

October 2020



“Vote as if your life depends on it – because it does!” - Justin Dart

My name is Jason and I was born and raised in Madison, WI. I’m Julie and I was born and raised in Eau Claire, WI. We met at Camp Wawbeek in Wisconsin Dells. Jason was 10 and Julie was 11. Julie always says, “we met when boys were cooties!” We became friends and pen pals for years. After we both graduated high school, we reconnected and began dating. We married in August of 1996, between our birthdays. 16 years ago, we built the first barrier-free house in Eau Claire and have enjoyed being homeowners ever since.

We keep ourselves busy in our community playing wheelchair soccer for the Chippewa Valley Hooligans, bowling on an adaptive league, volunteering, and running J&J’s Handmade Crafts, our micro-business. Jason wears many hats throughout Wisconsin. He is the president of People First WI, the chair of the WI Independent Living Council, a board member of Eau Claire County ADRC, a member of the Governor’s Taskforce on Caregiving, and a member of the WI Election Commission on Disability Voting.

For Julie, school was one fight after another. In Middle School, she was denied the accommodation of oral testing as there was no ADA yet. Her first day of High School, she

returned home crying and with soiled pants as the school refused to let her use the only accessible restroom due to it being locked and a policy that didn't allow a student to have a key. Her mother went to the school the next morning, with a grab bar and her screwdriver, and informed the Principal that it better be installed in an unlocked restroom before the day was over or she would be back to do it herself the next morning.

For Jason, school was also a fight. Starting in Middle School, his Occupational Therapist made anyone that was in a wheelchair carry a license to use their wheelchairs. If the student did not have them, they could be suspended for it. Jason was also bullied from other students, which continued through High School. His teachers never gave much thought of why he was passing all his classes in special education. In his senior year of High School, he was placed in regular education classes. He could not keep up with his peers as they didn't transition him, just left him to sink or swim with no support.

Jason remembers going to his first disability rally at the capital when he was still in high school. He felt overwhelmed with all the wheelchairs and other people with disabilities fighting against what was wrong in Wisconsin. Jason didn't really get involved in advocacy work until moving to Eau Claire to be closer to Julie. Julie brought him along to a self-advocacy group called Barrier Busters that she belonged to. It didn't take long for Jason to find his passion for advocating and started working with the group to make sidewalks and curb cuts accessible for people of all abilities. He thought it was cool winning and achieving their goal of having sidewalks and curb cuts everyone could access.

Voting is a right, a responsibility, and a duty for Julie. She believes that if you're able to vote but don't, then you don't get to whine about the outcome. Many of her friends have had the right to vote taken away by judges and guardians. For Jason, it is one way to make sure his voice is heard. He feels that if you don't vote, then you shouldn't complain about what is happening politically.

For Julie, it's about making an informed decision. She pays attention to the debates, particularly the candidate's stance on disability issues and policies. Jason makes decisions on a candidate that make the most sense to him. Many things he doesn't understand but if a candidate talks about changes that need to be made for the disabled or to give the disabled more freedom, he remembers them when he goes to vote.

Julie prefers to use the voting machine instead of having help with a paper ballot, voting independently and privately just like any non-disabled voter. Jason also prefers a voting machine. It is hard for him to fill in circles or lines on a paper ballot. He worries his vote might

not be counted if it can't be read correctly by the tabulator. It doesn't matter how you vote, just that you go out and do it! Jason is an election poll worker in the city of Eau Claire. He votes on one of his breaks during the day as he is assigned to his own voting site. Julie brings him lunch or dinner and votes at that time. We each wear our masks, bring and use our own hand sanitizer, and use our own pens and stylus to vote with. Get out the vote whichever way is easy and safe for you.