: So they were more made, you are saying? They became leaders?

Kunick: Not made, became leaders. I became a leader.

Caldwell: What qualities and skills do you think it is important for a leader to have?

Kunick: To know what to say at the time, and how to say it, whatever the case may be. Nine out of ten times you don't know when it is going to happen. Something comes up and you say, "Let me tell you this," and then you say what you want to say.

Caldwell: Any other skills you think leader should have?

Kunick: I don't think "leader" is a skill. I think "leader" is what you would like to be.

Caldwell: Yeah, say more. What do you mean by that?

Kunick: The leader is a person who know they have it. They have it in the heart, they have it in the brain, and they have it in their head. Just follow your heart and you're brave and do what you need to do, and you have to be not so scared anymore. Now sometimes I am still scared in different places, but that is all right. Some stuff will never, ever go away with me. One is I can never go down an escalator anymore. I can go up, but never down because I get too scared. I used to go up and down like nothing. All of a sudden I can't do it.

Caldwell: Let me ask you one more question about leadership. Sometimes when people say the word leadership it means a lot of different things. What would you say leadership means to you?

Kunick: Leadership means to take people to places they want to be in, not where they don't want to be in. They can do it because they know they can do it. You don't think about it, you just wait until it happens and then you go to go, to take somebody with you. Did that make sense?

Caldwell: Yeah, that was good. Now let me ask you a couple questions about the self- advocacy movement, People First of Ohio and the Cincinnati group. What challenges do you think the self-advocacy movement faces?

Kunick: Have people understand what disability is, cause that is when they get scared. That is when people will yell and gripe, when they don't know about a disability, they don't understand. They think we have germs and if they touch us they can get it. They can get a disability from us and that is not right. That is what I want to see, for people to know more about disability so they don't have to be so afraid of disability.

Caldwell: I think being afraid, that is true.

Kunick: Yes. If people don't know what something is you get afraid, and then you tell your kids not to talk to people who have a disability because they might hurt you. I don't think any people with a disability will hurt you on purpose.

Caldwell: So you think one of the biggest challenges for the self-advocacy movement is fear of people with disabilities?

Kunick: Fear, yes. If you don't know what any have, you can get afraid of that person; you don't want to be around that person, because you don't want to be hurt, you don't know what they will do. I think that is a problem we have in a lot of people, because a long time ago you would not see people in wheelchairs out, you would not see people who have a disability out. Now you would see me, because my parents took me anywhere. Everywhere they went I went because they just did it, but sometimes other people will just hide the kids in a closet, anywhere, because they are ashamed of the person. Not because the person had a disability, but they thought they had something wrong with them. That is why they came out different.

Caldwell: Let me ask you about the movement in Ohio. Do you see it growing? Do you see more people becoming involved in the self-advocacy movement - people joining, going to meetings, coming to conferences?

Kunick: I see more. Yeah, because you go out and find people who go anywhere now. They are not afraid to go.

Caldwell: So what kind of things do you think would help the movement grow more?

Kunick: A butterfly. If they feel free and know more about a butterfly, who does the butterfly, they would know more about disability and disability wouldn't be bad to have.

Caldwell: So just more people speaking up would help the movement up?

Kunick: Yes, more people speaking up and go many places. You think that is boring, but it is not boring. That way they will know a lot of people. Because you will see more on the airplane. You will see more. They don't hide anymore.

Caldwell: That is a good point.

Kunick: People needed to hide when I was a kid. My parents never hide me. I went everywhere. Where my parents went, I went.

Caldwell: So what supports do you think are needed to help make the movement stronger or to help the movement grow?

Kunick: We need more Ted Strickland, who is the governor of Ohio. He is a very neat guy. I have met him three times. We need more guys like him.

Caldwell: Does he support the self-advocacy movement?

Kunick: Yes, he supports people who have a disability.

Caldwell: So you need more politicians to support people with disabilities is what you are saying?

Kunick: Yes. Yes.

Caldwell: Does People First of Ohio do policy work? Do you talk to your members of congress and the governor?

Kunick: Yes, Leaders in Action does and People First does.

Caldwell: What is your vision for the future of the self-advocacy movement? What would you like to see it do?

Kunick: All the people who just got born who have a disability, they grow up and not be like us, and they will come out and be a blossom.

Caldwell: So when you say “not be like us” what do you mean?

Kunick; Don’t have the fear –of us who were born older.

Caldwell: Don’t have the fear when you were younger?

Kunick: When we were younger, to grow up and blossom more.

Caldwell: That is good. That leads me into some other questions about younger people, younger self-advocates. What do you think younger people, younger self advocates, need to become leaders?

Kunick: Mothers who let them do what they want to do. Like, if they want to go on a baseball team, let them be on a baseball team. If they want to go play football, let them be on the football team. If they want to be swimming, let them be swimming. If they want to be in girl scouts, let them be in girl scouts or boy scouts. Don’t hold them back. Don’t let them be back. Let them go forward. Hear them say, “You can do it! You can do it! I know you can do it!” That is what I see in the future and that is what I want.

Caldwell: So that is one thing you think is really important to help people become leaders is the family support in what they want to do.

Kunick: Yes. Don’t hold them back.

Caldwell: What other things do you think would help support people to become leaders?

Kunick: Take them places. Let them go to museums. Take them to baseball games. Let them be in the field, not out of the field.

Caldwell: What about the school. What should the school be doing to help teach people with disabilities to be leaders or support them to be leaders?

Kunick: Let them be on all the sports games and all the programs they have in school. Don’t let them not do it.

Caldwell: Do you think a lot of people with disabilities don’t get to do those things in school?

Kunick: Yeah. They will say you can't do it because you have a disability, and we always say we can do it.

Caldwell: Do you see any differences between your generation and the younger self advocates you see?

Kunick: I see our generation a lot better, and I see the new generation get better, get perfect.

Caldwell: Get even better than the older generation?

Kunick: Yes, and that is what I am hoping for.

Caldwell: Do you see a lot of young people joining the self-advocacy movement? Like in Ohio, do you see younger people getting involved in the movement?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: You do?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: Do you think they have any different needs or is there anything different?

Kunick: I don't think they have any new needs, but they have what we don't have. They just got new stuff to say.

Caldwell: Like what do you mean?

Kunick: They got new ideas.

Caldwell: Like what? Can you think of any?

Kunick: They don't want to join the circus, to stay away and hide. They don't have that, but they want to do what they need to do. If they can write, make letters or sing. I never could sing. Do I want to sing? Yes, but I can't. Sing to the lord. Go to movies and not be afraid. Ask for the show you want to see, not hide because you can't say it.

Caldwell: What advice would you give to young leaders?

Kunick: Do it! Just do it! Go out and have power. G out have esteem to know you are going to go it, know you can do it. I wish I had all that when I was younger.

Caldwell: You grew up in a different time. When you went to school a lot of kids with disabilities didn't even go to school. They were still fighting to go to school, and the parents. Now, kids go to school and it is a different time. Do you see any differences between what you see in the young kids with disabilities?

Kunick: I see that they have power to go do what they want to do. I have a story and I have to go back to my nieces and nephews... One day I was at my sister's house and my sister has a lot of kids, a lot of grand kids, and the one grand kid said to me that at school a group of people came to us. They one guy didn't have any arms, the one guy couldn't see, and one person couldn't hear and they told us all the stories about how they live. And I am looking at Abigail and I am smiling because I know what I am going to say next. I said, "Do you want me to come to your school and talk about my disability?" She looked at me like, "Why do you want to do that, Linda?" And I laughed. I always laugh about this because she said, "You don't have a disability, why do you want to come to my school?" See, that is what I want to see. I want to see everybody have that. A little kid don't see your disability in anybody. They know I am Linda. They know I talk funny, and they know I don't read. They might not understand why, but they understand. None of my nieces and nephews ever did that to me. I would like to see that today, people will say, "Why you want to do that? Why you want to come to school? What do you have?"

Caldwell: That is a good story. Let me go back to a couple other things. I wanted to ask you, after high school, did you still live at home with your parents?

Kunick: I lived at home until I was 30 years old. I started working when I was in my 20s at Resident Home. I moved out they day my sister said, about a month later after 30, she asked me to live with her when I was thirty. I couldn't say yes right away, but I did say "yes." I waited about three weeks later and I called her up and said today I am going to move to your house. That is when we began living together and that is when I moved out. If it wasn't for that I don't think I would have been moving out until they passed away. I had no reason to. I loved it there.

Caldwell: So you still live with your sister? You live with your sister now?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: And why did you move out? Why did you want to move out?

Kunick: I didn't want to move out, but Debbie asked me to.

Caldwell: She thought it would be good for you to move?

Kunick: Well, really for two reasons. We are good together. We work good together, and also she wanted me to live with her. So I lived with her and that was a fun time. Why we live together now is because both of my parents is in heaven. She asked me one day, she said, "What do you want to do? Do you want to live on your own or do you want to live on your own?" There was no question in my mind what I was going to say. I said, "I want to live with you." I lived by myself for ten years.

Caldwell: You did live by yourself for ten years?

Kunick: Yes, and I hated it. I didn't mind it during the day. I hated it on the weekends, and night time was the worst. I loved living on my own at that time; but today, would I live on my own today? No. It is because it is my choice. Not because I have to, but because I want to.

Caldwell: So, you lived with your parents, then you moved with your sister, then you moved on your own, and then back with your sister.

Kunick: Yes, when my parents died.

Caldwell: Were you living with your parents when they died?

Kunick: No, on my own.

Caldwell: When you look back at your life, and think about the people who were the closest to you. I know you who you are going to say, Debbie. Who else besides Debbie has been the closest to you in your life?

Kunick: My mom and dad and God and who I have met along the way is my closest people. Today I would have to say John Roamer is, Mark Schiefer who works at the Resident home. Right now I would have to say Essie and Sadie. The one who brought me back, I guess I would have to say God. God during a lot of stuff in my life. I always have to go back to him because he is doing it. He said, "Linda, you can do it," with all the people around me. Oh and Mel, my friend Mel. Mel is my really good friend.

Caldwell: And who is that?

Kunick: She worked with Leaders in Action, what John is doing now.

Caldwell: So is she part of the group or she works there?

Kunick: Well, she was part of the group, but she works for the office that John works with in Hamilton County?

Caldwell: So she has been important to you and a support in your life?

Kunick: Yes.

Caldwell: So that leads me to, you talked a little about your spirituality or beliefs that guide your life... What beliefs would so say guide your life?

Kunick: My faith and my family and stuff I want to do. What my goals is that guides my life. One goal I have and I am close to it. I said it to Essie many years ago. I want to see the President of the United States. I want to go to Washington and see the President. That is my goal and I have had it for fifteen years and I am getting close to it. One day somebody is going to call me up and says. "Linda, do you want to go see the President? Okay let's get ready."

Caldwell: What would you say to the President if you met him?

Kunick: About disabilities. I know that part but I don't know the rest.

Caldwell: You better get ready. Have you been to Washington, DC?

Kunick: Yes, I have. Once after my presidency was in Washington and then I went another time. I decided next time I go it is going to be when I see the president, and I am going to wear something blue. Why blue? Because I like blue.

Caldwell: What lessons have you learned in your life? When you look back do you think there are some lessons you learned.

Kunick: One lesson is to be me. I am Linda and I can do it. I can do all I want to do.

Caldwell: That is a good lesson. You mentioned you wanted to meet the President, are there any other goals you have in your life?

Kunick: Oh, yes. My goal is to have a car. It be my car, but I don't drive it. I have a cell phone, and I will call that cell phone up and says, "I am going to this meeting, be at my house by eight o'clock and I have to be there my nine."

And that is my goal –pick many people up who picked me up over the years.

Caldwell: So you would give everybody a ride?

Kunick: Yes. And you don't have to put this in, but it used to be a joke that I said "I am going to be a chauffeur like Driving Mrs. Daisy."

Caldwell: And I have to ask you about your pin? Where did you get that?

Kunick: I went to a conference two weeks ago. We went to Arkansas and in the conference a lady made them, and I thought that was so pretty. I kept the other ones she made but I like this the best.

Caldwell: I think we covered most everything that I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything to add or anything we did not talk about?

Kunick: Well, I have to say this. Yesterday, when my friend at work was reading all the questions to me and we got to that one you just ask, I looked at her and she looked at me, and she says, "By that time I am not going to have nothing else to say, because I said all of it."