About Dolly Gray

Dolly Sharpe Gray was born September 20, 1971 in New York City. She was born with severe cerebral palsy, and for many days in the NICU her future was uncertain. When it was clear she would survive, her parents, Lynn and Hod Gray, took her home. Not quite 18 years later she died in her sleep of a respiratory infection.

Dolly's full life was in many ways the life of any little girl and young woman. She had friends and went to school. She went camping and went to parties. To an extent that one might not have anticipated, she participated in the world that we not "the rest of us," but all of us share. Literature had a lot to do with it.

Like many young people, she loved books and for many of the same reasons. Dolly could not walk, and she could not speak. Perhaps because of these limitations, the concentrated messages books bring about diverse people and places were all the more critical to her. It was in part as if the world shared itself with her through them.

Books affected Dolly's life in other ways. We take it for granted that books promote something called "awareness." We sometimes forget that it is hardly a simple matter. With unique power and realism, books tell us about the lives of others, including persons with disabilities. Throughout her life, Dolly was greeted with much acceptance, and benefited from that understanding for which literature is partly responsible.

Each of us knows ourselves better for having encountered ourselves in literature, and books offered Dolly something precious. She enjoyed stories none too many available in her time showing figures with whom she could identify. Without powerful and accurate depiction of persons with disabilities, literature itself is diminished.

Today there are many more books for young people which give substance to "inclusion." Often they are more factual, yet more creative and truer to life than standard fare in the past. Dolly would be pleased. She would be reading them. Dolly would be thrilled for this award to be named in her honor. She would think the idea of it especially cool, because she knew what sharing is all about.

By Hod Gray
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