From Puddles to PRIDE
(For all those who marched at the Disability Pride Parade)
by Janice Fialka

When they first gave me the news my child
had a disability
and would forever have a label glued to his name

I discovered sounds in my throat I never knew existed
wails
groans
sobs

Even silent screams
erupted from my throat,
shattered the windows
in my once-called normal home.

After my body emptied
of all sounds
the tears came
madly,

streaming down my cheeks,
sliding down my arms that clutched my baby
raining over my heart.

into puddles,

Puddles all around me
Puddles everywhere
Puddles I thought I would drown in.

That was 19 years ago.

Today, July 18, 2004 on a balmy summer day
in the city of Chicago

I stand

on this street where there are no puddles.

On this street there are feet
of every size, shape, age, and color marching, shuffling, rolling
in the first-ever Disability PRIDE Parade.
Yes, I said: Disability Pride Parade!
On this street there are wheels rolling
lovely legs limping
clenched fists raised high
    in the cloud-studded blue sky,
beautiful bent smiles exploding with joy.

On this street there are voices, mumbles, grunts, spit, hands moving in the air,
shouting out, signing out, singing out:
*What do we want?*
    Accessibility!
*When do we want it?*
    Now!

On this street are people who will
no longer be shunned, excluded,
no longer be segregated, pitied
no longer be tolerated only on holidays and at charity balls.

On this street is Marlin, regal in his body and chair
singing James Brown with a twist:
“Say it LOUD, I’m Disabled and Proud”
Rallying all young disabled activists to say it, shout it, sign it
and Braille it . . .

On this street is our son, Micah
whose label is not a source of shame to him.
Who says, “I meet the best people in the world.”

On this street, I look around,
turn to another mother who knows about puddles
and say: “This is how life should look every day, on every street.”

On this street there are no puddles ---
no puddles of shame.
The glorious sunlight has dried them up.

On this street there are no puddles,
There is only PRIDE.
There is only PRIDE.