



When Unexpected Dreams Come True
By Diana Elizabeth Jordan, 2018

I recently had the opportunity to attend the AEO Micro Business Conference in Detroit as a Disability Ambassador for The World Institute on Disability. Attending the conference was yet another unexpected and wonderful opportunity I had on my professional journey as an actor, activist and entrepreneur. I became aware of WID's Ambassador Program when I applied last year, was accepted and had the opportunity to attend the National Urban League Conference in St. Louis. I enjoyed last year's conference and the opportunities I had at various sessions and workshops to speak about disability inclusion, intersectionality and equity.

When I applied for the WID Ambassador Program this year, I specifically choose the AEO Conference not only because it is so important for me to continue to ensure that disability is an inclusive and integral part of any diversity dialogue, but also because I felt that since the AEO Conference is specifically targeted at micro business owners, the workshops offered would be a great benefit for me as a business owner. In 2015, I launched my business, The Rainbow Butterfly Café, an edutainment production company that uses performances and expressive arts tools and strategies to celebrate multicultural diversity and disability inclusion, cultivating resiliency and fostering personal growth and professional development.

I have often described starting a business like climbing a mountain without a map or any gear. I am an actress, speaker and artist educator. My educational background, including being the first actor with a disability (cerebral palsy, which mildly affects my speech and gait) to obtain a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from California State University, Long Beach, is arts- and performance-based, not business-based. The last few years, there has been a lot of trial and error of learning the skills it takes to run a business, including new language and terminology.

The AEO Conference was a wonderful platform to attend a variety of diverse workshops, ranging from workshops targeted at female entrepreneurs to workshops led by investment companies. Each workshop I attended allowed me to fulfill my obligations as an Ambassador; I took every opportunity I could to speak about the importance of including the intersection of disability in all diversity dialogues, a message that was always well received. I also benefitted from the opportunity I had to advance my education as an entrepreneur and to network with other attendees and to learn from the speakers and workshop facilitators. I collected many business cards and gave out over forty cards during the three day conference.

Most importantly the conference highlighted the need and importance of the WID Ambassador Program. I still find that, although dialogues on multicultural diversity are an integral part of many business platforms and agendas at conferences, reminders to include disability inclusion and equity as a part of the conversation are still needed—I was happy to initiate those conversations at the AEO Conference. Additionally, I got to spend time with WID staff

members, Elizabeth Layman and Tom Foley, who I've gotten to know over the past couple years and so appreciate the support and appreciation they have shown me.

One of my favorite pictures is of me as a little girl sitting on a swing, wearing a green dress in the backyard of one of my childhood homes. I will usually post it on social media platforms when a special occasion happens for me in my acting career like walking the red carpet and attending a screening for a film I've been in. The picture symbolizes the gratitude I have that my childhood dream to be an actor has come true in some of the most amazing ways. I may not have dreamed of being an activist when I was a child, but it was my experiences as that little girl in the green dress, and throughout my life, that laid the foundation for my passion for disability activism and my commitment to use my skills as an actor and entrepreneur to continue to raise awareness and advocate for diversity and disability inclusion. Whether I am playing a role in a film or play, facilitating a workshop through The Rainbow Butterfly Café or being a WID Disability Ambassador, my childhood dreams have not only come true; they have and continue to manifest in ways that I never could have imagined.

Diana Elizabeth Jordan is an award winning actor, speaker, artist educator-facilitator and diversity and disability inclusion consultant. She is also the founder and Creative Artistic Director of The Rainbow Butterfly Café, an edutainment production company that offers powerful, one person shows and dynamic expressive arts based workshops that celebrate multicultural diversity and disability inclusion, cultivating resiliency and fostering personal growth and professional development. For more information please visit www.dianaelizabethjordan.com or www.rainbowbutterflycafe.com



Diana in her green dress



Diana as a Disability Ambassador