

The Diversity of Whoopi Goldberg – a DVD Review

Success Story:

Adaptive Gardening- How to Adapt Gardening to “Challenged” Bodies

For this review, I really wanted to talk about disability awareness. To begin we reach back into the Affirmative Action Resource Library’s dusty archives to review a DVD that has never gotten reviewed though it has sat on the shelf quite a while.

By Cid Barcellos, UCCE Yolo County Master Gardener

“Whoopi Goldberg: Back to Broadway” is from 2005 and is an HBO two disk set. It includes a recording of an anniversary “re-enactment” in 2005 of Ms. Goldberg’s celebrated one-woman show on Broadway from 1985 that launched her career. Disk 1 is the recording of her “Back to Broadway” performance in 2005; Disk 2 is a recording of the original 1985 one-woman show.

Life can throw us many curves. Accidents happen, diseases occur and aging is a given. It doesn’t mean we have to give up gardening. Gardening is adaptable to bodies which are changing as we get older. Our heart says “let’s do it”. Our bodies may say “not so fast.” Our mind can choose to do it. Even in the face of aging bodies, accidents or diseases, we can keep gardening. Gardening is therapy. Let’s use it.

Why should we care and what does this have to do with disability awareness? She portrays sets of characters – male and female – in each performance. (Brilliantly.) There is one character, though, which appears on each Disk and which completely captivated me. Whoopi portrays a woman with cerebral palsy.

There is active gardening and passive gardening. On the active side, gardening is a stress reducer providing physical exercise, and will leave you with a positive tiredness. It builds character and you are proud of its success. It is a great teacher of patience and persistence.

She changed the monologue considerably for the 2005 performance on Disk 1 and I prefer the 1985 version on Disk 2. On Disk 2, this segment is called “Can You Understand Me?” (and lasts about 10 minutes) (on Disk 1 it is “Crippled Girl”). It is an inspired, inspiring representation. It goes beyond representation, though. Ms. Goldberg inhabits this character completely; we never learn her name but Ms. Goldberg, through the character, teaches so much about disability awareness, about acceptance and tolerance, about fear of the unfamiliar, and misleading stereotypes – and most importantly, she teaches simple respect and dignity – never by preaching, never “telling” but by showing, by *being* this “crippled girl,” letting her talk to us, share with us, mildly confront us. We begin to see and care about this girl as a human being – we’re gently forced to see *beyond* the disability. About halfway through the performance, she undergoes this utter transformation (it’s a sort of dream sequence) . . . if you don’t remember or didn’t see the original show, there just isn’t words to describe it. Breathtaking is a cliché – it is a too brief moment in the monologue but my jaw dropped. Ms. Goldberg is an artist of the first order. “Can You Understand Me?” is simply what art is all about

The passive garden is a plus, too. One learns to appreciate plants even when viewed through a window. The mind is stretched to identify plants, birds, and bugs. It sparks creativity and curiosity. The garden is a wonderful place to socialize with your friends and family. And it often brings peace of mind and a spiritual calm into our lives.

One of the best things about gardening is its adaptability. Garden tools can be adaptable, beds can be raised, and the infrastructure can be changed. If there is a will, there is a way. Let’s think outside the box and look at ways to keep on gardening even when our body talks back to us.

Basic rules 1) Do not over do it. For safety and your health, respect pain. It’s your body

no matter the medium or the message. It moves with genuine humor, empathy and tenderness.

AND, it teaches us about disability awareness!

Fair Warning: One of the other characters Ms. Goldberg portrays on this 2-disk DVD is a young brother from the hood. The language is strong. Very strong. It is a portrayal close to the bone, very funny, but uncompromising. It is an accurate representation of the verbal idioms and cadences of a disenfranchised young Black man. But the language, nevertheless, is quite profane and very strong. Not all the characters on these Disks use such strong language, but Ms. Goldberg starts her show both times with this character and it's quite a jolt. The Affirmative Action Office, therefore, can only recommend "Can You Understand Me?" on Disk 2 (remember: it lasts about 10 minutes) (and "Crippled Girl" on Disk 1) – each of which can be chosen from the main menu. And both are an inspired vehicle of disability awareness training provided by the understated genius of Whoopi Goldberg. Highly recommended.

To find this DVD go to http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/Diversity/Affirmative_Action/Resources/

Fill in and send the Resource Library Loan Form to me at the address on the form or email it to me: dewwhite@ucanr.edu

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telling you to stop, take a break. Remember, it does not have to be done in the next few hours or even today. Pace yourself. Try one hour per day, not 4 hours. 2) Use your strongest muscles. Use your legs not your back; your forearm and elbow, not your wrist or fingers. Use your palms to push levers or tools, not your fingers. Avoid staying in one position too long. 3) Carry smaller lighter weight objects.

Make it easier to get around. A reversible kneeler/bench, a garden cart, and a garden seat caddy help the gardener more easily sit and prune or plant. An empty 5 gallon bucket makes a great tool carrier and will support a seat cushion. Add mailboxes around the yard to hold small tools. It's convenient and you won't have to carry tools very far.

Adapt tools for your needs 1) Use tools with extended handles. These can lengthen your reach. You don't have to bend over so far so it's easier on your back. 2) Choose a steel tubular handle rather than wood which is heavier. 3) Wrap self adhesive tape or foam tightly around handles for a nonslip gripping surface. Use bike grips or crash bar pads to give a wider and softer handle. Pipe insulation also makes a nice soft grip. 4) Kneepads contoured to your knee are comfortable. Buy some or make your own by attaching pieces of foam to your knees with sturdy fabric or use velcro to hold them in place. 5) Use kitchen tools such as tongs, strainers, and salt shakers (good for planting small seeds). Think about lightweight plastic cups, spoons, forks. 6) Use children's tools as they are lighter, have longer handles and may be just right for your hands. 7) Ratchet pruners are easy to use. Your hand makes several smaller squeezes thus sparing arthritic hands. 8) When weeding, length means strength. Long handled hoes allow cultivating and weeding from a standing position. Three pronged cultivators are easy to use. And last but not least make sure the pruners, loppers and saws are sharp. Raised beds are a big plus you avoid bending over so far your back is not screaming at you. Beds are usually 12", 24" or 36" high. Raised beds are attractive and easy to use. A ledge can be added so you can comfortably sit on the edge of the bed which is easier on your back and legs. Raised beds can yield up to 4 times more harvest, whether flowers or vegetables, compared to an in-ground bed. The soil stays lights, provides good

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drainage, is easier to work with and requires less strenuous digging. Raised beds can be planted earlier in the season as they warm up more quickly than the ground. Add a trellis for vertical growth. You can make your own with PVC pipe. It is sturdy, lightweight, rot resistant, easy to assemble and disassemble. Use at least 1" diameter PVC.

The down side to raised beds is they can dry out faster than ground level beds. Adding mulch helps keep the moisture in. Tall plants may grow out of reach.

Before you put in a raised bed be sure you can reach the center from both sides if it's built out in the open. If the raised bed is built up against the house or fence, make sure you can reach the back. Add mulch to prevent weed growth, retain moisture, feed the plants, and keep the soil from compacting. Beds should run north/south for maximum sun.

Containers: Plastic pots are light weight and easy to move around. Keep them small and simple. Large planters can hold several plants and need watering less frequently. A ½ barrel makes a great container for multiple plants. Self watering containers mean less frequent watering for you. Put planters on wheels or rolling platforms for easy moving. Cut a bag of potting soil lengthwise down the center and plant. Put the bag on a table first and remember to poke holes for drainage on the bottom. Consider window boxes so you can see them from inside. Maybe containers fitted to a railing would work for you. Hanging boxes or pots look lovely. They work best when lined with sphagnum moss or coco fiber liners.

Planting: Seeds can be frustrating when they are tiny. Some seed packets recommend planting 2 or 3 seeds per hole. You can hardly see the seeds much less count them. Seeding tools that can be quite useful for small or large seeds and you can make your own. To make your own seeding device use a funnel or a piece of PVC or bamboo to drop the seeds into the planting holes. Try mixing the seeds with sharp sand, fine soil or coffee grounds to prevent clumping. Place in a salt shaker or hand held seed dispenser for easy planting. Make a seed tape with newspaper and a flour/water paste. Glue the seeds on strips of newspaper and plant the whole thing.

Planting small plants – use a large diameter PVC pipe (large enough to push the plant through). Slide the plant down the pipe into the hole. It may be helpful to cut a notch in the PVC to help land the seedling.

Watering: Have a water source near the bed(s), if possible. Install the hose bib at a higher level to make watering easier.

Weeding: Use a push/pull motion from a standing position for weeding and cultivating.

Tips for success: Protect your joints by using your largest and strongest muscles. Use splints if needed. Maintain joint flexibility, range of motion and quality of life. Avoid slouching and resting your weight on 1 arm or 1 leg for any length of time. Wear a carpenter's apron to carry tools or push a cart on wheels with tools in it. Weed after it rains or after watering. Exercise is important to physical and emotional well being. Keeping muscles in shape improves flexibility. Work with a friend or someone who has strength and dexterity. This provides companionship and fun. Nature is a wonderful stress reducer just by observing it. Walk in your garden and enjoy that you have created. Notice the birds, bees, butterflies and bugs. They are enjoying your creative endeavors.

Websites:

Everything Ergonomic [www.Handhelpers.Com](http://www.handhelpers.com)

Fiskars Tools [www.Fiskars.Com](http://www.fiskars.com) Arthritis Foundation Seal Of Approval On Some Tools, Lifetime Warranty

Florian Tools [www.Floriantools.Net](http://www.floriantools.net) Ratchet Pruners

Garden Tools [www.Lifewithease.Com](http://www.lifewithease.com) Ergonomic Garden Tools

Gardener's Supply [www.Gardeners.Com](http://www.gardeners.com) Gardening Tools Including Adaptable Tools

www.amazon.com/ Look Under Arthritis Gardening Tools (Ergonomic Gardening Tools Set, Garden Weeds, Kneeler & Seat

(More Websites. . .)

Arthritis Supplies: www.Arthritissupplies.Com

Garden Seat Caddy, Easy Grip Arm Support, Forks, Cultivators, Hoes, Trowels (Short & Long Handled)

American Horticultural Therapy Association:

www.Ahta.Org

Chicago Botanic Garden:

www.Chicagobotanicgarden.Org

Resources:

Accessible Gardening For People With Physical Disabilities: A Guide To Methods, Tools And Plants

by Janeen R. Adil

Accessible Gardening: Tips & Techniques For Seniors & The Disabled by Joann Woy

Easy Gardening, No Stress, No Strain by Jack Kramer

Gardening For Life, Horticulture For People With Special Needs by Lynn Dennis

Just a reminder: The ANR Affirmative Action Resource Library has a very good DVD that introduces viewers to various cultures/religions: “Cultural Awareness: Respecting Race, Religion, & Diversity” is a 2 disk set offering 10 -15 minute segments on topics such as “Islam”; “Buddhism”; “Judaism”; and “Eastern Orthodox” to name just a few. Also includes an non-exploitative look at transgender individuals. A good resource.



Who are these happy people?

L to R: Delynda Eldridge, 4-H, MG Prog. Rep.

Kathy Berrettoni, Office Mgr, Master Gardeners

Marcel Horowitz, 4-H & NFCS Advisor

Rachael Long, CD & Field Crops Advisor

Gene Miyao, Veg Crops Advisor

They're all in a good mood because they just finished participating in the recent **Yolo County** Affirmative Action On-Site Review! For more information on on-site reviews, give David White a call: 530-752-8496 or dewhite@ucanr.edu

