



*Dear Friends,*

*As the world celebrates Women's History Month and reflects on the multitude of talented women who have left a positive impact on the world, I find myself deeply appreciating a group of women whose stories may never appear in history books but are so worthy of telling.*

*In 1958 a woman named Margaret gave birth to a daughter with Down syndrome. For generations, having a child labeled as "disabled" was not a moment to be celebrated. Parents were encouraged by physicians to put their children in institutions, that "it was best for the family." Societal pressures supported these heart-wrenching decisions, and as result millions across the world spent their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in institutions, separated from family and their communities of origin.*

*Margaret initially followed the path the doctor recommended, and her daughter was taken to an institution. The separation was intolerable so within several months she brought her daughter home and began a journey of breaking down barriers to full inclusion. Her daughter grew up surrounded by love, attended school, participated in church, excelled in Special Olympics sports, and was connected to her community. A life many of us take for granted, but without the actions of a courageous mom- life for her daughter would have been much different.*

*Marcene is another trailblazer of the 1950's I've long admired. Although her son was born with cerebral palsy, there was no question about where he would grow up. Surrounded by loving parents and siblings, he thrived. Marcene was a gentle force to be reckoned with, and her advocacy for accessibility and opportunity became legendary in her community and beyond.*

*I have also met and admired women who chose the path of adopting children with disabilities, and their voices and actions of advocacy have changed laws and practices across our country.*

*These stories have a multitude of variations-mothers across the world raising their children with a wide range of "diagnostics," but embracing them first as individuals with gifts and talents to share. Their fierce advocacy for equity, accessibility and full inclusion has changed the face of history. Each story is so worthy of recognition and celebration, although most will not be told on a global stage.*

*Because of the courage and love expressed by mothers like Margaret and Marcene in decades gone by, our present has been deeply enriched and is more inclusive. To each of these women, we owe a debt of gratitude, and I for one am so admiring of their impact.*

*Regards,*

*Michele Girault*  
Michele Girault  
Executive Director