

## NOTES

In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. This piece of legislation prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools and transportation. This social change, as it pertains to the perception of those with disabilities, guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. In her essay, *Lessons from a Big Girl with a Handicapped Parking Sticker*, Yolanda Williams revisits her youth and examines how living with a disability can serve as a powerful metaphor for anyone who feels cornered by their own circumstances or personal shortcomings, because, after all, normal people are just “freaks” who are afraid to be themselves in public. This selection should be performed by a female and be entered in Prose Interpretation; however, this selection may also be considered for performance in Dramatic Interpretation. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons simply serve as suggestions for when to turn the page of the manuscript.

When I was younger, I always had a pretty good self-esteem. When I entered school, however, all of that changed. Let’s be honest. Kids? Kids can be cruel. It started with just the simple things: Name calling or an occasional nudge while standing in line. Then, as I got older, things escalated. The names started to sting. Their words became more like daggers, and the occasional nudges turned into intentional shoves (with the malicious slurs like, “Move over, Orca! Step out of my way before I harpoon you!” Or, “Be careful of the crippled girl! She’s contagious!” I, of course, tried to *ignore* their insults, but it was hard. After all, everyone heard what they said, and no one wanted to take up for the overweight handicapped girl.



I think the worst I ever felt in school was during one of our school assemblies. It was career day, so we were all gathered in the auditorium to hear speeches from members of the community. When one of the speakers asked if any of us had a job, a boy, who I secretly had a crush on, stood up and said, “I don’t have a job, but Yolanda Williams does.” He said, “Oh, and where does she work?” And I’ll never forget it. He said, “She works in the circus as the Fat Lady.” Then, someone else shouted, “And if she touches you, you’ll turn into a Crip’ like her.”



I may have been bigger than most of the kids in the school that day. But I didn’t *feel* big. I felt *small*—so small that I wanted to shrink down in my seat and disappear. Where were the teachers? Oh, they were around. They were there. At those times though, they adopted what my dad would call “selective hearing.”