UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

April 12, 2021
Jim Logan

The Fight of a Lifetime

Judith Heumann's fight for the rights of the disabled started early. After contracting polio at 18 months, she used a wheelchair. Her local public school refused to let her attend, claiming she was a fire hazard because she couldn't walk. It wasn't until high school that she was allowed to attend school in person.

What followed was a life advocating for the rights of the disabled, working in the Clinton and Obama administrations as well as non-governmental organizations and other groups.

Heumann will bring her story of tenacity and good works to a Zoom conversation Tuesday, April 13, at 4 p.m. Hosted by the UC Santa Barbara Women's Center, Heumann's talk will also focus on the intersection of disability rights, feminism and anti-racism, said Betsy Kaminski, director of Women, Gender and Sexual Equity.

"I invited Judy because I think she has an incredible story to tell," Kaminski said. "She has been a lifelong advocate for the rights of disabled people. She's done everything from suing the Board of Education of the City of New York in order to be allowed to teach in a wheelchair, to leading a 29-day occupation of a federal building to demand the signing of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (which protected the rights of people with disabilities), to serving as the first special advisor on International Disability Rights in the Obama administration. Judy has done amazing things in order to advocate for accessibility, inclusion and social justice."

Indeed, Heumann's determination to secure equal access and opportunity for the disabled in the face of political resistance has made her something of a legend among activists. It's a legacy that Kaminski believes can serve as an example for people today.

"I hope that people learn just how powerful a person can be when she is dedicated to a cause," she said. "I hope people feel inspired about how to advocate for social justice."

The event is co-sponsored by the MultiCultural Center (MCC), the Disabled Students Program, UCSB Library, Graduate Division, Feminist Futures and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

'Crip Camp' Screening

One aspect of Heumann's life that's not widely known is that she attended Camp Jened in the Catskill Mountains of New York from ages 9 to 18. Nicknamed "Crip Camp," it was a place where disabled teens got to enjoy an inclusive life of parties, sports, smoking and more.

The MCC will present an online screening of "Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution" Wednesday, April 14, at 6 p.m. Visit the MCC's events page for the Zoom link.

The documentary follows several young people, including Heumann, who become activists in the disability rights movement.

The screening is co-sponsored by the Women's Center.

About UC Santa Barbara

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