

DISABOOM

HOLIDAY GUIDE 2009

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Welcome to the Second Annual Disaboom Holiday Guide!

We've rounded up the best holiday tips we could find; interviewed the experts; tracked down the stand-out gifts, books, adaptive sports camps; and, well, covered just about every base except for the best rum eggnog hangover recipe – we just couldn't agree on the best one. We hope these holiday tips will keep you sane, solvent, and joyful!

Check the following pages for the most current resources on holiday travel; holiday tips for avoiding stress (and maintaining your sanity); coming up with cool gifts without spending the proverbial arm and leg; getting out of the house and into an adaptive winter sports camp; holiday tips for the budget-minded (and who isn't these days?); and how to find special (read: fun, affordable, and geared toward your child's abilities) toys for special kids.

*Holiday tips
to keep you
sane, solvent,
and joyful!*

Read holiday tips for acknowledging the special gifts of time, love, and effort that are given to us every day by those who make our lives better, easier, or more rewarding throughout the year, or peruse the Annual Disaboom Best Books list, appreciation and applause for those books that

stood out for their thoughtfulness, insight, information, and writing.

Lastly, we are honored to have an opportunity to include an article from last year's guide written by Bethany Broadwell, who passed away earlier this year. In addition to being a fine and passionate writer, which is how we at Disaboom

first came to know her, Bethany was a beloved daughter, friend, and ceaseless advocate for people with disabilities. She will be missed, but her spirit will live on in these pages and many others.



Accessible Travel: Holiday Flights Give Whole New Meaning to Adventure Travel!

By Kim Donahue

This holiday season, given the challenging state of the economy and the equally challenging state of the nation's airlines, let alone accessible travel, it's likelier that few of us will be flying around the country for the holidays.

However, for those hardy souls who live for adventure and will thus be boarding a plane in the coming weeks, we offer the following resources to help you navigate the challenges you may encounter when undertaking airline travel with disabilities, whether it be wheelchair travel, traveling with oxygen, flying with kids with special needs, or some other consideration.

TSA: Travel with Disabilities and Medical Conditions

TSA, a.k.a. the Transportation Security Administration, is charged with ensuring and maintaining the "highest level of security" for the flying public. And we have complete confidence that with their excellent oversight, we are, no doubt, enveloped in security. It just *feels* like the security processes are actually designed to make us crazy. ...

But you'll feel better about why those processes are in place, especially for travel with disabilities, after visiting this website. You'll find information about screening processes, disability-related items permitted through the security checkpoint, what to expect during screening, and similarly helpful pointers. Be sure to read the [Before You Go](#) information, and check out the information specific to your disability (for example, [Mobility Disabilities](#) for wheelchair travel, [Visual Disabilities](#) for those with vision impairments, etc.).

Air Accessibility, Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Dept. of Transportation

Your tax dollars at work, this site provides links and descriptions to five resources:

- [Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel](#) – an overview of the Department of Transportation regulations as stipulated in the Air Carrier Access Act, which prohibits discrimination in airline service based on disability. Three documents: two rule updates effective May 12 and May 13, 2009, and an FAQ, current as of May 13, 2009.
- [Passengers with Disabilities](#) – a summary of the Air Carrier Access Act (also known as 14 CFR Part 382), which defines the airlines' obligations under this law.
- [The FAA's Passengers with Disabilities Home Page](#) – check here for such information as what to expect at the passenger security checkpoint, planning your trip, at the airport, getting on and off the plane, on the plane, and compliance procedures.
- [Facility Accessibility Guidelines](#) – Applicable to airports as well as all public buildings, these guidelines establish the minimum requirements for accessibility in buildings and facilities subject to Title II and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Home Page](#) - provides information and technical assistance on the ADA, including material on Title III, which applies to public accommodations and private facilities.

Accessible Travel for the Holidays: Live the Adventure!

By checking out the tips and resources above, hopefully your airline experience will be as relaxed as possible. Whether your accessible travel involves wheelchair travel or travel with a service animal or with an oxygen pack or other condition, we hope your journey is a safe, relaxed, and joyful one.

Looking For More Accessible Travel Resources?

[Guidebooks for
People with Disabilities](#)

[Camping 101: Vital
Adaptive Equipment and
Knowledge for Campers
with Disabilities](#)

[Accessible Travel and the
Paralympic Movement](#)

[Accessible Travel: How
About Audio Tours?](#)



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Holiday Stress:

Ten Tips for Staying Sane During the Holidays

By Kim Donahue

According to the American Psychological Association, nearly half of women in the U.S. experience heightened stress during the holidays. Perhaps the other half were simply too exhausted to fill out the form correctly.

Let's face it: as joyful as the holidays can be, they can also be the source of anxiety, frustration, holiday depression, and the five-pound weight gain.

Holiday Stress and...Belly Fat???

And we're not talking your ordinary, garden-variety weight gain here! According to the experts, stress causes your body to send damaging hormones, including cortisol, coursing through your system. Excess cortisol is believed to cause your body to store belly fat.

The good news: you can change this dynamic by taking control of your life – and your days:

1-Pamper Yourself

If there were ever a time to get a massage, this is it. Book one for December and one in January (for blissful recovery). Dark chocolate and red wine are also effective – and healthy! – approaches to pampering, especially when shared with others.

2-Move

Focus on fitness, rather than worrying about fatness – rev up your metabolism with aerobic and strengthening exercises. Ready to try something new? Head to the local public library for some exercise DVDs. Many routines can be adapted to sitting movement.

3-Hang Out With Happy Friends

Go for quality rather than quantity in your social life: during the holidays, hang out only with friends who make you laugh, feed your soul, or in other ways delight you. You'll have plenty of time for your other friends in February.

4-Volunteer

Give your community the gift of you, even if all you can volunteer is a smile or a compliment. Consider volunteering at a local charity. In addition to benefitting from what experts identify as "helpers' high," you may also meet new friends and make lasting connections.

5-Play With Your Food

Lighten up family favorites, do a recipe "makeover." Figure out what you want to eat and enjoy it – then ignore the rest of the buffet table. Use smaller plates for smaller portions. Stick to your healthy foods, even if you add the occasional holiday splurge – this will make it easier to resume your healthy lifestyle in January.

6-Rethink Gift-giving

Make gift-giving as easy as possible. That may mean giving fewer gifts, doing your shopping online, paying a few bucks for gift wrapping, or perhaps making modest online donations to the favorite causes of friends and family. Most of us spend our time agonizing about what to get for whom. Consider instead that the real gift you give is your time – this is the gift that creates memories, and lasts for a lifetime.

7-Laugh

According to researchers at California's Loma Linda University, just anticipating a good laugh "significantly decreases levels of the stress hormones dopac, cortisol, and epinephrine." Cortisol? Hot damn, there goes the belly fat! Laughter is life's gentlest way of easing our fears and frustrations. Where to get started? Rent funny holiday movies!

8-Sleep

Try for eight hours, get at least seven. For people with disabilities, who may have compromised immune systems, a lack of sleep can have devastating consequences. But even if that weren't the case, missing your shut-eye will result in exhaustion, depression, and general crankiness.

9-Say No

Remember, "no" is a complete sentence. No, nada, nope, that doesn't work for me. Consider this an absolute necessity for protecting your health and sanity during the holidays (although it works pretty well throughout the rest of the year, too!).

10-Cut Yourself Some Slack

How many ways can you say "guilt?" You didn't get the cards sent, you had the rum eggnog *and* the dozen brownies, and the gifts you finally got mailed off to your brother's kids will probably be there after New Year's. Cause for guilt? Nope – cause for celebration. It just means you're a completely normal human being and you wisely decided the holidays shouldn't be about stress, but about joy. Congratulations!

Want More Stress Relief? Look Here!

[Stress and Women's Health](#)

[Handling Irritability](#)

[Fitness for People with Disabilities is Important](#)

[Therapeutic Touch for Chronic Pain Relief](#)

[Shoulder Pain Relief with Acupuncture](#)

Five Suggestions for an Affordable Holiday

By Dan Lawton

The holiday season is officially here. For some families, that means another season of racking up debt to pay for everything from holiday travel to gifts. Don't do it!

There are plenty of ways to enjoy the holidays while still being financially responsible. To learn some inside tricks, I spoke with Adam Baker, a budgeting guru who writes the popular blog [Man Vs. Debt](#).

Disaboom: What are the steps to creating a solid holiday budget?

AB: Start early. One of the biggest problems we have is not planning ahead for the holidays. Often, it's not until October or later before we realize that we are in trouble from a budgeting standpoint.

Keep it simple. Most people either don't start at all or burn out quickly, because they try to do everything. Start broad. Divide your budget into housing, transportation, food, spending, etc.

Give yourself room. Create a separate account for the holidays. Even putting in \$40 a month can make a huge difference when winter rolls around. Also, round your income down (e.g., \$2234 to \$2200) and round your expenses up (mortgage of \$1542 becomes \$1600). This way at the end of the month, you'll have a little extra padding in your account.

Disaboom: What are some tips for saving money on holiday travel—airfares, hotels etc.?

AB: If possible, avoid traveling during the busiest holiday times. Our family used to have Thankmas, which fell between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This allowed our extended family to get together only once, while making travel much cheaper.

That being said, sometimes this isn't a possibility. Your next best

option is to be flexible with how you travel or even when you travel. Often, it's cheaper to stay at a cheap hotel an extra night if



decorations, ornaments, lights, wrapping paper, holiday foods? Are there creative ways to reduce their expense?

flight prices drop drastically the next day. Also, consider driving, flying, or even trains or buses. Don't assume you can only travel one way.

Disaboom: What are some ways to reduce the price of gifts without crushing the spirit of the holidays?

AB: Focus on experiences first. There are plenty of ways to add tremendous spirit to the holiday season that don't involve materialistic things. Playing family games, spending quality time making personalized gifts from scratch or even offering services is much more valuable than another candle or gift card.

If you do want to buy tangible gifts, I would focus on one or two main presents. Most of the issues with budgeting involve things getting out of hand. You get into the 'spirit' and next thing you know you've bought dozens of knick-knacks and haven't realized how quickly things add up.

Disaboom: What about all the little incidentals of the holidays:

More Great Budget Ideas!

[Financing an Accessible Home](#)

[Looking for a job? Start here!](#)

[Accessible Cheap Lodging: Couch Surfing](#)

[Seven Cheap Date Ideas](#)

[Top 5 Sites for Free Online Learning](#)

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Looking for Winter Adaptive Sports? Think Adaptive Ski Camps!

By Craig Kennedy

Do you want to give something extra special to your loved one this year? Giving the gift of an invaluable life experience will make their day. Send your friend or family member with a disability to any of the many adaptive ski camps across the country and help them to learn or improve a lifelong passion. Here's a roundup of some of the top adaptive ski camps ([click for the full list of adaptive ski camps](#)):

Colorado Adaptive Ski Camps

Colorado is well known for its dozens of ski resorts, including nine adaptive ski programs offering opportunities for all levels of skiers with disabilities. *Adaptive Adventures* is a leader in providing adaptive ski camps—hosting, co-hosting, or participating in nearly 10 camps and clinics in Colorado alone.

The Vail All Mountain Ski Camp, sponsored and co-hosted by the Vail Marriott Mountain Resort and Spa, usually held the second week of January, features special guests and Paralympic coaches. For \$500, participants receive four nights lodging, daily instruction, access to the NASTAR race course, and will improve their skills and confidence on the hill. This camp is geared toward intermediate- and advanced-level riders.

For parents who want to ski with their children with disabilities, the *Stars of Tomorrow Youth Camp* in Vail is the opportunity to give your child the thrill of a lifetime. \$50 per day per pair includes everything you need. This social group setting, complete with certified, NSCI-screened instructors is perfect for families wanting that big mountain experience.

As these are just a sampling of the camps available in Colorado, check out camps held in [Crested Butte](#), [Aspen](#), and [Winter Park](#).

Missouri

The *Gateway Disabled Ski Program* in St. Louis hosts five children's camps throughout the winter season. For any child with a disability who belongs to the *Variety Club*, camps in January and February are offered free of charge. During the first week of February, children with visual impairments can learn to ski through a camp run in cooperation with the *Delta Gamma Foundation*.

Minnesota

The *Courage Center* in Duluth, Minnesota, is home to the *Mono-ski Madness Camp*, sponsored by the Miller Dwan Foundation and held at Spirit Mountain the end of February. This camp is unique in that they cater to all ages and abilities. It is very affordable at only \$50 per day, not including lodging.

Vermont

Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports has been empowering people with disabilities for more than 20 years and offers several learn to ski and race programs at multiple locations. People with disabilities can learn to ski or ride at Pico Mountain the third week in January or at Sugarbush Mountain the first week in February.

The annual kids camp takes place during the first week in February at Sugarbush and teaches children with disabilities aged 8-16 to improve their skills while having fun on the slopes. The camp includes skill clinics, gate training, and more. The cost of the camp is free but space is limited.

Skiing can be great fun for families, a group of friends, or couples of varying abilities, and a great way to make the most of our cold, snowy months. This is just a small sampling of adaptive ski camps, for a fuller list of [adaptive ski camps](#), [click here](#).

Want To Get Into Other Adaptive Sports?

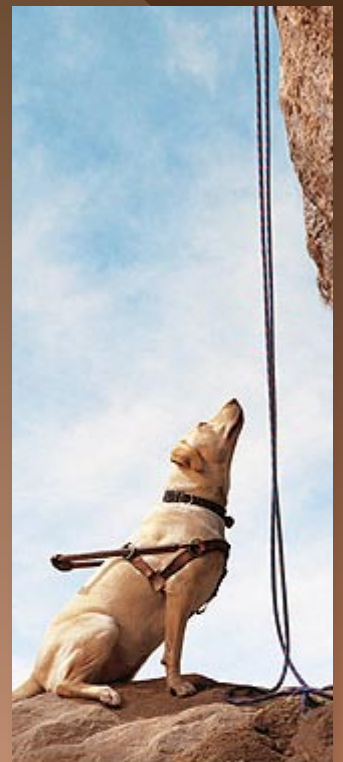
[National Wheelchair Basketball Association](#)

[Amputees Swim with Waterproof Prosthesis](#)

[Adaptive Sports Association](#)

[Adaptive Winter Sports, Get in the Snow!](#)

[Adaptive Sports Center](#)



NATIONAL
SPORTS
CENTER
FOR THE
DISABLED

Fifty under \$50: Top Holiday Gifts for the Impossible-to-Buy-For

By Erin E. Williams

Gift-giving is one of the top stress factors for the holidays, so to help you out, we've assembled the Disaboom monster list of holiday gifts and gift ideas.

Gifts for Friends on the Mend

Movie-Rental Subscription (\$8.99-\$17.99/month)

[Netflix](#) allows family or friends to enjoy movie nights at home.



Blanket with Sleeves (\$19.95 + S&H)

[Snuggie](#) is currently offering a buy-one-get-one-free sale – so snag one for a friend and keep the other for yourself!

Gifts for Athletes

Fitness and Medicine Ball (\$10-\$27.77)

Wal-Mart has a selection of [home exercise accessories](#), including a [fitness ball](#) for \$10 and a [medicine ball](#) for \$27.77.

Lightweight Athletic Towel (\$19.50)

The [REI MultiTowel Lite](#) comes complete with carrying case and ultra-soft synthetic fabric.

Gifts for Travelers

Travel Accessories (\$3-\$49.95)

[Le Travel Store](#) offers a selection of [luggage tags](#) (\$3-\$12.99), [wallets and travel organizers](#) (\$12 - \$30), [travel sheets](#) (\$49.95) and more.

Travel Magazine (\$16.95-\$33.90)

[Emerging Horizons](#) offers online and print magazine subscriptions, full of accessible travel articles and tips.

Gifts for Readers

Book/Laptop Lights and Accessories (\$8.95-\$39.99)

[LightWedge](#) and [Bigger & Brighter](#) make reading lights for laptops or books with the LED technology.

Book of Games (\$22.95)

[The Big Book of Brain Games](#): 1,000 PlayThinks of Art, Mathematics & Science will keep loved ones busy for hours.

Just for Fun

MP3-Player Speaker

(\$9.99) The [Desktop Speaker](#) hooks up to most MP3 players.

Savory Snacks (\$19.95-

\$49.95) [Harry and David](#) offers a selection of decadent treats, including the [Snackbox Gourmet Gift](#) (\$19.95), the [Gift Tower of Sweet Treats](#) (\$29.95) or the [Wild Alaskan Salmon Party Sampler](#) (\$49.95).

For the Kiddos

Kids Chef Sets (\$6.75-\$49.95) [Growing Cooks](#) offers a selection of cooking accessories for kids, including the [Basic](#)

[Chef Set](#) (\$6.95) or the [Kid's Sweet Treats Non-stick Bakeware Set](#) (\$26.95).

Art Set (\$27.95)

Budding artists will appreciate the [Introductory Art Portfolio](#), with watercolor and graphite pencils, soft oil pastels and water color paper.

Holiday Gifts of Support

Donate to a Cause in a Loved One's Name

[Habitat for Humanity](#) – A \$10 minimum tax-deductible donation can be made in a loved one's name to help buy construction materials to build homes for people in need.

[CharityChoice Donation Gift Cards](#) – CharityChoice allows gift card recipients to choose from more than 100 charities they wish to support, including certain [Disability organizations](#).

To see the complete list of holiday gift ideas, go to [Fifty Under \\$50: Top Holiday Gifts for the Impossible-to-Buy-For](#).

Want More Gift And Gadget Ideas? Look Here!

[Adaptive Equipment Gifts for Your Sports Sweetie](#)

[Best Books for Special-Needs Kids](#)

[Children with Disabilities Get Great Toys from This Toys "R" Us Guide](#)

[Special-Needs Toys: Find or Create the Best for Your Child](#)

[Everyday Assistive Technology for Your Disability](#)

ITT Technical Institute ITT

Now offering programs in business and criminal justice.



Kids With Disabilities Who've Touched Our Hearts:

[Adam Bender Does it All on One Leg](#)

[Double Amputee Jesus Villa Finds Love with Adopted Family](#)

[Meet Quinn: One Beautiful Face of Autism](#)

[Braille Without Borders: Creating Hope Where Darkness Once Dominated](#)

[NF2: A Rare Diagnosis Called Neurofibromatosis II](#)

Special Toys for Special Needs Children

By Erin E. Williams

Looking for the right gift for a child with special needs? Today more and more toy manufacturers are creating toys for special needs children that make them laugh, engage them and hold their interest, and lend themselves to imaginative play.

Types of Special Needs Toys

Consider the types of toys available for kids with special needs by the skill addressed. For example, *auditory toys* enhance youngsters' ability to connect through sound in order to absorb information, tell or listen to stories, connect with music, or appreciate the order of repetitive rhymes.

Tactile toys, on the other hand, can help increase children's hand-eye coordination, build concentration and improve tactile skills and gross motor skills (e.g. grip, strength and flexibility in hands and fingers). For fine motor skills, including hand-eye coordination, think *visual toys* that challenge your child's focus as well as engage his or her curiosity.

Language toys can help your child integrate sounds, mimic rhythms, words and sentences, make word associations, and build vocabulary. Language toys and games that can be played in a group situation can be both especially fun and reinforce social communication skills.

Today more & more toy manufacturers are creating toys for special needs children.

Other Aspects of Special Needs Toys and Activities

Creativity

All kids, including special needs children, can benefit from toys that encourage them to use their imagination. Look for toys that focus on building, painting, making music, or even playing dress-up with dolls. (Remember that fun, basic science experiments can be as creative as an activity like painting for a child who loves science.)

Self esteem

One of the best ways to help kids with special needs build self esteem is through activities that provide independence and mastery. A toy that presents a challenge is good, but make sure that it's a challenge your child can reasonably succeed at.

Social skills

Learning how to navigate social situations is critical for special needs children, so consider toys and/or games that help them learn to play successfully with others. This could include toys for multiple players such as board games or language games. Especially effective are games or toys where kids have to cooperate with each other to achieve a goal.

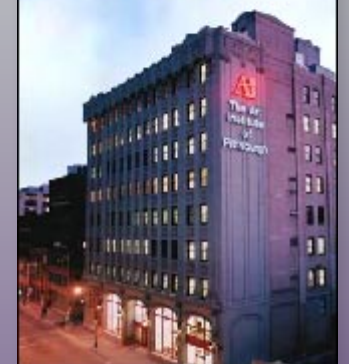
Laughter

Any toy that brings laughter into the lives of special needs children – and those who love them – is a terrific one, no matter what other skills, learning, or knowledge it delivers.

To see the complete list of adaptive toys, see [Adaptive Toys for Special Needs Children.](#)

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More Stories On Those Who Inspire!

[Conquering Mountains with MS](#)

[Video: Michael Gerber on Appreciation](#)

[Jessica Cox Video: Disabled Label](#)

[Matt Scott: Just Do It!](#)

[Video: Former Gang Member Turns Life Around](#)

For Those Who Make Our Lives Easier: Gifts of Appreciation and Love

By Bob Wassom

Many of us with disabilities rely on caregivers, therapists, friends and family to make life livable. They do everything from providing help with daily chores to sharing good times. With the holidays on the doorstep, you may be wondering what to give these special people who do so much. First of all, don't panic. They'll probably truly appreciate anything you give them. But here are some ideas that may help, particularly if you're on a budget...and who isn't these days?

Turn the tables on them. Give them some comfort, in the way of a full body massage, or pedicure or manicure. There are many day spas that provide a la carte services at reasonable prices. An hour long massage typically costs \$60 to \$70. Pedicures and manicures range from \$30 to \$75. Many spas have packages from \$100 that combine several services. Or for a less expensive option, check to see if there is a local massage school nearby that offers the services of massage therapists in training.

Feed them. Have a special recipe? Give them your recipe, along with all the ingredients, packaged in a nice gift basket. Or give them breakfast, with all of the fixin's in a basket...eggs, bread, butter, orange juice, bacon, coffee...the works. Include a nice card with a personal note.

Too much work? A simple gift certificate to their favorite restaurant with dinner for two will give them a nice break.

How about an inspirational book or DVD? You can shop for these online, and any bookstore will give you suggestions. Keep an eye on local events and get them tickets to a play or concert that you know they'll like – local college performances are often less expensive than professional productions, but can be just as much fun. Or how about some in-home entertainment? Package a new movie DVD with some popcorn, a warm blanket and some hot cocoa. Or how about a calendar that's personalized with photos of you, them and their loved ones? Each page can have an inspirational quote or note from you. (That one may take some planning and time.)

The key to any gift is to be in tune with your caregiver or therapist and listen. Most likely they will drop hints in daily conversations about their passions, their likes and dislikes. Tune in and you'll get some great gift ideas, guaranteed. You don't have to spend a lot of money. Being thoughtful is more important. If you really feel stymied, the Internet is loaded with websites for gift givers. Try FindGift.com for an easy-to-follow guide. Happy Holidays!

You don't have to spend a lot of money. Being thoughtful is more important.

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Second Annual Disaboom Best Books List!

By Kim Dority

Once again disproving the claim that book publishing (and reading) is on the wane, 2009 proved to be a good year for books of value to the disability community. Below are the books we believe were especially noteworthy this year. We encourage you to check them out (if your local library doesn't have a copy, they can probably get it for you through interlibrary loan), and share them with friends and loved ones.

Barrier-Free Travel: A Nuts and Bolts Guide for Wheelers and Slow Walkers. Candy B. Harrington, Demos. *Another excellent how-to guide from accessible-travel expert Harrington.*

The Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Ed Child, 6th ed. Lawrence M. Siegel, Nolo Press. *What you need to know to be an effective and informed advocate.*

Disabilityland. Alan Brightman, Select Books. *Perhaps the most moving, beautiful, and wise book ever written about living with disability.*

Dive In: Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity, and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce. Nadine O. Vogel, Paramount Market Publishing. *Convincing argument for the strategic, bottom-line value of hiring people with disabilities.*

The Illustrated Guide to Assistive Technology & Devices: Tools and Gadgets for Living Independently. Suzanne Robitaille, Demos.

AT expert Robitaille details the types of and options within assistive technology, as well as financing options.

Estate Planning for People with a Chronic Condition or Disability. Martin M. Shenkman, Demos. *A practical, understandable, user-friendly guide on a critical topic; includes downloadable forms.*

Lucky Man: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist. Michael J. Fox, Hyperion. *The popular actor once again reveals himself to be funny, wise, and honest in the face of Parkinson's disease.*

Starting an Online Business: All-in-One Desk Reference for Dummies, 2d ed. Shannon Belew and Joel Elad, For Dummies. *Everything you needed to know about creating an online business that can be run from home.*

An Uncertain Inheritance: Writers on Caring for Family. Nell Casey, Harper. *A compendium of moving and beautifully-written essays by well-known authors on being cared for, or caring for others.*

Yoga for Pain Relief: Simple Practices to Calm Your Mind and Heal Your Chronic Pain. Kelly McGonigal, New Harbinger Publications. *Whether from spine injury, MS, fibromyalgia or other condition, chronic pain can be addressed through these gentle but effective movements.*

Want Some More Great Reads?

[Free Digital Audio Books for Vision Impaired](#)

[Children's Nonfiction Book List](#)

[Michael J. Fox Follow-Up: Looking Up](#)

[Running Through Roadblocks Inspires](#)

[Seeing Beyond Sight: Blind Photographers](#)

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Programs Helping Children With Disabilities:

[VSA Arts Helps Children with Disabilities Connect with Their Creative Side](#)

[NASCAR Turns Kids with Illnesses Into Happy Campers](#)

[Dolphin Therapy for Children with Disabilities](#)

[Choosing Among Special-Needs Camps](#)

[Special Needs Children Have Assistive Technology Options](#)

Signing Santas Convey Christmas Magic through ASL

Children with hearing loss let Santa know what they're hoping for come Christmas morning

By Bethany Broadwell

For the past 19 years, ever since the Cherry Creek Shopping Center opened in Denver, CO, children have had an opportunity each holiday season to visit with a Santa who can "Ho-Ho-Ho!" in sign language. "Everyone should be able to tell Santa what they want," said Angela Baier, the shopping center's marketing and sponsorship director. "People are genuinely touched by seeing the children speaking to Santa in their own language."

During December, the mall provides transportation on appointed days so hundreds of kids who are deaf or hearing impaired can convey their wishes to good ol' St. Nick.

One of the mall's regular Santas knows sign language and is capable of conversing about requests. "Last year a little boy asked Santa for a red Ferrari," said Baier.

"The media was here and he was on the evening news. Our local Ferrari dealer saw the story, contacted us to find the boy and delivered an authentic red Ferrari miniature car to the boy's home." Thomas Shaffer, a program manager for the Northeast PA Center for Independent Living in Scranton, PA, strives to keep Christmas magic alive by putting on a Santa suit.

Local children who are deaf or have hearing loss are able to connect with Santa through a ideophone, an Internet-based system with video that allows parties to see each other on screen.

When describing the previous year's program, Shaffer said, "The kids' expressions when seeing Santa Claus signing in American Sign Language were amazing and moving."

"It was pretty difficult to see with the white moustache and beard all over, but I did see his eyes and cheeks that gave indication of a happy face. He picked up a present and handed it over to me."

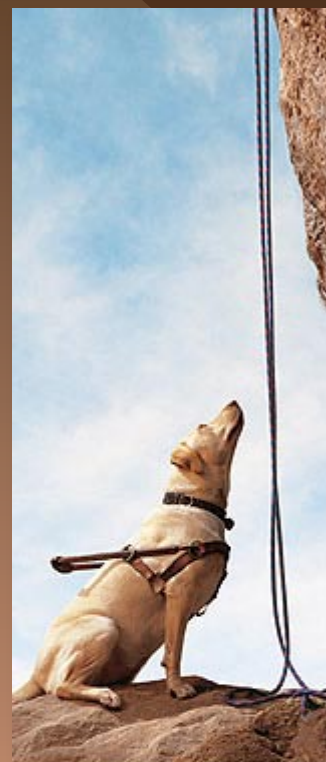
"People are genuinely touched by seeing the children speaking to Santa in their own language."

It was basically a wordless visit, but seeing Santa's kindness and loving gestures

impressed Shaffer. He said he would have been really amazed if Santa had been able to sign.

If you'd like to find a signing Santa in your community, contact the state Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing for details about signing Santa events in your particular area.

Note from the editor: We are republishing this article in memory of Bethany Broadwell, who passed away September 16th, 2009. Bethany was a muscular dystrophy survivor and a freelance writer for several publications, sharing the lives of people with disabilities with others. Disaboom was saddened to learn of her passing, as were all who knew her.



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