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INCLUDAS PUBLISHING: HOW SEGREGATION BROUGHT ME TO MY DREAMS

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Imagine a room full of people in wheelchairs. You're the only one standing. No one is talking to you, everyone is talking to everyone behind you. You're the only one looking down. Everyone is at eye level. You constantly have to watch your feet because your toes have almost gotten run over twenty times. Twenty-one. And although there is movement all around you, you're stuck. There are no paths for you. From time to time, you casually smile and nod at passerby, but in your heart you know this place is not for you. Dreadfully, you hang your head low, disappointed that the hype of having an event that is inclusive, doesn't include you. It's always the same old story. They say, they say they value inclusion, yet, you'd never felt more excluded in your life.

No one seems to understand. No one even tries to understand inclusion in its raw, authentic form. No one sees it the way you do. Do they not know their way does more harm than good when they believe their inclusion plan is superior? You sigh and take a pen in hand.

And you write—you write about what others fail to see. Because as much as you want to believe that the next time will be different, you know that that day will never come if the same old story is told. So you create, you create a letter stating everything wrong with the event and how excluded you felt when there were no chairs at the counters or tables, where all of the information was in Braille, where the staff asked you to move to the corner so you wouldn't be blocking anyone's view.

Time and time again, I—as someone in a wheelchair since the age of nine—have had to adapt to the world that excluded me. Places created by the able-bodied for the able-bodied did not include someone of limited mobility. Weeks before college graduation, after a horrid experience, I decided to turn the negative into opportunity. I wanted to offer solutions where no one would ever feel excluded. Over the years the focus shifted from collegiate recreational facilities and entertainment venues to publishing.



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There came a moment in my life where I had to take a step back from the pressure of what others wanted me to do and ask myself what made me happy—creating beautiful stories, connecting with those who feel forgotten, supporting a shift toward an inclusive world.

INCLUDAS Publishing, which I founded in 2015 is all about bringing diversity books and diversity authors to readers, with specific focus on ability. Whether it be limited mobility, deafness, schizophrenia, or autism, we are happy to foster a welcoming and supportive community for all. Our criteria is either 1) the author/talent identifies with a particular ability status, and/or 2) the main character of a story is affected by a particular ability status/disorder. We are open to many projects and are currently planning our INCLUDAS Book, which invites anyone of the diversity community to submit.

The goal is not to only give access to diverse books and authors, but to also create a community and culture that empowers inclusion.



Born with muscular dystrophy, Luda Gogolushko has lived her entire life with limited mobility but never stopped dreaming big. Before starting INCLUDAS in 2015, she served on the EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Commission for the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA). This focus aims to create experiences of inclusion that successfully caters to ability status, gender, faith, etc. for recreational facilities in educational settings. She holds a BS in Recreation and MA in Communication Studies from California

State University of Northridge (CSUN), where she also conducted an auto ethnographical study entitled, "Negotiating Space: An Autoethnography on Wheels."

Website: includas.com

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