

To be disabled is to have failed. I don't mean we've failed inherently, but our culture tells us whose bodies matter, and it's not us. Having failed gives us certain problems, like with making money, staying housed, finding partners, keeping our children, transportation that works for our bodies, and being understood and known in community.

We lose respect for walking differently, taking longer to talk, spastic movements, and asking for anything— like a ramp, or to turn the TV down. Our existence makes abled people uncomfortable because they have to think about difference, power hierarchies, and death. Often they feel guilty for the relative who's locked away in a group home, or they're hurting about the relative they lost who shook like you do.

We know that white, thin, abled people with money are the people who matter. So disabled people are in trouble within culture.

creative freedom

When I think of freedom, I remember how failing Algebra II in high school set me free. I'd been a "smart kid" and good student, stuck in those roles. Failing meant I could hop off the path I'd been on and make a new path. In fact, I was forced to get creative.

That's one of the things I love most about disabled people. We can't do the standard thing, so we find options that are freshly new, or go back to basics. I love how disabled people define success in a way that includes ourselves, get around a requirement, and create pockets of justice where we can help one another with love.

My favorite ways of finding disabled success aren't ways that mimic the norms of mainstream culture, like inspiring special olympics with budgets of millions of dollars. My favorite ways are sweet and quiet. We Den Parent in our communities because someone needs to start the birthday card, put flowers on the

table, and speak the prayer.

We cook Food Not Bombs because we're good at it, and there's so much surplus produce going to waste that we can put to good use. But we also cook Food Not Bombs because we know what it's like to be houseless and hungry, or we miss our disabled sibling who died on the street. We can't save everyone, but the vegan lentils are delicious today—please try them.

access intimacy

The ones taking care of disabled people are mostly other disabled people. My disability justice hero Mia Mingus coined the term “access intimacy” which is when someone understands your access needs, and there's an ease. We're not trying to hide the pain, the ostomy bag, mobility aid, bruises, bandage, stimming. In fact, I like your stims.

Let's be real about what we're doing here. We're two people who have known the struggle to survive. Probably we've faced death so many times. Often we face death alone.

So comparatively, this is a cakewalk. We're having a good day on this blanket, in this meadow. Death is around the corner, so thank you for pausing to talk today, where the elk so recently pooped into the grass and chewed their cud in the sun.

whole selves

At this point I have so much experience with failure that it's a skill. There are countless ways my culture has told me I don't belong, I'm a burden, and I don't count.

Disabled love is the best love because we're not stuck in an error of who has worth. We show up as our whole selves. Any illusion of perfection is long shattered.

Will you be vulnerable with me as we learn anew what love is? With every person, we come together uniquely. My jagged places

find yours—my harm finds your harm. What we do with the unique combination is up to us. Compassion and gentleness is my preference, but sometimes fear rushes in.

Community is a rehash of our families of origin. We take on similar roles as we did in our childhoods, or rebel against them. We reenact conflicts. Pain resurfaces; I feel the old patterns ache. I'm sorry for how I've behaved when my value was being ignored, or when someone acted like my brother, and I had a response that seemed out of proportion.

Being disabled in community is hard because our worth is more hidden. Through big money media, capitalism created a culture where what can be seen obviously and visually is the winner.

Tenderness is small, inner, and doesn't shout its name. Thank you for picking up the blanket, shaking off the grass, folding it neatly, and carrying it under your arm when you could tell I was having trouble carrying myself.