



Remembering Engracia Figueroa

That morning she was not feeling well but she decided to proceed to work and she usually takes the morning train —the Bart to the office. As it was coming, Engracia lost consciousness and fell many feet below on to the train tracks. The accident left her a double amputee—the accident cut off a leg and paralyzed her on all 4 limbs.

That was 35 years ago. The train accident did not kill Engracia—in fact, she stared at it with courage and rose from the tragedy. She went through rehab and was fitted with a custom made motorized wheelchair. She learned a lot of independent living skills from a wheelchair so she can live on her own and she did so with ease and good humor. A few years later, she moved to Los Angeles and continued her involvement with the Disability Rights Movement and here we met her at CALIF. We enjoyed her company, her insights and intelligence, her joy and depth of character. We enjoyed her confidence, did a lot of sharing of experiences and good will. She eventually became our CALIF Board President and she was taking off straight up toward national leadership had it not been for the horrendous mishandling of her wheelchair by United after a trip to Washington, D.C. to represent our community. Ironically it was not the train accident but an airplane ride that led to her untimely passing last month. At the airport, she was made to sit on furniture with steel netting which seriously threatened her skeletal muscles.

The wheelchair loaner given her caused her wounds long healed to reopen and created new ones. She felt excruciating physical pain and during her last surgery, she died, to the total shock of her family and community.

But in her death, Engracia seem to have attained immortality: she was on Twitter, the Los Angeles Times, Facebook and other media channels national and international. Her story and her fight against the airline industry's record of breaking wheelchairs has gained prominence and exposure. With her death Engracia continues to fight the good fight but this time, untethered and from above!