An actor, director, educator and writer, Regan Linton is also artistic director and acting executive director of Phamaly Theatre Company in Denver. She was recently honored with the True West award for Colorado Theatre Person of the Year 2017. She has performed professionally with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Mixed Blood, La Jolla Playhouse, Pasadena Playhouse, Big-I, and Phamaly, among others. She is a leading voice for diversity and inclusion throughout the national theater community. She is also an adaptive swimmer, golfer and yogi, and enjoys traveling, new adventures and challenging the status quo. Visit her website at reganlinton.com.

Mark Mathew Braunstein became a T12 paraplegic from an unskillful dive in 1990. Lucky him, his injury and recovery were made into a short TV documentary (youtu.be/96EhHzN6Roi). After 30 years as an art librarian and art curator at Rhode Island School of Design and then at Connecticut College, he retired to contemplate his navel as well as other people’s art and literature. A frequently published photographer, he is shown here photographing the ramp at Vermont Studio Center. You can view his nature photography and read his eight previous articles for New Mobility at MarkBraunstein.org.

Cindy Otis served with distinction as a CIA security analyst and manager between 2007-2017 on some of the top U.S. national security priorities, including a tour as an intelligence briefer at the White House. Prior to the CIA, she worked as a public affairs officer for the U.S. Army. Since leaving the federal government, she has written on important political and national security issues in publications like The New York Times and Teen Vogue. She holds a master’s in international relations from Boston University and a bachelor’s in international politics from Brigham Young University.

Want to contribute to New Mobility? Please send queries and manuscripts to Ian Ruder: iruder@unitedspinal.org
What if I told you there’s a resort that honors artists and writers with free vacations of room, board, and studio space? And that, at this resort, preference is given to artists and writers with disabilities — and not just any old vanilla-flavored disability, but specifically spinal cord injuries?

Welcome to Creative Access. What started in 2008 as a partnership between an artists residency center and a foundation dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with spinal cord injuries has grown into a sprawling, multi-site opportunity unlike any other.

Last year I was one of 13 lucky crips who were awarded Creative Access fellowships. The fellowships entail an extended stay, usually one month, to pursue your own artistic endeavors at one of four unique residency sites across the country. They are like art schools without final grades or summer camps without counselors. Think of these colonies as Creativity Camps.

With locations in Vermont, Oregon, New Mexico and Illinois, the sites are almost as diverse as the applicants. Last year’s fellows included painters, sculptors, filmmakers, writers and much more, all united by the fact that they had some sort of spinal cord injury. That’s one of the prerequisites set by the provider of the fellowships, the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation: Creative Access awards are for visual artists and writers living with spinal cord injury in the United States and Canada.

At all four sites, your bedroom, your bathroom, and all public places are wheelchair accessible, else they would not have invited you. Accessibility for all of us was good, but not perfect. Not that we expected perfection. If we wanted perfection, we would have stayed home. We all were glad that we did not stay home.

All the staff have already been well broken-in from hosting wheelers before us. Hence, they are knowledgeable and welcoming. And the staff are themselves artists or writers. Hence, they share camaraderie with those who are mutually afflicted by artistic callings.

While some events calendars might be tagged with studio visits, poetry readings, lectures, workshops, critiques, rap sessions, social gatherings, and even yoga classes, these are all optional. Freed from the shackles of job responsibilities and family obligations, you can fritter away your time in any way you please.

“The quest for inspiration and productivity is what brought everyone together.”

BY MARK MATHEW BRAUNSTEIN

WHATSOEVER

reveca torres

Fashion designer, illustrator, photographer, filmmaker and nonprofit founder Reveca Torres’s resume is nearly as long as her passion for the arts is deep. Torres, a C5-7 quad, co-directs the annual ReelAbilities Film Festival in Chicago and curated an online photo exhibition that showcases the lives and works of people with disabilities. She attended Vermont Studio Center in 2014 and Santa Fe Art Institute in 2017.
Yet as a 67-year-old retiree whose every day already is a vacation day, I accomplish much more living alone at home with deep woods just 50 feet beyond my window than I did in the middle of a Vermont village with the commotion of companionship and community all around me. Writing, after all, is a solitary act. Still, my time there was productive, just not as I had planned. That happened to many others, too, who laid plans to do one thing but accomplished another. Thrust into a totally new environment as though we had dropped from the sky, we hatched some new eggs.

The quest for inspiration and productivity is what brought everyone together. After all, at home few artists enjoy the luxury of a bright and spacious and well-ventilated studio with empty walls begging to be filled. So in their separate artist or writer studios, residents create their latest masterpieces, all the while enjoying the comforts of sharing up to three meals a day, of being allocated unhurried and unscheduled time, and maybe, just maybe, of being instilled with inspiration to last a lifetime.

During several hour-long gatherings, residents were invited to give ten-minute slideshows or readings to the VSC community. During each of those artistic and literary “happy hours,” you got to see or hear the works of your peers who you had been meeting around campus. And you, too, got your chance to condense your entire oeuvre into ten minutes. I am proud to say that I limited mine in nine.

Other evening events were the two-hour Open Studio visits that alternated between painters’ studios one week, sculptors’ the next week, and so on. Hobbling along on my crutches, I did not try to keep up with the Open Studio parade. Instead, I made studio visits on my own, at my own pace. All are accessible except for the second floor of the sculpture studios. Some visits I arranged in advance, others were by happenstance. If at work in their studios with their doors closed, that signified, Do Not Disturb. But open doors meant, Come On In. The studio hosts got to verbalize the artistic itch they were scratching, and I got to accost them with my unsolicited but nevertheless welcomed critiques. Those intimate one-on-one conversations were the most indelible memories of my entire Creative Access experience.

Ready to Apply for 2019?
Applications will be accepted beginning in September 2018. For the precise date, consult the Creative Access webpages on the
Elizabet Sachs

A failed T1 spinal surgery at 65 made Elizabeth Sachs a latecomer to the SCI world, but did little to slow her creative momentum. A journalist, editor, New York Times book reviewer and children’s and young adult author (pen name Betsy Sachs), Sachs now writes about her disability. Look for her forthcoming memoir, Late to the Dance. Her residency at VSC demonstrated just how nurturing fellowships can be, “It allowed me to gather a disjointed manuscript representing 40 years of writing into a cohesive story.”