



LIFE: Learning Is for Everyone: The True Story of How South Carolina Came to be a Leader in Providing Opportunities for Postsecondary Education to Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

Donald Bailey

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“Dad, am I going to college?” Donald Bailey’s intellectually challenged son, Donald Jr., asks at the outset of *LIFE: Learning is for Everyone*. The answer ordained by the educational infrastructure in the Bailey family’s home state of South Carolina is “no.” However the author chose not to accept the state’s answer. As one of Bailey senior’s compatriots explains, “Donald Bailey has this ongoing auditory processing problem. He simply cannot understand the word ‘no.’”

As a result of the author’s aversion to quitting plus his indomitable will and knack for bringing people together, the answer to his son’s question changes over the course of a brief book that is as much a how-to for social change as it is a personal story.

LIFE is a story about how Bailey spearheaded an effort to create a college opportunity for his son. But his account, which is written in first person, really focuses on how he went about developing a program for intellectually disabled adults. Bailey describes his work with dozens of people, organizations, and universities, from his initial success with the formation of the Charleston Transition College board in 2006 to the triumphant birth of the first LIFE program at the University of South Carolina in 2008 and the blossoming of other efforts across the state. Bailey chronicles each setback and milestone as he helps to bring South Carolina to the forefront of post-secondary education for intellectually disabled young adults.

LIFE has its flaws. Bailey has never met a cliché he didn’t like, and his prose tends to ramble, but his informal style lets his personality shine through, and it is always readable. Readers will likely be won over just like the many people Bailey enlists in his cause.

LIFE’s greatest literary achievement is that it transcends its potential for schmaltz. By focusing on how he succeeded in his quest, as opposed to leaning heavily on emotional aspects or social arguments, Bailey’s book is genuinely inspirational. In showing how he accomplished a revolution in South Carolina’s post-secondary education system, he demonstrates that one person can still make a difference, even in our disillusioned age.

KENRICK VEZINA (September 13, 2012)

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