

Ed Roberts, Prophet of Independence

Ed Roberts died on March 14, 1995. He was a major prophet of the new revolution of independence, not for nations or groups, but for people as individuals. Ed declared that people with disabilities are fully human; that they have a right and a responsibility to throw off traditional paternalism, to take control of their own lives, to help build a new culture in which they and all people participate fully in the leadership, the labor and the fruits of society. Like most great prophets, his ideas came not from books, polls and experts, but from the depths of his vulnerability, of his passion for life, of his love for people. Like most great prophets, the power of his message was not simply words and logic, but the example of his life, the profound power of principles lived. Like most great prophets he inspired others to institutionalize his agenda, and to plant its seeds around the world. Unlike most prophets, his life produced more than a new version of an old idea and a popular movement bearing his name. Our revolution is expanding the definition and the process of human being itself, in the name of all. Millions have benefited. Billions will benefit. Let us celebrate this prophet. Not, as with prophets past, by monuments and rituals, but by living the dream of independence. Each one of us a prophet, each one of us a leader in the struggle to focus the full force of science and free enterprise democracy on the empowerment of individual humans. Let us unite as never before. Let us go forward in the spirit of Ed Roberts, with love, with truth, with courage, with absolute commitment to a society by all.

Justin Dart

Ed Roberts 1939 - 1995

I want to extend my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Ed Roberts. As an international leader and educator in the independent living and disability rights movements, he fought throughout his life to enable all persons with disabilities to fully participate in the mainstream. He was truly a pioneer. His vision and ability to bring people together should be an example for all Americans.

President Bill Clinton



Ed Roberts and I met on the telephone over 20 years ago when he called me in Brooklyn to invite me to join him in developing the Berkeley Center for Independent Living. My life was irrevocably changed. Ed was a dynamic, charismatic character. He became my mentor, my partner, and my best friend. His boldness, daring and unwillingness to accept the status quo resulted in thousands of disabled people, families and supporters uniting to change archaic policies and practices that prevented us from making our best contributions. Together we created a movement from which we all reap benefits today. The world is a better place for Ed having been here. In his passing we must all remember that we are only just beginning to improve the quality of life for disabled persons and we must recommit ourselves to fighting for equality and independence for all.

Judy Heumann