

# Autonomía, Libertad en Movimiento, A.C.

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“What is essential in a work of art is that it should rise far above the realm of personal life and speak to the spirit and heart of the poet as man to the spirit and heart of mankind.”

- Carl Jung



ALEM has always strived to achieve its objectives not only in vocational training and productive workshops, but also in attention to the cultural life of its members. The famous lyric from “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” goes, “*And the dreams that you dare to dream | Really do come true.*” The members of ALEM had dared to dream of the possibility of creating a work of art which would give a voice, an expression, to their social reality. They discovered that the dream was shared by other groups of people: Instituto Cultural de Morelos and DIF Estatal (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia). In listening to ideas and sharing their stories with those groups, they were able to turn that collective dream into a concrete reality. The result of their shared labor is the theatrical work, “La Discapacidad No Es Como La Pintan” (“Being Physically Challenged Is Not What It Seems”). It was presented to members of the Instituto Cultural de Morelos on October 22, 2009, and presented at the closing of the 36<sup>th</sup> National Paralympic Games in Cuernavaca on October 29, 2009. The play is meant to be itinerant – that is, it may travel to different places and audiences – and the first of these performances will take place in Cuautla on November 21<sup>st</sup>.

The play presents several interwoven storylines, each of which deals with some aspect of living with a disability. Some scenes focus on discrimination in the workplace, some confront problems with those who would merely pity the disabled, while others address personal tragedies and triumphs. The

work is intentionally provocative, opening with a collective monologue which ends with the line, “Would any of you want to trade places with me?” By being confrontational with its audience, the play is able to work on reshaping and transforming the way viewers think about what it means to live with a disability. The picture of that situation is not always rosy, which the actors make clear, but the work ends on a hopeful note: relationships have been altered, discrimination confronted (though not always overcome so easily), and dismissive attitudes of disgust or pity have been molded into new understandings.



The actors in the play have been enriched by the knowledge imparted by their directors, and although they have no theatrical background, they have drawn deeply from the well of their own personal experience. The inherent value of those experiences is best summarized by English philosopher John Locke, who declared in his “Essay Concerning Human Understanding” that the only way a human mind truly came to be endowed with knowledge was from pure experience. Thus, all scenes, situations, and monologues in the play were written collaboratively, and everything is derived from someone’s personal experience. Moreover, the work speaks directly to the local reality of living with a disability in Cuernavaca. It directly criticizes aspects of the larger social network of which the actors and audience members are a part – amplifying its impact – while suggesting ways to improve the structure of the personal ties which bind them all together.

This piece serves not only a beautiful artistic expression, but a reflection of the values which society has attached to one of its marginalized groups. In Mexico, as in many countries, disabled people are often perceived to be useless, worthy only of paternalistic over-protection and pity. Through this play, the members of ALEM seek to alter those values. Only by being consistent and persistent in their message will the actors bring about their desired effect...to be seen and heard as they are.

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