Chapter IV

Addressing Ableism

"All human wisdom is summed up in these two words – 'Wait and hope.'" —

Alexandre Dumas (*The Count of Monte Cristo*)

The current chapter delves into the exploration of ableism within the chosen writings of Beverley Brenna. It contemplates various possibilities such as accommodation and creating spaces that cater to individuals with disabilities, ultimately aiming for their inclusion. The chapter endeavours to investigate the concepts of accessibility and space, highlighting how they foster inclusion as a solution to ableist perspectives.

Inclusion stands as a pivotal factor for various marginalised groups, encompassing the LGBTQ+ community and individuals with disabilities. The concept of 'inclusion' derives its essence from Latin, denoting the provision of equitable access. As articulated by Ruth Cigman in "A Question of Universality: Inclusive Education and the Principle of Respect," the assertion that "All children without exception should be treated with respect" remains a foundational belief (784). Cigman posits that the challenge lies in the diverse interpretations and understandings among individuals regarding the recognition of inclusion. The integration of the disabled community into mainstream society presents a potential challenge to prevailing norms, prompting a re-evaluation of ableist ideals and attitudes toward disability.

The issue of inclusion remains sidelined, primarily due to a dearth of resources and comprehensive data available for children with disabilities. As individuals with disabilities strive to integrate into mainstream society, they inevitably challenge entrenched ableist norms. Erevelles astutely observes that despite efforts to provide space, disabled individuals often grapple with a profound sense of disconnection

within mainstream environments, feeling estranged from the prevailing ableist paradigm.

In his work *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*, Dan Goodley echoes Erevelles' sentiments, proposing that "inclusive education, once seen as a radical notion, has lost its edge, perhaps because education's preconceived notions of normality emphasise the exceptional attributes of certain students, thereby only tentatively accommodating those who deviate from normative standards" (101). Consequently, certain select groups are afforded the opportunity to assimilate into the mainstream, painting a facade of inclusivity within society.

The correlation between space and accessibility stands as a cornerstone in fostering genuine inclusion within societal structures. Space, both physical and conceptual, serves as a platform for enabling access, participation, and integration of individuals with diverse abilities. Accessible spaces are not merely about physical accommodations such as ramps or adaptive technologies; they symbolise the embodiment of inclusionary ideals.

When environments are deliberately designed and adapted to accommodate a spectrum of abilities, they inherently communicate a message of acceptance and value for all individuals. These spaces, tailored to meet diverse needs, facilitate the unrestricted movement and engagement of people regardless of their physical or cognitive capabilities. Furthermore, such environments promote social interaction, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, breaking down barriers that hinder full participation. Ultimately, the integration of accessibility into spaces amplifies the voice and presence of individuals with disabilities, reshaping societal perceptions, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable community fabric.

Addressing ableism necessitates a holistic reconfiguration of societal structures and attitudes, with inclusion serving as a powerful tool. By actively cultivating inclusive environments, societies can challenge biases ingrained in ableist frameworks. This entails not only creating accessible spaces but also promoting genuine acceptance of diverse abilities. Inclusion amplifies the voices and contributions of individuals with disabilities, facilitating their equal participation across various domains. Embracing inclusion as a proactive stance against ableism transforms societal norms, promoting empathy and commitment to building an equitable and diverse community.

The deficiency in inclusion arises predominantly due to the absence of adequate space and accessible opportunities for disabled individuals within society. Bess Williamson, in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, defines access as encompassing "the ability to enter into, move about within, and operate the facilities of a site," entailing architectural features like wheelchair ramps, widened toilet stalls, lever-shaped door-handles, Braille lettering, and closed-caption video (53). While improvised infrastructure stands as a milestone in the disability rights movement, its success hasn't seamlessly translated into genuine inclusion. Technological advancements, despite their strides, have fallen short of meeting the comprehensive goals of inclusion and equal opportunity for disabled individuals.

The emphasis on access in ableist societies represents a departure from efforts aimed at fostering inclusion, not only for individuals but also for diverse social backgrounds. The core concept of access within disability frameworks centres on the fundamental referred by Bess Williamson in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, "right to be in the world" (54-55), advocating for equal access for all. Yet, while access is crucial, its creation poses intricate challenges. It encompasses both defining and

comprehending the multifaceted requirements, proving to be complex in its execution. The push for enhanced access aligns with the principles of the social model for disability, shifting focus from individual impairments to the surrounding environment, recognising the pivotal role that the environment plays in enabling equal participation.

To overcome barriers, individuals with disabilities require access to inclusive environments that facilitate their participation in societal activities. Space plays a crucial role in nurturing social interactions and advancing societal cohesion. However, existing structures and societal norms often favour able-bodied individuals, overlooking the needs of those with disabilities.

Drawing from Tony Fry's insights, Dan Goodley emphasises the pervasive oversight in the design of spaces, which typically cater to the needs of the able-bodied without questioning their inclusivity. This discrepancy is exacerbated by the dominance of the medical model, which pathologies disability and reinforces ableist attitudes within society. Consequently, individuals whose bodies do not conform to these norms face stigma and marginalisation, as noted by Rob Imrie in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, being deemed "out of place" (479). Spaces designated for individuals with disabilities often perpetuate segregation, such as special schools or institutional settings, further marginalising them from mainstream societal engagement.

Space is experienced diversely depending on one's disability: for the individuals with hearing disability, it constitutes a rich sensory landscape imbued with sound, representing a complex interplay between location and the auditory senses. Conversely, visually impaired individuals perceive space through touch and spatial awareness, as noted by Rob Imrie in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, framing it as "that which is seen" (481). Despite this diversity in sensory experience, the provision

of space often heavily relies on visual cues, signage, and symbols, marginalising both sighted and non-sighted individuals. This oversight in inclusive spatial design perpetuates social inequality and hampers equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Neglecting the range of sensory experiences within space obstructs genuine inclusion, highlighting the urgent need for a more comprehensive, multi-sensory approach to ensure spatial accessibility for all.

Brenna's exploration scrutinises the dichotomy between theoretical ideals of inclusion and their practical manifestation, exemplified vividly in her short story collection, *Something to Hang on To*. Particularly, in the narrative "Finding Your Voice," the harsh veracity of this divide is portrayed. Here, the protagonist's mother, despite having given birth to a disabled child herself, exhibits biases against disability. The struggle for equitable treatment persists, even among those without disabilities.

The protagonist's mother epitomises a discordant perspective on inclusion, emphasising that societal attainment of universal inclusion remains a distant goal. Her actions, including public insults directed at Samantha, symbolise the pervasive antagonism toward inclusion. While inclusion aims to render the disabled and able-bodied as equals, its implementation unfolds with inherent societal advantages and disadvantages.

The narrative of *The Moon Children* revolves around Billy and Natasha, both navigating the complex struggle for space and societal acceptance. In an ableistic society, they confront intricate power dynamics that complicate their quest for belonging. Throughout the novel, Billy strives to showcase his abilities despite encountering setbacks. He views his environment as bleak and devoid of hope, as depicted in the text: "... he wandered into the shade …. He turned and craned his neck, but all he saw was the ragged roof of their three-story apartment building and

beyond that, between clouds, a back pocket of blue sky" (Brenna 7-8). This portrayal captures his sense of displacement within society, leaving him feeling detached and excluded. His struggle transcends external challenges, delving deep into an internal conflict.

Billy draws parallels between his yo-yo, named "Typhoon," and natural disasters, revealing, "... he sometimes felt as if he had a real typhoon inside him, making him jump around and do crazy stuff" (Brenna, *MC* 11). For individuals like Billy, the lack of space and continual neglect contribute to a dwindling sense of hope. He interprets his surroundings through his emotional state, envisioning the potential explosion of his apartment and interpreting cracks on the walls as fault lines, vividly depicting his internal turmoil amidst an unforgiving environment. As narrated:

> He flopped onto his bed and looked up at the ceiling. The crack across the middle grinned down at him …. What had his teacher called those lines in the earth? … and remembered. *Fault lines.* What if this was actually a fault line … there'd be an earthquake and the ceiling would open up like a split pumpkin? "*Look out, it's gonna explode!*" he cried, watching the ceiling for any possibility of action. (Brenna, *MC* 13)

The emotional turmoil experienced by a boy, longing for societal acknowledgment akin to any other child his age, echoes a poignant narrative. However, the attention he craves remains elusive within an ableist society, where their pity, though offered, is unwelcome in Billy's eyes. At home, he immerses himself in imaginative realms, yearning for recognition and validation, striving to carve out a space where his presence matters. Despite the space allotted to him being tinged with pity, Billy grapples with the challenge of deciphering the lens through which it is viewed.

Billy's yearning to break free from reality is rooted in his desire to carve out his own space. Yet, the torment he faces extends beyond familiar settings; it infiltrates his school life. Despite being afforded physical space within the school premises, he remains a target for mockery, particularly at the hands of Eddie Mundy, a representative figure of the broader ableist community. Eddie's relentless bullying punctures Billy's sense of self-worth, magnifying his insecurities with each taunt from classmates.

Despite these challenges, Billy tenaciously fights for acceptance in society, seeking validation through participation in a contest. His fervent ambition is articulated as he declares, "I've got to win the contest …. That'll show 'em [sic]. If I win that contest, that'll show 'em [sic] all!" (Brenna, *MC* 21). Although the contest involves yo-yo tricks, for Billy, it symbolises an opportunity to showcase his abilities to a judgmental ableist society.

Billy's neighbour embodies a contrasting facet of the ableist community, offering him a space where he's treated with equality. Mr. Glady Schmidt and Mrs. Schmidt refrain from categorising Billy as someone in constant need of aid; instead, they perceive him as a kind and endearing child. Mrs. Schmidt, particularly, signifies a shift in the ableist society's mindset, exemplifying a readiness to embrace individuals with disabilities without prejudice or assumptions about their capabilities.

Another key character, Natasha, like Billy, discerns Billy's uniqueness amidst the crowd. Their mutual understanding fosters the creation of a shared space where they find solace in each other's company. Natasha confides in Billy, sharing her secret with a confidence born from her belief that he won't judge her but instead sees her as a person and a friend. Billy, acknowledging his own experiences as a victim, offers

assurance to Natasha, stating, "'Please? I won't hurt anything. And I won't laugh.' He knew how awful it was to be laughed" (Brenna, *MC* 26).

Natasha's personal space is marred by the cruelty she endured in Romania, resulting in the loss of her voice. Drawing becomes her refuge, a medium through which she expresses her inner turmoil and emotions. Billy keenly observes Natasha's emotional release through her artwork, recognising it as akin to his use of yo-yo tricks—a means to navigate and communicate with the ableist society.

Billy grapples with his father's abandonment, often imagining his return, especially during his contests. He avoids facing the truth that his disability might have driven his father away, leaving him emotionally unsettled. Finding refuge in the circus, where prejudice against disabilities is absent, Billy finds comfort, "Billy loved the circus ... He loved the acts and the sensory experience it offered" (Brenna, *MC* 31).

In their article "Social Circus for People with Disabilities: A Video Analysis through the Lens of the MOHO," Thompson and Broome emphasise the inclusive ethos of circus, stating, "Circus is about being a team, about trust, working together, finding people's uniqueness, and celebrating differences ... It's non-competitive and truly inclusive, making it a perfect platform for people of all abilities" (5).

Participation in fostering inclusion requires engagement from both able-bodied individuals and those with disabilities. However, there's often a noticeable disparity in able-bodied participation due to their limited perspective shaped by conventional norms. In contrast, the circus environment encourages active engagement and adaptation, providing opportunities for learning, embracing, and experiencing both failure and success. This fosters self-determination and personal growth, pushing individuals beyond comfort zones to overcome barriers. Despite the transformative

potential of circus culture, disability activists face hurdles in challenging established norms to pave the way for broader inclusion efforts.

Billy perceives societal perceptions of his disability as limiting his opportunities, further compounded by the absence of his father, hindering his focus on yo-yo tricks. In a moment of panic, he reflects, "… tried a few tricks and then examined the string on the Typhoon. No knots. But you never knew when knots would appear …. At least if Dad were there, he'd help him figure out what to do. But Billy were by himself, and something happened […] the thought made him feel sick to his stomach" (Brenna, *MC* 33-34).

The apprehension of potential emotional turmoil, even from his absent father—who ought to have been a consistent support—weighs heavily on Billy. Meanwhile, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson citing Rapp in *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies,* assert the necessity of a discourse on disability that acknowledges "… a humble argument for disability conversation that honors the pain, loss, and suffering that is fundamental to much disability" (57).

Natasha and Billy find solace in their shared pain, cultivating a space that transcends societal norms, allowing them to appreciate each other's talents without constraint. Billy acknowledges Natasha's drawing skills, stating, "'You draw good' .... 'I wish I could draw. I can't. I can just do yo-yo tricks'" (Brenna, *MC* 35). In turn, Natasha encourages Billy's yo-yo skills, displaying keen interest and applauding his performance: "She was looking interested, her small white teeth biting her bottom lip, and when he finished, she clapped her hands" (Brenna, *MC* 35). Despite recognising their respective talents, they refuse to let their perceived limitations hinder their connection with society.

Alan Dyson et al. highlight the pivotal role of student engagement in key dimensions of the school ecosystem, as expounded in *The Connected School: A Design for Well-Being*. They underscore the importance of students' involvement in shaping their school's culture, curriculum, and community dynamics (12). At the core of their argument lies the notion of inclusion, which hinges on cultivating shared values and expectations across the school community. This fosters equitable participation and upholds uniform standards irrespective of individual differences.

Chrysta, Billy's mother, stands by her son's side, offering support when he feels inadequate and becomes an easy target for bullying by other kids. Encouragingly, she reminds him of Gladys Schmidt's words: "'Remember what Gladys Schmidt says? All God's creatures have a place in the choir' …. 'Means everyone's different and that's okay ….'" (Brenna, *MC* 42).

In contrast to the father, Chrysta assumes a supportive role, striving to alleviate the hardship in Billy's life. She instils in him the belief that he holds a meaningful place in society, urging him to shed his insecurities and recognise the opportunities within reach. Acting as a catalyst, Chrysta endeavours to dismantle Billy's internal barriers, constructed both by societal perceptions and his own self-doubts. The conflict between Billy's personal understanding of society and society's perception of his disability generates an inner conflict that Chrysta endeavours to mend.

Despite the unwavering support from Chrysta and Mrs. Schmidt, Billy faces the persistent inability of the ableist society to see him beyond his disability, undermining his identity as a child. When Billy seeks sponsorship for a contest, his efforts are met with judgment solely based on the perception of his behaviour. According to Dan Goodley in *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*,

"Disability disorders normative curricula expectations. Some kids just do not have the wherewithal to 'get it.' Disability opposes expectations of educational achievement … disability haunts these performative expectations …" (103). This quote emphasises how disability disrupts conventional educational norms and challenges the expectations of academic success, often haunting those who fall under this label, obscuring their capabilities and potential achievements.

The pervasive identity of being labelled as disabled casts a shadow over individuals, eclipsing their abilities and talents, subjecting them to rebuke rather than recognition. Billy, despite possessing abilities, encounters repeated dismissals and neglect of his skills. This is evident when he approaches various shop owners seeking sponsorship, only to be swiftly judged and turned away without fair consideration.

In one such encounter at the post office, Billy's approach is met with hostility from a dog and prejudiced remarks from a man: "A dog was tied up in front of the post office. When Billy came close, it growled. 'shut up,' he told it …. 'Quit teasing my dog!' a man said, coming out of the post office. 'He bites kid like you.' Billy just shook his head and walked past, his insides a swirling tornado." (Brenna, *MC* 51-52). This distressing sequence of events leaves Billy with a disheartening realisation that no one is willing to sponsor him, highlighting the harsh reality of societal prejudices and the uphill battle faced by individuals with disabilities in gaining recognition for their talents and abilities.

Billy's struggle to secure sponsorship for the contest finds an unexpected ally in Samantha Peeteetuce, who empathises with Billy's challenges and extends a helping hand by assisting him in filling out the form. She not only informs Billy about the sponsorship opportunity but also takes the initiative to complete the form on his behalf. Despite the hurdles, avenues for accessibility and support aren't entirely

elusive for Billy. Within the school, he receives assistance, ensuring he has the support he needs. Beyond the school walls, individuals like Mrs. Schmidt, Samantha, and Natasha step forward to assist Billy in navigating societal barriers.

Samantha stands out as she takes the time to explain the contest rules to Billy, displaying a level of attentiveness that others had not shown. Having a deeper understanding of Billy's situation due to their longstanding acquaintance, Samantha embodies an awareness and comprehension of disabilities devoid of bias. Brenna, through Samantha's character, highlights the significance of perceiving individuals with disabilities through an unbiased lens. Unlike his friends or family, Samantha emerges as a member of the ableist community, striving to create a space where individuals like Billy can find understanding and support.

During the contest entry process, Eddie, known for his consistent bullying and deceitful behaviour towards Billy, misguides him once again. Eddie's able-bodied status affords him privileges, as Dan Goodley states in *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*, "Normal is dominant culture that struggles with the precarious nature of trying to be what it is often not" (118). Eddie's perceived normalcy grants him a sense of superiority over Billy, enabling him to exploit Billy's vulnerabilities. Under false pretences, Eddie deceives Billy into believing that a $5 fee is required for contest entry.

Unaware of Eddie's ulterior motives, Billy falls into the trap and resorts to stealing money from his mother. This action burdens him with overwhelming guilt, leading him to blame himself for his parents' separation. Overwhelmed by this guilt, Billy withdraws from his social circle, unable to bear the weight of his remorse. Eventually, he finds solace in confiding in Natasha:

> He cleared his throat, but there wasn't a laugh anywhere in there. The weight from the secret he was keeping from his mother was still heavy on his chest, and made him feel hot inside …. 'I got something to be sad about,' he said. 'I didn't start out to be a secret, but it is now. I took money from Mom's purse, and she thought Dad stole it, and now she kicked him out. I don't know what I am going to do.' (Brenna, *MC* 67)

Disabled individuals face ongoing scrutiny and constant monitoring by those who are able-bodied. In Billy's case, he resorts to a wrongful act to partake in a mainstream event, viewing the payment as a symbolic entry into an inclusive society. However, his desperate actions reveal the extent of his determination, leading him to the drastic measure of stealing money from his mother.

At his age, most kids aren't overly concerned about facing disciplinary actions from their parents, even when engaged in mischief. However, Billy experiences deep remorse for betraying his mother's trust, feeling a strong sense of guilt. He finds solace in confiding in Natasha, recognising her non-judgmental nature. Her supportive approach helps Billy understand the importance of honesty with his mother. The safe space they've established empowers them to choose the path of integrity. Natasha's encouragement instils in Billy the confidence that being truthful to those he cares about won't bring harm, but rather, alleviate the burdens of guilt and deceit.

The significance of honesty and openness extends not only to Billy but also to Chrysta, who decides to confide in him. She admits, "… I guess it's time to tell you. When I was pregnant with you, I did a lot of drinking. Maybe it affected you, I'm not sure, but the doctors […] they said […] they said it did'" (Brenna, *MC* 70). Chrysta courageously acknowledges her struggle with alcohol addiction, which led to Billy's Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This revelation fosters a stronger bond

between mother and son, empowering Chrysta to confront her challenges and take proactive steps to prevent similar issues with her second child.

Despite her husband Zak's attempts to manipulate her into drinking again, Chrysta remains resolute in her decision. Her pivotal role in Billy's life becomes more apparent as he comes to terms with the truth about his birth, instilling in him a newfound sense of confidence and love towards his mother. She reassures him, saying, "We're a team, Billy, you and me …. No matter what, we'll be okay'" (Brenna, *MC* 70).

Despite his mother's earnest efforts to support him, Billy still longs for his father's presence. The societal attitude, steeped in ableism, doesn't just impact those outside the family circle but also influences family dynamics. For instance, Billy's father abandoned him due to his Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), as highlighted by Tom Shakespeare in *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives,* "… it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in the community" (197). Able-bodied perceptions shatter opportunities for participation in an inclusive environment, a reality Billy deeply yearns for, particularly desiring his father's presence during his yo-yo tricks performance.

Seeking help, Billy turns to Natasha to find a sponsor for his contest. As their rapport strengthens, Billy requests her to take him to her father, Mr. Arnold's workplace. During their journey, Billy envisions his contest scenario, where his father motivates and encourages him during the performance, and Natasha appreciates his skills. In this reverie, one trick after another is executed flawlessly, garnering

admiration from everyone, where Billy is acknowledged for his performance without the stigma of being seen solely as a person with a disability.

Arnold's surprise at finding his daughter and Billy at his office is evident. However, rather than reprimanding them, he takes a different approach by creating a comfortable atmosphere. Instead of immediately focusing on Billy's explanation for their visit, Arnold's attention remains fixed on Natasha's unexpected presence. Despite having a child with particular needs, Arnold's attention seems diverted, centred more on his own concerns. He appears preoccupied with ensuring Natasha's well-being but fails to offer her the space she truly requires. Rather than Mr. and Mrs. Arnold actively providing space for Natasha, it seems they struggle to understand her needs and inadvertently exclude her from their created space.

Billy, in contrast, feels overwhelmed witnessing the opulent lifestyle provided by Arnold for his daughter. The disconnect becomes apparent as they seem unable to comprehend Natasha's needs, despite numerous attempts to bridge the gap. Unlike Zak, Natasha's stepfather, Mr. Arnold genuinely endeavours to provide his daughter with the support she needs for a higher quality of life, yet falls short in understanding her emotional needs. Conversely, Billy, through Natasha's drawings, attempts to grasp a deeper understanding of her world and tries to communicate with her father to learn more about her.

Mrs. Schmidt emerges as another character who embraces Billy wholeheartedly, seeing him not as a burden but as a person worthy of warmth and acceptance. Upon returning from Arnold's office, Billy seeks solace at Mrs. Schmidt's home, where he reciprocates her kindness and genuine affection. Their interactions are characterised by mutual respect and understanding, fostering a comfortable environment where Billy feels free to share his thoughts and experiences.

Mrs. Schmidt's patient and attentive listening creates a space where their conversations flow naturally, a genuine exchange rather than a one-sided dialogue. In this welcoming atmosphere, Billy feels at ease, knowing he won't face judgment but instead receives appreciation for his honesty. As exemplified by Mrs. Schmidt's comment, "'You have a silver tongue'" (Brenna, *MC* 85).

Mrs. Schmidt views Billy simply as a regular kid, extending care to him as if he were family. Quoting Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's thoughts presented in Anne et al. work on *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, the notion that "disability is the master trope of human disqualification" and "perhaps the essential characteristic of being human" (51-52) underlines the pursuit of an inclusive society. This vision advocates for an accessible, barrier-free environment that integrates individuals with disabilities into public life. By welcoming Billy into her home with open arms, Mrs. Schmidt, an outsider in his world, takes a powerful step towards initiating inclusion and establishing a supportive space for him.

The bond between Mrs. Schmidt and Billy flourishes remarkably, exemplified when Billy confides Natasha's secret in Mrs. Schmidt. Inviting her into his personal space, he shares Natasha's secret, and in response, Mrs. Schmidt assures him of the confidentiality of their conversation, revealing her genuine interest in understanding Billy. Her awareness of the challenges faced by children like Billy and Natasha in an ableist society becomes evident. She enlightens Billy about Natasha's circumstances, mentioning, "'Well, you know those children from the orphanages can have lots of troubles. I heard about it on TV' … 'This program I watched said the kids were never given enough to eat, and when they come to Canada many of them have a hard time eating …. Poor motherless kids'" (Brenna, *MC* 86).

Mrs. Schmidt's compassion deeply influences Billy, prompting him to invest similar effort in comprehending Natasha's situation. The nurturing environment and care provided by Mrs. Schmidt reflect in Billy's actions toward Natasha, illustrating the positive impact of Mrs. Schmidt's kindness on his empathy and understanding.

Billy's perceptiveness regarding Natasha becomes evident when he remarks, "'I guess Natasha must have left her voice over there. She can make sounds, but she doesn't talk at all'" (Brenna, *MC* 87). His understanding of Natasha's situation is profound, recognising the nuances of her communication.

The nurturing space provided by Mrs. Schmidt inspires Billy to extend a similar sense of care and understanding to Natasha. His actions signify the transformative effect of empathy, space, and accessibility in helping individuals emerge from traumatic experiences. In contrast, despite offering a life of luxury, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold overlook the opportunity to truly comprehend their adopted daughter. Billy, however, demonstrates patience in waiting for Natasha's response and exhibits a remarkable lack of judgment, striving instead to view the world from her perspective.

Billy grapples with a profound sense of sadness stemming from his longing for a father figure like Natasha's, someone who tries to understand and connect with their child. However, Zak's departure deeply wounds him, exacerbating Billy's sorrow as he begins to harbour the distressing belief that his father left because of his disability. In Billy's eyes, Zak embodies a representation of eugenic ideology—a mindset highlighted by Rosemarie-Garland-Thomson in *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, which aimed to eradicate disability entirely: "Our dominant understanding is that disability confers pain, disease, functional limitation, disadvantage, and social stigma; limits opportunities;

and reduces quality of life. Eugenic logic tells us that our world would be a better place if disability could be eliminated" (53-54).

Billy's emotional turmoil finds justification in his father's abandonment, marking it as the most significant emotional barrier to his sense of inclusion. The rejection from his own father instils in Billy a poignant belief that rejection is a natural outcome, making him anticipate similar treatment from others.

When Billy gazes at Natasha's house from his apartment, he spots her silhouette against the moon, sharing a similar view later witnessed with Mr. and Mrs. Arnold. Amidst this shared celestial moment, a poignant portrayal emerges—a juxtaposition of two distinct worlds immersed in their own melancholy. Brenna masterfully captures two contrasting mindsets, one opposed to inclusion and the other leaning towards it, yet both lacking the understanding or efforts to facilitate inclusion. It becomes apparent that Mr. Arnold remains unaware of Natasha's disability, hindering any meaningful progress.

For Billy, the moon becomes a medium of communication for Natasha with her mother, while he, through music, yearns to bridge the emotional chasm with his absent father. Reflecting on the vastness of the world, he dreams of a miniature realm where he could walk across to reunite with his father, akin to Natasha's longing for her mother: "… he dreamed about a world so tiny that he could walk from one side to the other, where his father would be waiting for him" (Brenna, *MC* 95). The weight of his father's abandonment feels suffocating, invading his personal space and dismantling his sense of self.

Yet, unlike his father's abandonment, Billy extends kindness to other living beings, exemplified in his gentle gesture toward an earthworm—creating a safe space for it in a society that might harm it. This act symbolises his yearning for a place, a

cry for space and accessibility within an ableist society. His action serves as a poignant plea for acknowledgment and inclusion, highlighting his desperate need for space and access.

Billy's efforts to secure sponsorship take a sharp downturn when he faces judgment based on his appearance and hyperactive behaviour. Seeking support, he approaches a store with hopes of gaining sponsorship, only to encounter difficulties exacerbated by his hyperactivity. His intentions become muddled as he inadvertently asks the store manager for money instead of articulating his need for sponsorship. Compounded by the absence of his pamphlet, left with Natasha's dad, Billy struggles to effectively communicate with the manager. However, the manager appears more focused on critiquing Billy's behaviour rather than listening to his words, making it challenging for him to convey his purpose. As narrated:

> 'Can I help you?' said a gravelly voice. The manager stood before him, watching as he painfully formed his phone number. 'I [Billy] […] uh […] I thought I'd enter your contest,' stammered Billy …. 'I'm here because I need to ask if the store will give me some money. I mean the money, wouldn't really go to me, but I'd take it to the park.' (Brenna, *MC* 99)

Billy finds himself without anyone to assist him in conveying his message or connecting with others. His FASD becomes a formidable barrier, turning his situation into a nightmare, casting him as a figure of amusement rather than being taken seriously. Instead of his words being valued or considered, they paint him as a mischievous and peculiar child, reducing his significance. Disheartened, he exits the store with a heavy heart, unsuccessful in securing a sponsorship for the contest.

Natasha, in contrast, receives care and attention from her adoptive parents, but they struggle to comprehend her method of communication. Surprisingly, Billy, typically the talkative one in the group, becomes the first to truly listen to Natasha. Despite his usual chatter, he pays heed to her. When Natasha senses Billy's disappointment over the failed sponsorship, she breaks her year-long silence to aid the friend who offered her warmth and understanding. This gesture embodies the transformative power of providing space and accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Natasha's spoken words momentarily overshadow Billy's sponsorship concerns, bringing him immense joy just by hearing her voice. Her barriers start to crumble, and their unique bond achieves what seemed impossible: "'I'll help you,' she said as he started to cross the street. He stopped in his tracks and swung around. 'What did you say?' he asked, surprised to hear her voice … he wondered how a person could stop talking for almost a year. A long time not to talk" (Brenna, *MC* 100-103).

Though Billy feels genuinely happy for Natasha, his inability to secure sponsorship leaves him feeling disheartened. He experiences a sense of helplessness, lacking support akin to what he provided for Natasha. This situation underscores the societal lack of inclusivity, where biases against individuals with disabilities persist. In Anne Waldshmidt et al. *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies mad Cultural Studies*, Rosemarie quotes Snyder and Mitchell, "Few of us openly embrace disability in today's world. The onset of disability is often viewed as a tragedy or personal failure, positioning individuals in an unanticipated and socially unappealing role" (55).

An inclusive perspective reveals a disparity in participation from the ableist community, who acknowledge a person's abilities while disregarding their disability. This recognition—or lack thereof—not only stems from an ableist viewpoint but is also mirrored in how Billy perceives himself. He admires Natasha's ability to navigate the world despite his own struggles to integrate into society, rendering him vulnerable.

The construction of an ableist society perpetuates the stigmatisation of children, particularly those with disabilities, resulting in the breaking of their potential. In the novel, Billy's mastery of yo-yo tricks—knowing twenty-one of them—seems futile to him: "Twenty-one tricks. He knew twenty-one tricks, but what good would that do? In the event of earthquakes, tidal waves, and tornados, what good, in the end, were a few tricks?" (Brenna, *MC* 104). This sentiment highlights the devaluation of skills and capabilities within a society that fails to recognise the inherent worth and potential of individuals, especially those with disabilities.

Billy's shattered spirit emerges when he realises he won't be able to participate in the contest—an event of immense significance in his life, serving as his chance to validate himself to society. The weight of this missed opportunity breaks him internally, leaving him in despair for failing to accomplish his personal mission. His emotional outburst doesn't go unnoticed, drawing the concern of Mrs. Schmidt, who empathises with both Billy and Natasha. Mrs. Schmidt, along with his mother, who have seen Billy livelier and more engaged, are taken aback by his uncharacteristic silence during supper: "He was quiet during supper, and his mom looked at him with a worried expression on her face, but she didn't say anything" (Brenna, *MC* 106). The absence of accessibility leaves Billy exposed and vulnerable, realising he lacks the support or space necessary to demonstrate his worth to society.

Despite his own challenges, Billy makes a difficult trip to the hospital to check on Natasha after her accident. His familiarity with the hospital environment, stemming from his own medical experiences, empowers him to advocate on Natasha's behalf. Taking hold of Natasha's moon journal, Billy approaches Mr. Arnold, urging him to read it. Initially met with resistance, Billy's persistence eventually persuades them to relent.

Observing Natasha's parental support, Billy experiences a pang of jealousy, acutely aware of his own lack of such support. Nevertheless, he persists in encouraging Mr. and Mrs. Arnold to heed Natasha's silent pleas: "'Natasha talks to you?' she asked, brokenly. 'Well, kind of. She can tell me things even if she doesn't speak. You just gotta know how to listen that way'" (Brenna, *MC* 127).

Acting as a mediator, Billy aids Natasha's parents in understanding her beyond the scope of financial aid, emphasising the importance of understanding her circumstances and providing the necessary space. Similarly, Billy yearns for someone akin to himself, a mediator, to assist individuals like him in an ableist society. Recognising the diversity in communication methods, Billy desires the attention, care, and opportunity to showcase his abilities, rather than facing discrimination due to his disability.

As the novel draws to a close, Billy finds himself in the park, ready to showcase his skills, where he faces his bully, Eddie, determined not only to stand up for himself but also to seek acceptance for who he truly is. Recognising the need to stop worrying about others' negative actions towards him, he steels himself for his performance on stage. Disappointed by his father's absence yet fuelled by an inner resolve, Billy gathers the courage to execute his tricks, realising that seeking external

validation isn't essential. Instead, he embraces self-belief, understanding that things will fall into place in their own time.

Despite the absence of his father and the loss in the contest, Billy experiences a sense of contentment. His perspective shifts as he comprehends that his true victory lies in overcoming his fears and embracing his authentic self. With Mr. Arnold's unexpected arrival at the park to sponsor him, Billy discovers happiness, realising that the true triumph isn't winning the contest but conquering his fears. As he ruminates, "hope springs eternal" (Brenna, *MC* 130), signifying his newfound optimism and resilience.

In *Wild Orchid*, Jane struggles against her mother Penelope's overprotective tendencies, which restrict her freedom despite her efforts to assert herself. Penelope's insistence on dragging Jane along, as seen in the statement, "'Today is the day we are going to Waskesiu,' she said, 'whether you like it or not'," (Brenna, *WB* 8) reflects the imposition of ableist norms onto disabled characters, denying them autonomy and agency.

Jane finds solace and security in her journal, a space where she feels safe and comfortable expressing herself, affirming, "I think writing is good" (Brenna, *WB* 10). Her experience with Asperger's Syndrome inhibits her ability to engage with new people, often leading to misunderstandings and a sense of alienation among her peers. Writing becomes an integral part of her daily routine, offering her a sanctuary where her thoughts and feelings remain private and unjudged.

To navigate the challenges posed by her condition, Jane receives support from a teacher assistant who aids her in tasks that her peers effortlessly handle. Encouraged by this assistant, Jane adopts journaling as a coping mechanism: "She advised me to keep a journal ... writing stuff down makes you feel better" (Brenna, *WB* 12). This

guidance assists her in coping with the demands of mainstream education. Her assistant, Shauna, plays a crucial role in decoding social cues and norms practiced by Jane's classmates, helping her interpret and comprehend the world around her.

The plays by Pinter serve as a refuge for Jane, offering her a realm where she comprehends the concept of absurdity and derives meaning from it, surpassing the societal discourses that surround her. Take, for instance, 'The Birthday Party,' where she connects deeply with the characters, utilising them as pivotal references in her own understanding. In her words, "I haven't seen anything like this play before. When it was done, I sat almost shaking in my seat—that's how good it was. The way the characters spoke to each other was so interesting. I could see the lessons that Shauna taught me about conversations right up there on the stage" (Brenna, *WO* 73).

Moreover, the pauses in the play provide her with the necessary time to process the dialogue. She acknowledges, "The pauses in the play gave me a chance to process what was being said. If they had gone faster, I would have had trouble catching on" (Brenna, *WO* 74). These pauses become instrumental in her comprehension, allowing her to navigate the complex narratives.

Jane finds parallels between herself and the characters, particularly Stanley, as she muses, "I could relate to the part when the person said he didn't sleep. Sometimes, I don't sleep either, although I have slept better up here in Waskesiu than I would have expected" (Brenna, *WO* 74). This identification allows her to delve deeper into the complexities of their emotions and situations.

Watching the play, Jane reflects on Stanley's character, drawing striking similarities between them: "As I watched the play, I started thinking that maybe Stanley is a lot like me. He wants to go off on his own, but he can't function without

Meg. She looks after him like a parent. He wants to go and get a job, but he can't because he's afraid. Stanley's afraid of lots of things" (Brenna, *WO* 86-87).

Further, a single line from the play lingers in her thoughts, resonating deeply within her, "'Is the number 846 possible or necessary?' Goldberg says this when they are both interrogating Stanley. First Stanley says, 'neither,' and then he says, 'both'" (Brenna, *WO* 87). This line encapsulates the ambiguity and complexity that Jane often perceives in her own life, encapsulating her reflections on the intricate nature of existence.

Jane finds solace in her personal space, orchestrating it not with objects but with the chores that bring her peace. Her traumatic encounter at seven years old has unconsciously tethered her to that number, influencing her actions. In moments of distress, she instinctively repeats tasks seven times, a pattern seen when she feels uneasy during car rides. For instance, during a trip to Waskesiu, her discomfort prompts her to step out of the car and walk around it seven times, a ritual she finds calming:

> I don't like sitting still, and I especially don't like sitting still while perceiving that things around me are moving …. We stopped in Prince Albert for gas, and I walked around the car seven times …. I have this feeling that the number seven is lucky, and if I do things seven times, I feel safe. Like I'll take seven little sips from my glass instead of one big one, or bounce ball seven times. Going around the car seven times was a necessary diversion for my anxious feelings. The fact that her words came out in sevens was just a lucky event. (Brenna, *WB* 13-15)

Jane's agency is consistently constrained by her mother Penelope, who tightly controls her opportunities for independent decision-making. Penelope embodies the

contradictory aspects of ableist society: while she may exhibit protective and nurturing tendencies, her actions contribute to a constraining environment that suppresses Jane's autonomy. This duality in Penelope's role reflects the complex and conflicting nature of societal attitudes toward individuals with special needs.

Jane's school life is fraught with challenges, marked by frequent meltdowns that isolate her from her classmates. Finding solace in a cardboard box, a symbolic refuge she creates, she feels shielded from distractions. However, her behaviour is misunderstood by her ableist peers. As Florian and Spratt note in "Enacting Inclusion: A Framework for Interrogating Inclusive Practice," the intention of "inclusion pedagogy" is to address individual differences without "marginalization," (119) yet this proves challenging for teachers in managing Jane's needs effectively due to a lack of understanding or acknowledgment of her disability.

Further, Jane's precise nature demands exact timing; uncertainty tends to unsettle her. Asperger's Syndrome often fosters exceptional organisational skills, but any deviation from planned routines can trigger meltdowns, often misinterpreted as a spectacle by an ableist society. Jane's discomfort with surprises fuels her reliance on clocks; they offer predictability and precision, providing her with a sense of control. As she aptly expresses, "… this packing took me seventeen minutes. I estimated that it would take between fifteen and twenty minutes, and when I calculated seventeen minutes, I wasn't surprised. That's the thing about clocks. They never surprise you. They are completely reasonable" (Brenna, *WB* 24).

Upon receiving a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, Jane received invaluable support from both her school and the government. The school provided her with a teacher assistant, while the government covered her medical expenses, granting her access to necessary medical attention. Initially, Janet, a teacher assistant, offered

assistance to Jane, followed by Shauna, who helped her comprehend social cues, facial expressions, and body language. Jane found comfort in her interactions with Shauna, sharing conversations about school and boys, fostering a sense of ease between them.

Shauna plays a pivotal role in helping Jane grasp idioms and catchphrases used by individuals without similar challenges. In class, Jane struggles to discern signals amidst multiple distractions, feeling overwhelmed by surrounding noises. Shauna, the dedicated teacher assistant, offers specialised care and attention to educate Jane. As Jane articulates, "I can't pick up the same signals as other people. It's like being in a room with ten TVs on all at once, and I know there are words around, but I can't isolate any meanings from them. Shauna Penelope's desire for independence clashes with her dependence on Jane, revealing a complex interplay where ability relies on disability. Despite wanting Jane to understand her need for enjoyment, Penelope struggles to let her go, evident when she insists on bringing Jane along to Waskesiu. This highlights both responsible parenting and an attachment to Jane's constant presence. As Jane's initial tutor on social cues, Penelope's response to Jane's offer of gum reflects their intricate relationship: "No thanks, but maybe in a little while. You can keep the package." This exchange underscores the nuanced dynamics between them. could help me tune in to the right signals" (Brenna, *WB* 42).

Penelope's desire for independence clashes with her dependence on Jane, revealing a complex interplay where ability relies on disability. Despite wanting Jane to understand her need for enjoyment, Penelope struggles to let her go, evident when she insists on bringing Jane along to Waskesiu. This highlights both responsible parenting and an attachment to Jane's constant presence. As Jane's initial tutor on social cues, Penelope's response to Jane's offer of gum reflects their intricate

relationship, “No thanks, but maybe in a little while. You can keep the package” (Brenna, *WB* 16). This exchange underscores the nuanced dynamics between them.

Jane’s challenges in grasping social cues make her vulnerable, despite her articulate expression, inviting judgment for her unique behaviour. In “ITE students’ attitudes to inclusion,” Richards and Clough underscore the importance of “developing strategies to include all learners in the classroom” (84). They stress the need for careful selection of reading materials and collaboration with learning support assistants, aiming to create an inclusive environment.

Jane’s difficulty in grasping social cues leaves her vulnerable within an ableist society, where understanding different perspectives becomes a challenge. Explaining her experience, she expresses, “What confuses me most is how I can take one perspective on something and then find out that others think differently. It’s like walking into a room where everything is blue and saying, ‘So everything is blue in here,’ and having everybody look at you funny and say, ‘There isn’t any blue in here. What’s wrong with you, you geek!’” (Brenna, *WB* 25).

For individuals like Jane, social cues act as a barrier, as they prefer direct communication over idioms and phrases, complicating her comprehension. As she admits, “It took me a long time to understand about secrets. When I was a kid, I didn’t understand the possibility of thinking something that nobody else knew. That’s part of knowing about perspective-talking. The idea that someone could have a different perspective than me used to be confusing” (Brenna, *WFNO* 57).

Jane’s experience with Asperger’s Syndrome makes it difficult for her to navigate crowds, leading to a strong dislike for birthday parties and other social gatherings. She articulates her discomfort, stating, “the kind of parties I hate the most are birthday parties … beach parties, and I assume that they are the worst … I would

probably go around looking for an empty room …" (Brenna, *WB* 32). In crowded spaces, Jane feels her personal space invaded and her access limited by societal norms, restricting her from expressing herself freely.

Jane's behaviour, divergent from the norm, leads to her exclusion from societal integration. Her unique thought processes and comprehension set her apart from the crowd. An interaction with her mother portrays her struggle to communicate effectively, resulting in a meltdown: "I can hear her banging around in the kitchen. The trouble is I'm not sure what she's thinking about me? And if she is thinking about me, what will she do next? I'm not behaving badly. In fact, I'm just sitting on my bed, and I have my door locked to prevent myself being dragged out to the car" (Brenna, *WO* 1). Jane acknowledges her differences and recognises the difficulty in connecting with individuals unlike her.

Jane faces another challenge as she grapples with the societal expectation that she should readily share her thoughts. This expectation, commonly accepted among able-bodied individuals, contradicts Jane's viewpoint. In her own words, "It makes me feel unsettled when people inquire about my opinions because I need time to consider various perspectives. This adds complexity to my life" (Brenna, *WB* 29). She perceives it as an intrusion into her personal space when someone, particularly someone she isn't comfortable with, seeks her opinion. Jane values her privacy and prefers to keep her affairs private, steering clear of unwanted interference or prying into her matters by others.

Jane finds a contrasting experience at Waskesiu's nature centre, where she feels a sense of acceptance without judgment. Here, she discovers a profound opportunity to delve into the wilderness. The nature centre becomes Jane's sanctuary, fostering her deep affinity for plant life. Immersed in this environment, she revels in

the pleasure of reading and absorbing intricate details about the blooming orchids, cultivating her passion for these botanical wonders.

Jane's comfort at the Nature centre parallels her experience in a church setting. Similar to the serene atmosphere in a church, the Nature centre offers a quiet haven where she is able to delve into her interests undisturbed. This sense of tranquillity and space echoes the church environment for her.

A key factor contributing to Jane's ease at the Nature centre is Paul's presence. Unlike others, Paul doesn't impose any expectations on Jane; instead, he generously grants her the freedom and access she needs. His approach provides Jane with the space and autonomy to explore the environment at her own pace, enabling her to engage with things in a manner that suits her best.

During their Bog trail walk, Jane's excitement peaks as she discovers various orchids and an array of plants. Paul, recognising Jane's enthusiasm, showers her with appreciation for her discoveries. His encouragement uplifts Jane's spirits, leading her to reflect, "I was the first one to find a sundew, and I pointed out pitcher plants that the others probably would not have seen without me … Paul said that I was a good detective to see all those plants so fast and to remember their names" (Brenna, *WB* 41).

The profound shift in how Jane is perceived becomes evident based on her environment. In Saskatoon, she's often viewed through a lens of need, sometimes experiencing a sense of being marginalised. However, in Waskesiu, particularly at the Nature centre, Jane's talents and interests take centre stage. Her knack for identifying plants is not just acknowledged but celebrated. The space and access she's granted in exploring her passion for plants are truly empowering. Here, she isn't labelled or

stigmatised as an autistic person; instead, she's recognised simply as a girl with a profound interest in botany, valued for her unique skills and dedication.

Jane's growing fondness for Paul stems from his exceptional quality as a patient listener. Unlike Penelope, Paul not only lends an ear to Jane's gerbil stories but also genuinely appreciates her knowledge about gerbils and plants. His attentive nature creates a comfortable environment for Jane, devoid of intrusive stares or encroachment on her personal space.

In one instance at the Nature centre, a surge of anxiety hits Jane as a group of people, accompanied by children, enters. Feeling overwhelmed when the children approach her about the puppets, Jane attempts to distance herself. However, Paul, attuned to her distress, intervenes in a manner that soothes the situation. His calm presence allows Jane to handle the interaction gracefully, eventually assisting the children in obtaining what they were seeking. This act of understanding and support from Paul reinforces Jane's attachment to him.

Paul stands out as a rare individual who embraces and celebrates differences, valuing the unique talents of those around him. His approach isn't to let disabled individuals feel diminished; instead, he actively encourages and appreciates their strengths. Not only does he extend his help to Jane but also to his wife, June, who uses a wheelchair. Unfortunately, after transitioning to a wheelchair, June withdraws from society, confining herself within the confines of her home. She finds solace in the darkness, expressing, "Some people find darkness softer on their skin" (Brenna, *WB* 92), as the ableist society casts her aside as a failure.

However, Paul's perspective diverges from societal norms. He desires for his wife to experience life beyond these self-imposed limitations. Drawing from his own personal experiences, Paul understands the struggles of individuals like Jane and June.

He grants Jane the space she needs, fostering a comfortable environment for her to express herself freely. Jane acknowledges this ease in their interactions, reflecting, "I can have whole conversations with him and not once worry about making the right choices in terms of what I say. I can just say anything to him; he just listens and answers back" (Brenna, *WB* 98). Paul's empathetic understanding and his ability to listen without judgment create a safe haven for Jane to communicate openly.

Kody, unfortunately, embodies the traits of an ableist society, exploiting the vulnerabilities of disabled individuals for his own gain. His attempt to seduce Jane reflects this, ultimately failing. Even during an encounter at the Nature centre, when Jane observes Kody with another girl, she perceives mockery directed at her. This poignant incident sheds light on how the able-bodied, under the guise of societal norms, exploit and subject disabled individuals to victimisation within a stigmatised society.

This distressing experience leaves Jane feeling increasingly vulnerable, culminating in a meltdown that goes unnoticed and misunderstood by those around her, including her mother and even Paul. Paul's action of dragging Jane outside the Nature centre, urging her to return when she's composed, holds dual interpretations. It might be perceived as Paul's attempt to assist Jane, yet it also hints at his inability to manage Jane's meltdown, perhaps considering it disruptive to the centre's ambiance. Instead of addressing Kody's behaviour, the focus shifts to removing Jane, the victim, further isolating her from the societal space.

This grim reality showcases the unsettling dynamics: the victim, in this case, Jane, is marginalised and isolated, while the perpetrator, like Kody, remains invisible within the ableist societal framework, escaping scrutiny for their actions. The skewed

power dynamics and the overlooking of wrongdoing perpetuate the cycle of victimisation and societal invisibility of the perpetrator.

Jane's father, like Kody, also plays the role of a perpetrator in Jane's life, causing distress by making her feel like an outcast among her peers. On her eighth birthday, he organises a party without consulting Jane, leading to a confusing and uncomfortable situation for her. Rather than fostering a safe environment, her father's actions only contribute to Jane feeling alienated from her classmates.

He forces Jane to join her classmates despite her discomfort, a distressing incident witnessed by the other girls, which subsequently leads to their isolation of Jane. This betrayal by her father not only invades her personal space but also restricts her access to social interaction, leaving a lasting scar on Jane's heart. This experience becomes a turning point in her life, prompting her to realise that she was content before this event. This realisation shapes her behaviour, leading her to repeat actions seven times, as her mind seems to have stopped processing experiences beyond the age of seven.

Later, at the Nature centre, Paul fosters an inclusive environment by offering Jane a job organising books. Through Paul's encouragement, Jane discovers her capability to earn a living independently. Rose, another member of the Nature centre team, plays a pivotal role in guiding Jane through her responsibilities, teaching her the intricacies of the billing process. With Rose and Paul's support, Jane finds a comforting space where she feels at ease and valued, creating a sense of belonging within this environment. Their guidance and encouragement help establish a safe and comfortable place for Jane to thrive.

Jane finds joy in her opportunity to work at the Nature centre until the end of August. However, her plans take an unexpected turn when Penelope, facing a breakup

with her boyfriend, insists that Jane accompany her to Saskatoon. This demand triggers discomfort in Jane, reminding her of Penelope's earlier actions of coercing her to Waskesiu against her will.

Jane perceives this insistence as a violation of her personal space by her mother, who embodies the norms of an ableist society. In this society, the able-bodied often manipulate situations to suit their preferences without considering the autonomy or desires of those with disabilities. Jane feels her agency challenged once again, as Penelope tries to dictate her actions, echoing past instances where her autonomy was disregarded. Jane admits:

> I kept hearing Mom's voice in my head, 'Why do you behave so badly, Taylor?' She hadn't said this to me in a while, but she used to say it all the time before we knew I had Asperger's Syndrome. She said it so much that even though she doesn't say it anymore, I still hear her saying, I still hear her saying it. 'Why do you behave so badly?' and her voice is loud in my ears. (Brenna, *WB* 129)

Jane's father and Penelope both contribute to traumatic experiences in her life, particularly evident when Penelope invades Jane's personal space, triggering frequent meltdowns. This distressing pattern deeply concerns Jane, compounded by her awareness of the limited job prospects for disabled individuals. Enoch et al.'s research, "'We are not getting Jobs': Job seeking Problems of People with Disability and Coping Strategies adopted in an Urban Traditional Community in Ghana," highlights the challenges faced by disabled individuals in employment, "Misconceptions about the ability of people with disability to perform jobs ... prevalent not only among employers without disability but also among family members and people with disability themselves" (110-111).

Penelope's unawareness of her daughter's feelings leads her to disregard Jane's commitments and emotions. Despite Jane's investment in her work at the Nature centre, Penelope insists on abruptly leaving Waskesiu after Jane's breakup with Danny, causing Jane significant frustration.

When Jane discovers her cherished clock broken, her distress escalates, triggering an intense reaction that drives her to flee both her mother and Waskesiu. This escape is fuelled by her determination to avoid being taken to Saskatoon before August: "It was the blackness of The Future, empty again, coming out of my ears and eyes and slithering around my head" (Brenna, *WB* 131). Upon her return to the Nature centre, Jane realises that everyone had been searching for her.

Jane takes a stand against her mother's attempts to control her, symbolising a shift in the narrative. This act reflects changing times, where individuals with disabilities like Jane are beginning to assert themselves, advocating for their rightful space, accessibility, and inclusion within society.

In *Waiting for No One*, Jane embarks on a journey to explore her options, seizing space and access from the ableist society. Recognising the need for independence, she seeks a part-time job at a bookstore, understanding that financial autonomy is crucial to break free from dependence on her mother. This action symbolises the way the ableist society often marginalises disabled individuals by undermining their financial standing. Jane's initiative highlights that inclusion becomes feasible when both parties are willing to embrace it.

Not only does Jane attend job interviews, but she also enrols in university to study biology. Additionally, she plans to author a book that offers her unique perspective on the world. This ambitious endeavour signifies Jane's determination to share her insights and experiences, advocating for a world where her viewpoint holds

value and is heard. Her actions represent a bold step towards self-empowerment and a testament to the possibility of inclusivity when society is receptive to acceptance and diversity. Jane avows:

> I am writing a book. It is a book about me. When you consider all the books in the world, you might think that another one is not needed. But that would be incorrect. The world can always use another book because there are so many different perspectives that can be shared, and every person's perspective is important. Including mine: Taylor Jane Simone, age eighteen and three-quarters, would-be bookstore employee. (Brenna, *WFNO* 7)

Jane's writing offers a valuable firsthand perspective, especially significant as a disabled individual. Her narrative not only reflects personal experiences but also highlights societal injustices towards disabled people. The opportunity to publish her book signifies progress towards inclusivity, providing a platform for perspectives often sidelined in mainstream discourse.

Pets, especially gerbils, hold a significant place in Jane's life, serving as a source of comfort during various intervals. The relationship between Jane and her gerbils reflects a unique bond, fostering a mutual dependence that thrives devoid of judgment but full of genuine companionship. Despite being caged, gerbils fulfil their roles, becoming a source of solace for Jane during moments of mood swings or intense emotions.

When faced with stress or seriousness, Jane often finds relief in discussing her gerbils. These conversations serve as a calming mechanism, allowing her to establish a connection with these caged creatures. She reflects on this connection, acknowledging, "... maybe it's not so unusual that my mind switches to gerbils when

things get stressful. I know that other people don't understand this, and so, I try not to be too obvious about the relief I get from thinking and talking about gerbils" (Brenna, *WFNO* 31).

Penelope's pivotal role in Jane's life as both mother and father figure, following her father's departure due to Jane's disability, is underscored by her unwavering determination. Described as "the kind of person who just never gives up" (Brenna, *WFNO* 27), Penelope's persistence serves as both a motivator and a source of stress for Jane. While it drives Jane to elevate herself, it also encroaches on her growing need for privacy as she enters her teenage years.

The conflicting dynamics stem from Penelope's unwavering commitment, propelling Jane's growth while encroaching upon her need for personal space and autonomy crucial for adolescent development. Despite Penelope's overprotectiveness, she actively seeks to integrate Jane into her social circles, exemplified by her relationship with Danny, a hotel manager in Waskesiu. Jane's initial reluctance gives way to enriching experiences, encountering diverse individuals like Kody, Paul, Rose, and June. Each interaction offers unique insights, from Paul's perspective shift on disability through June's influence to Rose's inclusive treatment at the Nature centre. However, encounters like Kody's highlight the challenges of able-bodied privilege.

Paul embodies transformation, valuing individuals for their abilities rather than fixating on disabilities, influenced by his wife June's experiences. His understanding extends to mental health, disabled perspectives, and societal challenges. Similarly, Rose at the Nature Centre treats Jane as an equal, cultivating a sense of belonging and providing access to valuable experiences. In contrast, Kody represents a predatory presence, exploiting Jane for personal gain due to his able-

bodied privilege, underscoring societal power imbalances and the vulnerabilities faced by disabled individuals like Jane.

For Jane, new places often trigger distressing experiences. In Waskesiu, she initially struggles to adapt, but her mother's support helps soothe her mood. However, at her father's place in Wyoming—where he departed due to Jane's disability—she encounters significant difficulty and experiences a meltdown that involves her mother's intervention. This scene represents the profound impact of past trauma inflicted by individuals who initially scarred the memories of disabled individuals, illustrating the considerable time it takes for them to adjust to new opportunities despite the offered support.

In Brenna's narrative, disabled characters confront daily challenges that restrict their lives. For example, in *Waiting for No One*, Martin faces limitations imposed by his overprotective father, who restricts his language and emotional expression. This constraint on communication symbolises the denial of full accessibility, confining Martin's autonomy within prescribed boundaries. Despite these challenges, Martin's VOCA machine serves as a crucial communication tool within his family and society.

In contrast, families like Luke and Alan Phoenix offer unwavering support, fostering an inclusive environment from home. Both father and son stand by Martin, providing steadfast support. This dichotomy highlights the varied ways individuals with disabilities receive support, whether from within the family unit or through external sources like dedicated educators. Despite facing initial limitations, Martin finds solace and empowerment through familial support and technological assistance.

Jane's journey differs, learning through hardship due to school isolation. Initially, support comes from her mother and later her teacher assistant, aiding her in

navigating challenges. This discrepancy underscores varied support avenues for individuals with disabilities, from family or dedicated educators. Jane reflects:

> I have learned not to mind being touched by strangers in dance class. When I was in elementary school ... other kids called me 'The Freaker.' The worst meltdowns happened ... Eventually, my teacher let me miss square dancing ... I didn't even learn to square dance ... when I was in grade six, I had a new teacher associate named Shauna ... helped me to understand that I could touch a boy's hand while I was dancing with him (Brenna, *WFNO* 46-47).

Jane's differences are perceived as burdensome by her schoolmates, unaware of her health condition. However, it is her teacher assistant who facilitates her understanding that physical contact is customary in dance, prompting a shift in Jane's behaviour. This emphasises the importance of providing disabled individuals with space, access to their needs, and an inclusive environment, ensuring equal opportunities for all.

The selection of a teacher assistant emerges as a multifaceted pillar of support for Jane, transcending conventional academic assistance. Through structured sessions, the assistant aids Jane in deciphering facial expressions. Employing picture cards depicting diverse emotions, the assistant prompts discussions on their subtleties. Subsequently, Jane gains access to coping strategies. This progression towards nurturing empathy and comprehension holds pivotal significance in cultivating an inclusive societal fabric, affording Jane the capacity to grasp the emotional landscapes of others.

Shauna, acting as Jane's advocate, plays a pivotal role in ensuring that authorities understand the nature of Jane's meltdowns, eliminating the necessity of sending her home. By elucidating that these meltdowns stem from her emotions

momentarily overwhelming her, Shauna empowers Jane with strategies for self-management. She guides Jane to navigate her meltdowns autonomously, advising her to seek solitude from the crowd and practice deep breathing at regular intervals. This guidance equips Jane with practical tools to navigate and mitigate the impact of her emotional distress independently.

With the support of her teacher assistant, Jane gains an understanding of various facets, decoding not just able-bodied gestures and idioms but much more. This progress is a direct result of the government's initiative to aid individuals with disabilities. Jane's transition to university marks a significant milestone. Instead of viewing her disability negatively, she leverages it positively—her photographic memory becomes a catalyst for excelling in her studies.

Later, she makes a decision to meet her father in Wyoming, choosing to include him in her life. Jane asserts her independence, making her own decisions and setting boundaries with her mother, ensuring her personal space remains respected. In Wyoming, Jane likens her state to that of a bull confined within a pit, compelled to fight against its will. She recognises the limitations and control over her abilities and access due to her Asperger's Syndrome, empathising with the bull's plight. However, unlike the animal, Jane refuses to subject herself to violence. Instead, she takes the proactive step of breaking free from the clutches of an ableist society. She severs her own constraints, realising the need to advocate for her own cause.

Jane finds solace in her pet gerbil, Harold Pinter, relying on him to alleviate her distress or pain. "I spend sixty minutes holding Harold Pinter. He is very capable at calming me down" (Brenna, *WFNO* 74). In *Waiting for No One*, Jane delves into the notion of anticipating an unknown event, unsure of what exactly she's awaiting. Could it be her enduring battle for an inclusive environment, a lifelong quest for the

accessibility and space she's been denied for nearly two decades? Despite her persistent struggle, she finds herself perplexed by the enigmatic idea of awaiting something intangible, something not readily visible:

> 'People are always waiting,' I tell him. 'I am waiting to turn nineteen, but after that I will be waiting to turn twenty. I am also waiting to get a job. The manager of the bookstore is waiting for me to call her back. Mom is waiting for me to come home. I'm not sure what you are waiting for, but everyone's waiting for something. And you shouldn't wait by yourself if you have a choice' (Brenna 82).

This action serves as a poignant symbol of Jane's transition into adolescence, mirroring the concerns shared by other girls about their futures. Despite this, she grapples with her current state, acknowledging her dependency on her mother as she hesitates to take the initiative, still undecided about reaching out to the manager. The space she has carved for herself seems to lag behind her own growth, hindered by her reluctance to take that crucial first step toward independence.

Jane's worries deepen as she considers her mother's consistent accuracy in understanding things. Despite Penelope's advice against bringing the gerbil to Wyoming due to travel constraints, Jane disregards it, only to realise her error later. Penelope's approach sometimes borders on bossiness, encroaching upon Jane's autonomy. This overbearing behaviour reflects societal norms that, in the guise of adhering to ableist standards, restrict space and access, consequently hindering inclusion within the mainstream.

Jane's class at university portrays the inclusivity and access she has for a person with disability. Her disability i.e., Asperger's Syndrome helps her to have a picturesque memory of things she read, this helps her to excel in studies. She is also

good at drawing, and it is appreciated by Luke Phoenix, who sees her ability but not disability.

Jane encounters Martin Phoenix through Luke, observing the stark contrast between the inclusivity in the Phoenix family and the lack thereof in her own. Despite Martin having the freedom to use swear words through his VOCA device, his father imposes restrictions, showing care but also overprotectiveness. This protective environment deprives Martin, despite his age, of the typical fun experiences other kids enjoy. It highlights that while space and access are granted, they are accompanied by limitations. Jane, feeling frustrated by this realisation, takes action. With Luke's assistance, she aids Martin in expanding his VOCA vocabulary to include the words he desires, striving to help him find a more fulfilling sense of enjoyment.

Whenever Jane senses a loss of control, she seeks solace in tidying her surroundings, eventually leading to a compulsive obsession with cleaning. This behaviour becomes a disorder, driving her to not only request her mother's precision in wording but also urge her doctor to use specific language that aligns with her preferences:

> 'So I would like to see you again in four weeks to ask you how you are doing,' she (doctor) says. 'Don't say 'how': say something else,' I (Jane) say. 'Talk so I can understand you, because I have to know what you're saying' .... The doctor looks at me and I see her nodding her head. 'You're right, Taylor. I should talk so you can understand me' …. (Brenna, *WFNO* 141)

Even though the doctors are experts in treating patients like Jane, they still glean valuable lessons from these encounters. It evolves into a mutual learning experience for both the medical practitioner and the patient. As one doctor aptly puts it,

"Sometimes we just need a little help to navigate obstacles and move forward in life" (Brenna, *WFNO* 148). This mindset underscores how healthcare professionals contribute to shaping an inclusive society by acknowledging the need for support. Similarly, Martin's VOCA device was crafted by a father whose own son grappled with Cerebral Palsy. While individual perceptions are shifting over time, the changes aren't sudden but rather a gradual, steady progression toward a more understanding society.

Change often begins within oneself before manifesting in the outside world, and in *The White Bicycle*, Jane embarks on this transformative journey. For individuals with disabilities, achieving their dreams often demands immense perseverance. Despite her challenges, Jane takes a crucial first step toward empowerment by attaining financial independence. With this newfound autonomy, she begins to envision augmenting different facets of her life. This leads her to revisit her past through journal entries, seeking to explore and fulfil the aspirations she couldn't previously pursue.

As Jane acknowledges the potential impact of her past on shaping a better future, she reflects, "My high-school history teacher used to say that the past is important to the present. I will explore my past, such as it is, and see if this is true" (Brenna, *WB* 3). Her aspirations to attain independence drive her dreams; she yearns to care for herself, an opportunity often denied to her because of being a person with needs in a developed country. Observing girls her age thriving independently prompts Jane to recognise the stark contrast in her own circumstances.

Motivated to pursue personal growth, she embraces writing as a catalyst for transformation. Through introspective writing, she carefully dissects her present circumstances, setting the stage for a future characterised by independence. This

intimate exploration through writing illuminates the potential for individual change, not only within herself but also in challenging prevailing societal perceptions regarding ableism. By revisiting historical narratives and critically analysing societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, avenues are opened for a revaluation of stigmatised perceptions, thereby reshaping the discourse and nurturing a more inclusive comprehension of the disabled community.

Jane initiates her journal with a resolute declaration to break free from the financial constraints tethering her to her mother's control. Utilising the journal as a tool, she confronts her inner stigmas and begins dismantling the barriers obstructing her progress. This process becomes instrumental in transforming her perspective, aligning her attitudes with those of mainstream society.

Securing two jobs, one at a bookstore organising books and the other as Martin's personal care assistant, Jane strategically navigates her employment choices. Reflecting on her role as a "personal care assistant," she notes, "'Personal care assistant' looks a lot better than 'babysitter' on a resume, but either term could support further employment. This is my main goal: employment so I can buy all my own clothes, and everything else I will need" (Brenna, *WB* 4). Her aspiration for self-sufficiency fuels her ambition.

Jane's journey into her past serves as a lens through which she gains insights into her shortcomings and recognises the necessity for self-improvement to attain her objectives. This introspective journey underscores her evolving maturity, shaped not just by age but also by the profound experiences of her life.

During their trip to France, Penelope finds herself unable to effectively communicate with the driver, experiencing the frustration of not being understood. Jane steps in to assist, taking charge of the communication. This sudden shift in

dynamics upsets Penelope, who had typically taken the lead in communication between them. Being on the receiving end of the communication barrier unsettles her, leading her to admit:

> ‘She does not look happy. ‘Are you feeling okay?’ I ask. ‘I can’t communicate properly here,’ she says. ‘I do know some French words, but I just can’t seem to think of them when I needed them. It makes me feel […] I don’t know […] childish […] inadequate.’ ‘Being able to communicate is an art and a craft,’ I tell her, and she looks at me with a strange expression. (Brenna, *WB* 34-35)

This incident symbolises the resistance of able-bodied individuals when a person with a disability surpasses them in a particular field. In the dominant culture of able-bodied individuals, Penelope feels a sense of fracture and struggles to process the situation.

Jane’s experience in France proves transformative, offering her a fresh perspective on the world. During her nature ride, she encounters discomfort yet persists, symbolised by her determination to push forward. As she carries the white bicycle, grappling with the challenging terrain, she continually reassures herself that the path ahead will improve. Despite stumbling and grappling with the decision to continue, she perseveres, driven by the conviction that just a little further, the path will improve.

This resilient attitude showcases Jane’s readiness to confront the norms of an ableist society that often marginalises individuals like her. Her refusal to yield reflects her unwavering commitment to pursue her dreams. In doing so, she carves out her own space, seizing access with the unwavering support of friends and family.

Jane delves into her past through her journal, uncovering instances of misunderstanding between herself and her classmates. In a school predominantly

occupied by able-bodied individuals, their failure to comprehend Jane's unique needs led to frequent misjudgements, with her behaviour often misinterpreted by teachers. The absence of adequate space, access, and empathetic understanding contributed to an environment lacking inclusivity.

The studied text also underscores the pivotal role of music in individuals' lives, notably Jane and Billy, who both utilise music as an avenue to navigate their personal crises. When Penelope announces their trip to Waskesiu, Jane immerses herself in calming classical baroque music, finding respite and mental peace. Conversely, Billy harnesses music as an escape from his hardships, showcasing his yo-yo trick while singing at a contest—an act that not only captures Natasha's attention but also serves as a bridge for interaction. These instances highlight how music, as an accessible and personal space, becomes a powerful tool for both characters, aiding them in transcending their individual challenges.

Natasha isn't alone in using a journal to navigate her emotions—Jane finds comfort in expressing herself through writing rather than engaging with those around her. Consistently, journaling becomes an essential routine for Jane. Due to her Asperger's Syndrome, maintaining eye contact proves challenging, which inadvertently limits the people in her immediate space and contributes to her disconnect from an ableist society. At times, the weight of conforming to ableist norms overwhelms Jane, leading her to reflect, "I know this is impossible, but sometimes, in moments of extreme despair, I perceive things that astonish someone as typically logical as I am" (Brenna, *WFNO* 33).

Jane's reflections on secrets and differing perspectives underscore the complexities she navigates daily due to her Asperger's. Understanding the existence of thoughts unknown to others was a concept that eluded her in childhood, revealing

the intricacies of perspective-taking. The idea that individuals could possess viewpoints divergent from hers used to baffle her, emphasising the ongoing journey she faces in comprehending varied perspectives amidst the unique lens through which she perceives the world. These challenges highlight the continuous effort Jane invests in understanding the intricacies of social dynamics despite the hurdles posed by her condition.

Reflecting on her distressing experiences, Jane shares, "the thing I hate most about grade one are fire drills … I am standing in the line of kids from my class and I am trying not to cry. My throat hurts and I know that it is because there are sad sounds in there waiting to get out" (Brenna, *WB* 66-67). Her discomfort in crowded places exacerbates her condition, overwhelming her with sensory input she struggles to handle simultaneously. The dearth of awareness and the confined spaces suffocated Jane, leaving a profound impact even during her early years.

The ableist society often imposes rigid norms on disabled individuals, expecting them to conform to predetermined standards. This dynamic is exemplified during Penelope and Jane's stay in France when Penelope insists that Jane participate in a cookery course despite Jane's lack of interest. This coercion echoes the ableist mindset that imposes its opinions onto the more vulnerable community.

Jane reminisces about her evolving perception of Penelope, reflecting on how as a child, seeing her in the classroom, seated on a chair with her floral handbag resting on the floor, brought joy and reassurance. However, that sentiment has changed over time. Now, Penelope no longer evokes those feelings of happiness and relief. It's as if the shift represents the disparity between a haven of stability and a confining space. This transformation in emotions highlights a stark contrast from a previously comforting presence to a current sense of unease and constraint. The

norms perpetuated by the ableist society have a dual impact on disabled individuals, sometimes offering positive support but also often imposing limitations and negative expectations, further highlighting the complexities within this societal structure.

Jane hones her drawing skills, expanding her employment prospects in a field offering multiple opportunities. She meticulously explores job avenues that align with her comfort zone, delving into various options during her early adulthood to enhance her proficiency. Martin Phoenix's unwavering support and encouragement serve as a catalyst, propelling Jane toward greater artistic growth. The conducive environment fostered by Alan Phoenix provides Jane with the space necessary to refine her craft. Moreover, the acknowledgment of her talent by an authority figure significantly bolsters Jane's performance in the field, motivating her to excel further.

Jane's quest for independence takes root as she resolves to visit Adelaide, despite her mother's objections, signifying her yearning for autonomy. Determined, Jane sets her sights on reaching Cassis via bus, regardless of Penelope's stance. Penelope struggles to comprehend or embrace Jane's persistent pursuit of independence, mirroring a broader societal reluctance towards disabled individuals seeking autonomy. This dynamic symbolises not only the resistance of able-bodied individuals but also the governmental accessibility provisions for disabled individuals to navigate the city. Through diligent preparation and following instructions, Jane successfully achieves her goal of travelling to Cassis unaided, demonstrating her capability to navigate the world independently. Jane reasons:

> People who are nineteen are not supposed to be afraid of their mothers …. When I think about my future, other fears rise to consciousness. I am afraid of never getting a permanent full-time job …. I used to be afraid of finishing high school, but I'm glad I graduated …. I keep

> putting one foot in front of the other and when I get to the bus stop, I put some gum into my mouth. Peppermint, for calming and organizing. (Brenna, *WB* 136-137)

Jane's initial stride towards liberation involves extricating herself from her mother's well-intentioned yet stifling grip, wherein her mother's provision of care, access, and space inadvertently felt like constraints, curbing Jane's independence. This symbolism echoes the overarching trend in an ableist society, wherein ostensibly helpful actions often entrap the disabled community, fostering dependence and instilling a pervasive fear of survival sans able-bodied support. As Janani and Karmakar expounds in "Children's Literature as a Space for Disability Inclusion: A Study of RJ Palacio's Wonder":

> The social model of disability proposes that we shift the attention from the individual with a disability to the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives in their community, workplace, or school. Disabled individuals need to work towards and fight for rights and opportunities that others take for granted. This implies that '[d]isability is seen as an issue of oppression.' Therefore, fostering an inclusive educational institution would mean identifying, acknowledging, and removing impediments that inhibit disabled children's presence and equal participation in the learning process … disability is something that society produces, and it is possible that society could modify itself to include and accommodate those individuals with a disability. (5-6)

Jane's artistic talent doesn't just garner admiration from Alan Phoenix but also catches Adelaide's discerning eye. Despite her illness, Adelaide astutely perceives Jane's passion for drawing and generously mentors her, imparting intricate details to

refine her craft. In Jane's visit to Adelaide's house, she finds the nurturing environment she craves, where Adelaide not only provides the space for growth that Jane yearns for but also grants access to her own drawings, offering Jane a glimpse into the realm of genuine artistic skill.

On the other hand, Jane discovers that her job opportunities in France were orchestrated by her mother to facilitate spending her summer break with Alan Phoenix. This starkly symbolises how able-bodied individuals exploit the vulnerabilities of the disabled, seizing their spaces and manipulating their circumstances for personal gain. However, Jane's resolute declaration, echoing the sentiment, "'I am responsible for myself!' …. 'That is how I am free'" (Brenna, *WB* 157), encapsulates the determination of the disabled community. Her succinct statement signifies their readiness to claim the spaces they require without hesitation, asserting their independence and refusing to wait for opportunities to be handed to them.

Within Brenna's poignant collection of short stories, *Something to Hang on To*, an insightful exploration unfolds, delving into the intricate interplay of disability, access, inclusion, and the quest for solace amidst adversity. Specifically, in the narrative entitled "Finding Your Voice," readers are immersed in an educational milieu meticulously designed to accommodate disabled children, supported by a cadre of dedicated personal care assistants.

The central figures, Janine and Samantha, serve as poignant exemplars of enduring friendship amid formidable individual obstacles. Their bond emerges as a poignant demonstration of authentic inclusion, transcending societal norms imbued with ableism. Through the lens of their narrative, Brenna masterfully illustrates that

genuine inclusivity thrives when individuals are esteemed for their inherent dignity, rather than being solely defined by their disabilities.

In “One of the Guys,” the protagonist, despite contending with Down Syndrome, exemplifies kindness while courageously sharing his narrative with the audience. His storytelling serves as a profound window into his distinct perspective on the world. As the narrative unfolds, Rodney fervently seeks acknowledgment for his true identity, transcending the confines of being categorised solely as a person with a disability.

Rodney’s resilience shines as he engages in activities that his peers undertake effortlessly, despite the inherent challenges posed by his condition. His encounter with bullying serves not to diminish him but rather underscores the pervasive societal issue of able-bodied norms often marginalising the disabled community. Yet, in the face of adversity, Rodney tenaciously advocates for his rightful place, striving for inclusion and equitable access within the broader societal framework.

The central theme in this collection of short stories revolves around the concept of access, shedding light on how spaces and environments can pose formidable barriers for individuals with disabilities such as muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy. The absence of necessary accommodations like ramps, elevators, or other tailored provisions severely limits their mobility and ability to navigate within society. Brenna’s collection powerfully emphasises the urgent need to create inclusive environments that transcend these limitations. It champions the creation of spaces that welcome and cater to everyone, irrespective of their diverse abilities or backgrounds.

Concluding, this chapter has undertaken a meticulous examination of ableism within Beverley Brenna’s literary works. It has explored strategies such as

accommodation and the creation of tailored, inclusive environments for individuals with disabilities, with the primary objective of achieving authentic inclusion. By dissecting the concepts of accessibility and spatial design, the chapter has illuminated their pivotal roles in confronting and dismantling ableist ideologies. These insights underscore the significance of deliberate design and accommodation in addressing ableism, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of diversity and equity within our societal framework.