

# **Disability Exchange: Season 5 Episode 3**

## **Meet Mark Brown in the Middle**

**Judy Warth:** Hello and welcome to today's episode of Disability Exchange. We are a podcast that centers and elevates the voices of people with disabilities, family members, and other people who care about people with disabilities. We are based out of the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. My name is Judy Warth. I'm here today with my wonderful substitute co-host, Joanna Sabha.

**Joanna Sabha:** That's right. When the producer has to step in, you know, there's trouble. I'm really excited today to introduce one of our friends and work colleagues, who can tell us lots more about disability in Iowa City, since he has been living with a disability in this community for quite a while.

**Judy Warth:** Welcome, Mark. How many years have you been living in Iowa City?

**Mark Brown:** All my life.

**Judy Warth:** And how many lives, how many years has that life been around?

**Mark Brown:** I've been here 64,

**Joanna Sabha:** 64.

**Mark Brown:** Yup.

**Judy Warth:** And Mark, where'd you go to school here?

**Mark Brown:** I went to Pine School without being accepted by the outside community.

**Joanna Sabha:** So, you weren't able to be a part of the normal school system?

**Mark Brown:** No.

**Joanna Sabha:** So when you were in school, it was segregated.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Joanna Sabha:** You were kept separate, and you went to a school called Pine School where you lived.

**Mark Brown:** Right here.

**Joanna Sabha:** And it happened to be in the same building that we're in right now.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah. Right.

**Judy Warth:** I would've assumed that you went to West High School because you are a huge fan of the Iowa City West High School. Am I not right?

**Mark Brown:** I, I, I did. I went to Kirkwood Elementary School, and I started my sixth grade and I, I went to Junior high, I went to Northwest, into West High.

**Judy Warth:** Okay. So you did graduate from West High. That's what I thought.

**Mark Brown:** Oh,

**Judy Warth:** Okay.

**Joanna Sabha:** So, did everyone who went to Pine School end Pine School in sixth grade or just you?

**Mark Brown:** A teacher thought, we could handle regular school.

**Joanna Sabha:** So somebody picked you and a couple other students

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Joanna Sabha:** To go to mainstream school instead of staying at Pine school.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah

**Joanna Sabha:** Why do you think that she picked you?

**Mark Brown:** Because we were ready.

**Joanna Sabha:** You were just ready for school.

**Mark Brown:** We were capable.

**Joanna Sabha:** Capable, yeah.

**Mark Brown:** Of doing it.

**Joanna Sabha:** Yeah.

**Judy Warth:** And Mark, when you went to, um, to the city school, to the mainstream school, tell me about what were some of the major differences for you.

**Mark Brown:** I like the people. People were all nice to me.

**Judy Warth:** You got to know some new, new people I bet. And make new friends.

**Mark Brown:** I had to not sit back. If I just went home, I would not interact with people. Did see from other people how to act appropriately.

**Joanna Sabha:** So people, you watched people around you and saw how they acted and then that's how you created the way that you wanted to act, to fit in? Or was it not about fitting in?

**Mark Brown:** The people didn't realize my disability because people being normal in school. I proved to them, I was part of the culture.

**Joanna Sabha:** Yeah. You were part of the school culture.

**Mark Brown:** One time they shut me in the shed because they thought, I was not capable. It was so hard for me because they didn't get what I had you gotta show them that you are going to fit in.

**Judy Warth:** Did you feel like, like this was just all part of your kind of orientation to going school? Or did you feel like people were picking on you?

**Mark Brown:** No, they did not see any people with disabilities like us.

**Joanna Sabha:** Uh, so you gave them the benefit of the doubt.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Joanna Sabha:** That, that their lack of knowledge made them think things about you that weren't true.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Joanna Sabha:** So you went about proving them wrong by, by being polite.

**Mark Brown:** Being polite,

**Joanna Sabha:** yes.

**Mark Brown:** Listen before I talk?

**Joanna Sabha:** Yes. Do you listen before you talk and you. Could gain some information about what to do from how other people were acting.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Joanna Sabha:** Yeah. So I recently heard that you celebrated 50 years of helping the West High football team. Did that start when you were at West as a student?

**Mark Brown:** That did.

**Judy Warth:** It had to. Do the math. Do the math.

**Joanna Sabha:** How did you get, how did you go from being a student and doing classes at West to helping out with the football team?

**Mark Brown:** I wanted to actually be involved. Yeah.

**Judy Warth:** And that's, that's awesome. I mean, you've become a, a West high school football icon, which is unique for anybody,

**Mark Brown:** I like to be outside.

**Joanna Sabha:** I know. Me too. So you like those outside sports? Helping out the outside sports.

**Mark Brown:** Yup

**Judy Warth:** Mark, if you were gonna give advice to somebody who was thinking about going to, um, to leave perhaps a specialized class and enter into the mainstream, what advice would you give to a young person who was gonna make that leap? Maybe from a segregated class into general education classes or from a special school into, um, a more mainstream school?

**Mark Brown:** We gotta show teacher you can, can handle it.

**Joanna Sabha:** Why do you think that they saw something special in you, Mark? They must have seen the spark in you, right. That that said, we can try something new. We can try something different.

**Mark Brown:** Because they saw me in action.

**Joanna Sabha:** They saw you in action.

**Judy Warth:** Were there special teachers that made a difference? And what did they do?

**Mark Brown:** Yeah, Tried to build me up.

**Joanna Sabha:** I love that. I'm trying to build you up

**Mark Brown:** they're happy for me. Everybody like me.

**Joanna Sabha:** So it sounds like when people had positive thoughts about you and people put effort into building you up, that helped you be successful.

**Mark Brown:** Yup!

**Judy Warth:** You know, mark, here comes 1980. Guess who walked the stage? You and me both that year. Yeah. We're twins. And so, so Mark, you graduated. What happened after graduation? Because sometimes that's a scary time for people. What did you do after high school?

**Mark Brown:** I came back here. I ended up here because Dr. Healy said 'We had a job for you. Over here.'

**Judy Warth:** Nice. Alfred Healy. Um, he was a world renowned, physician pediatrician educator who dedicated his life to caring for children with developmental disabilities. He was the director here at CDD and Iowa's UCEDD from 1977 until when he retired in 1998. Dr. Healy, um, certainly is a legend and a major influence on this organization as well as many around the world. And so it's very cool, Mark, that he saw your potential and he, he brought you in not only for your sake, but for the sake of the patients to show that all people can work. You helped, you helped, uh, make that happen.

**Mark Brown:** People knew me and people can go down the street and people say hi to me.

**Joanna Sabha:** Everybody in Iowa City knows you Mark Brown! Yeah, mark,

**Mark Brown:** Everybody knew my dad and my mom.

**Judy Warth:** So, Mark, what you're saying is sometimes as much as what you do know, it is sometimes who you know that can help you get positioned.

**Joanna Sabha:** That's true.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah.

**Judy Warth:** Now, I know that for a long time you were living at home. Are you still living at home or have you moved out into your own space or what's happening in that arena?

**Mark Brown:** I, I moved out on my apartment in 1983 and now I currently live in the Rise at 435 South Linn and 85% student. And 20% me.

**Judy Warth:** 20% you, those are big shoes to fill Mark.

**Mark Brown:** Yeah. A mixed bag.

**Joanna Sabha:** It's a mixed bag.

**Judy Warth:** Yeah. Yeah. What other help did you need to be able to live in your own place?

**Joanna Sabha:** Do you have anybody come in and help at your house?

**Mark Brown:** No, I get my meals on my own.

**Joanna Sabha:** You get your meals on your own

**Judy Warth:** Do you, do you cook? Do you cook or do you go out?

**Mark Brown:** I make minute steak and sometimes I make BLT, grilled cheese

**Mark Brown:** Sometimes I'll go out, but I don't want to go out all the time.

**Joanna Sabha:** I know. Yeah,

**Mark Brown:** A lot of people been treating me good and I was lucky to be in, this town because now I have good support. Support around me like Megan and, Jessica.

**Joanna Sabha:** You have lots of friends here. Yeah.

**Judy Warth:** What do you do for fun?

**Mark Brown:** I go to all kind of Hawkeye football game and basketball game and I go to all the plays at Hancher.

**Joanna Sabha:** There's one other thing that I know that you're kind of an expert about. What about jazz, Mark?

**Mark Brown:** I, yeah. Yeah. I like jazz.

**Judy Warth:** Well, Mark, is there anything that you'd like for our listeners to, as we wrap this up, anything you'd like for them to know or advice that you'd give to young people with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities or just community members in general? Is there anything you'd like for them to know? Any advice you'd give?

**Mark Brown:** I will say meet people halfway.

**Joanna Sabha:** Yeah.

**Mark Brown:** Because work to or middle.

**Joanna Sabha:** Yeah. Towards the middle.

**Judy Warth:** Thank you for joining us today on Disability Exchange. Thank you Joanna for joining us today as more than just our producer, but co-host, mark.

**Narrator:** Thank you so much Thank you for joining us today on Disability Exchange. Disability Exchange is produced by the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, which is housed at the Center for Disabilities and Development at the University of Iowa. Special thanks to Kyle Delve for the music contribution.