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Health & Fitness

Home Bound: Growing Up with a Disability in America
Cass Irvin
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"After college I tried for a couple of years to get a job teaching," explains the author about her experience in the late sixties. "Not one public or private school in the area would hire me-a teacher in a wheelchair."

Irvin, who contracted polio at age nine, describes her life with quadriplegia in this book. From fifth through eleventh grade, most of her education took place at home. Her school labeled her "homebound," an inaccurate epithet because she was capable of leaving home. With extensive planning and the services of a personal care attendant, Irvin managed to earn a master's degree, living in the college dorm and in apartments; her father paid the bills. Limited use of one arm enables her to feed herself.

After graduate school, she worked part-time for two years as a community college English instructor, but she has mainly devoted her energies to disability activist work. Irvin is Executive Director for Access to the Arts, Inc., and frequently writes for *The Ragged Edge*, a disability magazine of which she was previously the publisher.

She stresses that discrimination causes serious problems for disabled people. When her terminally ill, hospitalized father insisted on going home, she thought, "My father is homebound. He was bound and determined to be home." This book describes Irvin's search for her place in society, as though it were a search for a home. In this sense, she was homebound.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, a polio survivor, was Irvin's role model. She wanted to use him as an example when advocating more funding for personal care attendants. Unfortunately, Roosevelt hid the extent of his disability, and the public didn't know that he needed somebody with him all the time. Irvin tells her story with more candor.

Her book triggers awareness of the excessive difficulties faced by people in wheelchairs, especially those with quadriplegia. Once, at a civil rights workshop, Irvin found that the accessible entrance to the dining room required such a difficult route that she skipped breakfast.

When other attendees asked why she hadn’t joined them, she said she wasn’t hungry, not wanting to sound ungrateful for the accommodations they had made. Irvin said Roosevelt “faux walked”; an explanation of this would have been helpful.

The author’s courage to overcome obstacles makes this book an inspiration for readers living with any kind of disability, and non-disabled adults will gain increased understanding from her remarkable story.

Activists for disability rights have made many accomplishments since Irvin’s unsuccessful attempts to get a high school teaching job. The battle must continue, however, because discrimination against disabled people continues. This book provides excellent weapons for that battle-education, encouragement, and an inspiring example.