

MODELS OF RESISTANCE

EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER

DISABILITY ACTIVIST

"If you don't have an idea that materializes and changes a person's life, then what have you got?"

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Background Information

Eunice Kennedy Shriver was born on July 10th, 1921, into the Kennedy family, a wealthy, prominent political family. She grew up Massachusetts and she was the sister of President John F. Kennedy and Senators Robert and Ted Kennedy. Her sister, Rosemary Kennedy was born with intellectual disabilities.

Rosemary was kept away from the public eye and eventually put in a hospital without her permission. During this time period, many people with intellectual disabilities were often treated poorly. This would later shape Kennedy-Shriver's activism. She went on to receive her bachelor's degree in sociology from Stanford University. Kennedy-Shriver died on August 11th, 2009.

Resistance

After college, Kennedy Shriver took over the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, her family's foundation. The foundation was focused on preventing intellectual disabilities and improving the way people with intellectual disabilities were treated¹. This new role was the beginning of Kennedy-Shriver's activism for those with intellectual disabilities.

In 1962, Kennedy Shriver started a summer camp for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. This grew into the Special Olympics. The goal was to empower people with disabilities rather than treat them like they were incapable of being successful. Kennedy Shriver fought against these attitudes. "Don't bother with them; they can't learn, so forget them; give them a lollypop to suck and a bench to sit on – that's what we've been fighting." (Kennedy-Shriver)

Achievements

Today, more than 1.3 million people with disabilities from over 150 countries participate in the Special Olympics². Kennedy Shriver has received many awards and honorary degrees including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2002, she received the Theodore Roosevelt Award of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Her resistance against society's low expectations for individuals with intellectual disabilities continues to create a more inclusive community for people with disabilities.

¹ Eunice Kennedy Shriver. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/the-kennedy-family/eunice-kennedy-shriver>.

² Small Steps, Great Strides (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.eunicekennedyshriver.org/bios/si>.

