

Fall 2011

# Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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## Recommended Citation

Salamone, Cathryn, "Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City" (2011). *Community Action Forum: Seidenberg School*. Paper 4.  
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## Cathryn Salamone

### Biography

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My name is Cathryn Salamone and I'm a junior BFA Musical Theater student at Pace University, in New York City. Next semester I will be studying abroad in London, UK at the London Academy of Dramatic Art for their Classical Theatre Semester course. My intended career is an actor, but I also have interests in graphic design, video production, and travel. My community service experience includes work through the National Honor Society and Key Club, as well as service work with Rotaract, a division of Rotary International, while I studied abroad in Japan.

### A Photo of Me

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## Midterm Reflection Journal

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It's hard to believe that we have already reached the mid semester. It's remarkable how far Nishtha and I have come in getting to know Felix, as well as how much Felix has been able to open up to us and communicate with us better.

When we first met our partners, we were given a list of potential questions to ask, including "Where do you live?", "How many people are in your family?", "What are your favorite subjects in school?", and "Who will win the world series?" Nishtha and I set out in asking these questions, and were responded with "yes", "no", or one-word answers. With answers that were not either "yes", or "no", it was very difficult for Nishtha and I to understand what Felix was saying to us. I recall having him write out a few words, including his brother's name, and his favorite Mets player.

Now, at mid-semester, I'm happy to say that we can understand almost everything Felix tells us. He is more forthcoming with his answers, and pauses less before answering us – a minor hesitation that he had at the beginning, which is less apparent now.

Felix is very upbeat and is always enthusiastic when he sees us. It is always a joy to work with him on Tuesdays, and he is usually interested in what work we are engaging in. Felix usually shows us videos of the 7 Train on YouTube, one of his big interests. We had to get Felix to stay on track with us when we were discussing important future goals, including career, potential for going to college, where he would like to work, and how his interests fit in with that intended work environment. However, he would always answer our questions with interest, and I am looking forward to practicing the powerpoint presentation and seeing how he fares with the task.

I greatly enjoyed the *DisabilityLand* text by Alan Brightman. I enjoyed the layout of the book – first, the fact that it was presented in landscape instead of portrait style, giving off the immediate sense that this book is different, talking about different people. I also greatly enjoyed the copious use of quotes throughout the book, a few of which stood out to me:

"The child must know that he is a miracle; that since the beginning of the world there hasn't been, and until the end of the world there will not be, another like him."

- Pablo Casals

“You will always find some eskimos ready to instruct the Congolese on how to cope with heat waves.”

- Stanislaw Lec

These two quotes are radically different, and in my eyes sum up the entire meaning and reasoning to write the book. It is perfectly true that each and every person is a miracle; the importance lying in that they know that they are miracles, and that they were made for a purpose. It seems very important to tell these students how special they are, and just because they are different doesn't mean that they are not entitled to the same joys as other people.

The other quote is also poignant into the insights of the problems that parents might feel when trying to help their children. People may feel qualified to give their advice on a certain subject, however, they may not be necessarily qualified to give their advice.

I also enjoyed the vignettes the author wrote about his experiences with people with disabilities as well as people outside of the “Disabilityland”, trying to make sense of it and trying to fathom it. All in all, it was a fantastic book, and I enjoyed reading it thoroughly.

I look forward to the work that Felix, Nishtha and I will embark upon for the second half of the semester. Here's to the rest of the journey!

## **FINAL REFLECTION JOURNAL**

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On Wednesday, my partner Nishtha, myself, and Felix made our presentation. We went first, and I told Felix of this in case he had any apprehension. He seemed very excited and not the least bit nervous. We went up to the front of the class, and Felix presented his slides very well. He smiled the entire time, and spoke his slides well. I was so proud of Felix for the effort he has made in this class, as well as with our project. I myself have stage fright when I go up onstage, so to see Felix get up without hesitation and present in front of his classmates, the AHRC staff, and the other Pace students, was fantastic.

A big component of this project that struck me was the importance of assessing Felix's skills and interests, and finding possible employment opportunities for him. Felix will be graduating in May and will begin pursuing options for a possible career, and my partner and I put a lot of research and thought into our options for Felix. I've also found that there is a lot of support out there for people with disabilities; we went on countless numbers of sites to find information, both from the government and private organizations.

A large impact that this class had on me was that though these students have disabilities, they have great strengths in other areas. I was amazed by some of the other presentations, where some of the students excel in animation, drawing, movie making, and sports. Felix is also an artist, and gave me a new drawing or piece of artwork each day he came to class. It became something I always looked forward to!

I think that Felix did enjoy his time here. It was great to take him on a tour of our school, as well as buy him a sweatshirt at the bookstore. Most importantly, I think it was great to expose him to the university setting, as a goal that he can work toward if he chooses to. Felix shared with us his passion for the subway system and showed us many YouTube clips of his favorite 7 train pulling in to his station. Felix also enjoyed showing us clips of his favorite movies.

I learned that Felix has an unbeatably upbeat personality. It was really inspiring to see him say hello to me and my partner, as well as to the other Pace students when he came to class. He also has a big sense of humor, and often joked with his friend Holden, another student in the class. This class is extremely important in eliminating inherent prejudices against people with disabilities by allowing university students to interact and work with them. An additional aspect of this was when we visited the AHRC Adult facility on Williams Street. We met beautiful, exuberant personalities and were able to see their daily activities. I believe that only through actual interaction and communication can people without disabilities eliminate any false prejudice or bias against the disabled. I am very grateful for the experiences I've had in this class, and I'm wishing Felix the greatest of luck as he graduates AHRC High School.