

Novel Reaction: Getting Life

Getting Life is a story about a 32 year old woman named Emily Mason who was born with Cerebral Palsy (C.P.) and has lived in a nursing home for the past 17 years. The assistants in the home view her as a “vegetable” and handle her as if she isn’t a person. She is neglected to the point where she needs hospital assistance for several days. In the hospital Emily meets a doctor who shows her that she is just as important as anyone else and deserves equal chances as anyone else. With this new realization she begins to fight for her rights as a person. Despite the degrading remarks and lack of support from the attendants in her nursing home, she learns to paint, read, write and even communicate through noises and a spelling board. In the end, with her determination and strong willed spirit she moves out of the nursing home to live on her own with part time assistance.

This book really showed me how poorly disabled people were and are treated and what an unfair advantage they face. It makes me appreciate all the things I have and the opportunities I am given. However, this book has also shown me how strong and capable disabled people are and, when given the chance, can do amazing things. For me the book also highlighted the importance of never doubting yourself, persevering and never giving up fighting for something you want.

When looking back on the book, it is evident that the author is biased against the attendants of the nursing home. Although I agree with the author that people with disabilities are treated very unfairly, I have a hard time believing that the attendants would treat the disabled patients so poorly. For example, on page 15, Emily describes an incident where she has fallen out of her chair. “‘Emily Mason, shut up! Shut up now!’ Everything in me flails and rips, and she grabs me and squeezes until I can’t breathe.” Although this is a very brief example, many incidents similar to this one reoccur throughout the book. Taking into consideration that human rights have come a long way in the past century and that incidents do happen, it seems somewhat unrealistic and unbelievable that the main character Emily could be handled like this, raped several times, and be sent to the hospital because of the indolent care of others and have no one question the facilities or the workers. It seems that people at the hospital would have looked into the situation to see how these incidents were handled.

A big connection I made to this book is Larry Watson’s book, *Montana 1948*. In *Montana 1948*, Native Americans were treated unfairly, with disrespect and at times were taken advantage of because they had no one to stand up for them; therefore, the whites could get away with anything they said or did. Although, from my understanding, these disabled patients were not a different race from the attendants and doctors, they were treated as if they too were a different race that didn’t matter to anyone. And like the Native Americans, the disabled patients could not speak up for themselves and had no one to defend them. If the patients tried to speak up, the caretakers would yell at them to stop because it was annoying and they didn’t want them to hurt themselves or anything around them. In both of these books, the “different” people were looked down upon, held at lower standards and looked at as if they were not real people and did not matter.

Some questions that still remain:

- 1) What year did this take place and had the American Disability Act (ADA) been put into law yet?
- 2) Why aren't all disabled patients tested for capability of reading, spelling and comprehension when put into nursing homes?