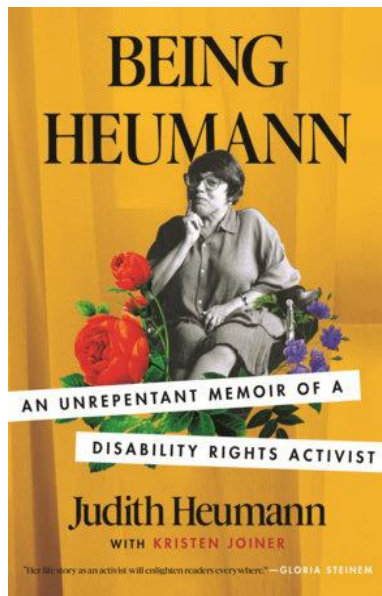


FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR, COMMON TEXT 2024-2025

Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist

Judith Heumann (with Kristen Joiner)

“Some people say that what I did changed the world. But really, I simply refused to accept what I was told about who I could be. And I was willing to make a fuss about it.” (p. 3)



In *Being Heumann*, one of the most influential disability rights activists in U.S. history tells her personal story of fighting for the right to receive an education, have a job, and just be human.

Judith (“Judy”) Heumann’s memoir recounts her lifelong battle to achieve respect, acceptance, and inclusion in society. It is a story of fighting to belong in a world that wasn’t built for all of us and of one woman’s activism—from the streets of Brooklyn and San Francisco to inside the halls of Washington. Judy was at the forefront of major disability rights demonstrations, helped spearhead the passage of disability rights legislation, founded national and international disability advocacy organizations, and held senior federal government positions.

Paralyzed from polio at eighteen months, Judy’s struggle for equality began early in life. From fighting to attend grade school after being described as a “fire hazard” to later winning a lawsuit against the New York City school system for denying her a teacher’s license because of her paralysis, Judy’s actions set a precedent that fundamentally improved rights for disabled people.

As a young woman, after having completed her bachelor’s degree and then a master’s in Public Health, Judy rolled her wheelchair through the doors of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in San Francisco as a leader of the Section 504 Sit-In. Working with a community of over 150 disabled activists and allies, Judy successfully pressured the federal government to implement protections for disabled peoples’ rights, sparking a national movement. Judy was instrumental in developing and implementing national and international disability rights legislation, including Section 504, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



Judy served as the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (1993-2001), as the first Advisor on Disability and Development at the World Bank (2002-2006), and as the first Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the U.S. State Department (2010-2017). She was also appointed as Washington, D.C.'s first Director for the Department on Disability Services.

In addition, Judy helped found the Berkley Center for Independent Living, the Independent Living Movement, and the World Institute on Disability. She also served on the boards of the American Association of People with Disabilities, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, Humanity and Inclusion, Human Rights Watch, the United States International Council on Disability, Save the Children, and others.



Judy has been featured in numerous documentaries on the disability rights movement, including the Oscar-nominated documentary film *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* (2020).

For two years before her passing in 2023, Judy hosted an award-winning podcast, *The Heumann Perspective*, described as “an internationally recognized badass disability activist, in conversation with disabled changemakers and their allies”. The series provided a platform for a wide variety of voices from the disability community to discuss a broad range of topics.

Judy co-authored *Being Heumann* (2021) and its young adult version, *Rolling Warrior*, with Kristen Joiner. Candid, intimate, and irreverent, Heumann’s memoir about resistance to exclusion invites readers to imagine and make real a world in which we all belong.



SOURCES

Biographical information, book description, and images borrowed and adapted from the author’s and publisher’s websites:

<https://judithheumann.com/>;
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/621090/being-heumann-by-judith-heumann-with-kristen-joiner/>.