



Users in Control: A Fresh Perspective on Accessibility

Episode 2

The Madtoe Strikes Again: Hands-Free Graphic Design by Leigh-Anne Tompkins

Due to a lack of oxygen at birth, I have cerebral palsy, which limits me physically. When I was nine years old, a TV documentary about a young woman who was without arms and painted pictures using her feet inspired me. I then started practicing drawing with my right foot, holding a pencil between my first and second toes. The first thing I drew was a big letter “A” (that’s when I started writing), and after that a picture of a baby, which my elementary school principal hung up in his office. I was so proud and it motivated me to try more artwork. In one instance, I won a trip to California because of a portrait I did of Michael Jackson.

Following high school, I earned a full scholarship to the University of North Florida located in Jacksonville on a beautiful campus, which is also a nature conservancy. The other students were friendly and helpful, although I didn’t have as many boyfriends as I would have liked. Students doing well in disciplines in which I was involved took notes for me, other friends fed me lunch, and my close girlfriends



Sampling of Leigh-Anne’s graphic and web design projects

helped me with toileting and hygiene. Most of my professors were especially adept at teaching and befriending me. I loved my college experience and my art kept me motivated throughout. Winning various awards along the way, I graduated in 1992 magna cum laude with a degree in Fine Arts with a track in Computer Graphics.

Shortly after, I founded Graphics Afoot Studio Design where I outsource for local, national, and international companies. AT&T, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Chase Banks/Home Finance are a few of the better-known companies I have done work for. Also, I do graphic tasks for local clients wanting to start new businesses. I work at home because most studios aren’t handicapped accessible, and although small studios are willing to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities, they are monetarily unable to support them. Larger studios don’t appreciate the hassle of making workplace changes, or hiring personnel for specific reasons like feeding and toileting the disabled artist.

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A lot of my work is done via email, FTP, instant messaging, phone calls, fax, and courier. To expose my company, I subscribe to freelance sites such as Elance.com, and designed a website for my studio www.graphicsafoot.com that features some of my portfolio. Other web designs I have created include www.pptsolutions.org and www.shcjax.org. My design work consists of personal/holiday ecards, web banners, logos, corporate packages, brochures, newsletters, newspaper/magazine ads, photo restorations, as well as other projects. Products highlighting my designs may be purchased at www.cafepress.com/graphics_afoot.

People wonder how I operate my Macintosh and Windows computers. While sitting in a wheelchair at my desk, I do my graphic and web designs by manipulating a Kensington ExpertMouse trackball on the floor with my right foot. Also, in order to type on a hardware keyboard, I use a headstylus. On my Mac, I wouldn't

be able to work without the Universal Access (AKA: Easy Access) Sticky Keys, which allows me to hold down more than one key at a time. When no one is present to put my headstylus on me, I use KeyStrokes in conjunction with my trackball. I like KeyStrokes and its word prediction. I had been wishing for an on-screen keyboard like this 18 years ago and at last my wish has come true! Finally, it may be of some interest to know the applications I use in my work without difficulty. These include: Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Acrobat, QuarkXpress, Freehand, Dreamweaver, Flash, and Fireworks, among others.

Being disabled doesn't mean an inability to function; it only means we function in a unique way. We find better ways to work more easily and successfully. We must not give up. This is expressed by a quote that was in big bold letters all over my elementary classrooms and physical therapy rooms: "We can because we think we can." □

Though I have a disability, it doesn't keep me from pursuing my dreams. "We can because we think we can." To see how anything is possible with technology, determination, and positive thinking, please watch Episode 6 of the video podcast, [Exploring the Frontiers of Assistive Technology](#).



This PDF and audio podcast is created by Mac users with physical, speech, or vision impairments. Featuring their experiences, it seeks to inform, inspire, and provide a platform for new ideas. Twice a year, some of the articles appear in a PDF of the AssistiveWare Newsletter, found at www.assistiveware.com/newsletter.php. A video podcast titled "Exploring the Frontiers of Assistive Technology" that features some of the contributors is also available.

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