

# My New Perspective on Life

Harold Carrillo

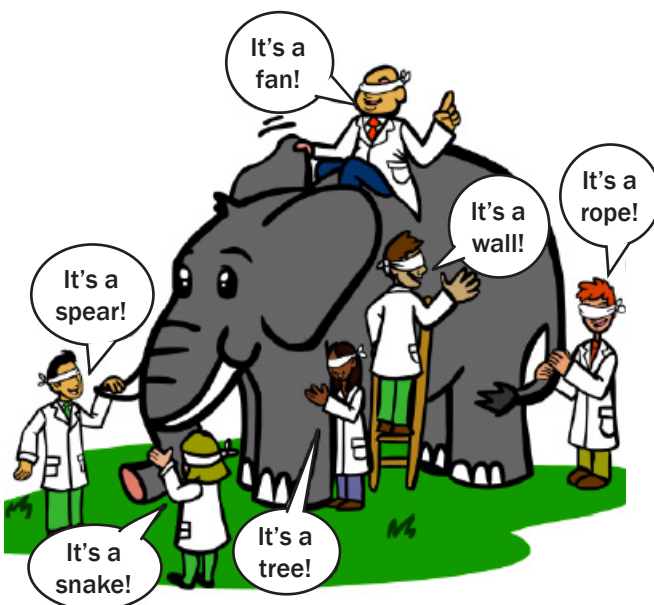
## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does it mean to get a new perspective on something?
2. Describe a time when some event in your life gave you a new perspective.
3. Read about the fable of the six people and the elephant. What is the moral of the story?

## The Two True Barriers

The dictionary says that a disability is “a condition that limits a person’s ability to perform activities or interact with the world around them.” But I strongly believe that those limits do not have to be there. Mostly, those limits come from two places:

- the mental barriers you create, and
- the barriers that society creates.



*There is a fable about six people who cannot see. They each explore a different part of an elephant, and they each have a different perspective about what it is. If these six people wanted to get closer to the “truth” of what they are touching, what could they do?*



Image by Sadie Hernandez from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sadiediane/4884006357> CC BY 2.0

How do I know about these barriers? I experienced them myself! I am 40 years old, and for 16 of those years, I’ve been in a wheelchair due to a motorcycle accident in Puerto Rico. I’m a quadriplegic.

## At First, I Felt Abandoned

After my accident, fear invaded my mind. This was not what I had planned for my future. The first few years were the worst. Everything was very dark, and I started to lose parts of my life. I did not have any goals. I felt abandoned by friends, who I thought were good people. Some family members, who I thought I knew, left me alone. Other people simply walked away. My situation made me feel helpless. That was the mental barrier I created for myself.

## I thought, “Why Go Out?”

As the years went by, I decided to try to have an independent life. My parents and older sister supported me, but it was still hard. In Puerto Rico, many buildings are not accessible to you

if you are in a wheelchair. I sometimes felt discouraged. I thought to myself, “Why go out?” This is another example of a mental barrier.

I went to many therapy appointments and university hospitals where students practiced on me. Doctors and therapists did their best to help me, but Puerto Rico doesn’t have enough of the right equipment. I continued to progress toward my goal of living an independent life, but I decided to move to Massachusetts to get better care.

### A Chance to Be Independent

I’ve been living in Massachusetts for seven years. It is easier to be disabled in Massachusetts than it is in Puerto Rico. There is more support here for people with disabilities. For example, there are very few physical barriers. Public transportation is more accessible, so it is easier to get to appointments. And there are more specialists for people with disabilities.

But in Puerto Rico, I still learned how to live alone.

“Alone?” you might ask.

Yes, ALONE!

During that time, I learned to be my own physical and mental therapist. I learned to cook, I did housework (sweeping, mopping, washing clothes, etc.), and I learned to bathe and dress myself without anyone’s help.

I tell you honestly, it was very hard, but it was necessary for my independence. After I became independent, all my negative thoughts and feelings of “I can’t” were gone.

### A New Goal

Now, my goal is to strive every day to continue growing as a person. I want to help people with the same condition as me. They might be like me right after I had my accident. They might think there is no *light at the end of the tunnel*. But there is. I want to share everything that I have learned during all these years.



#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to Harold, what are the two key barriers that people with disabilities face? What evidence does he share to support his argument?
2. What does Harold mean by the metaphor *light at the end of the tunnel*?

---

Harold Carrillo is a student at Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield, Massachusetts. He appreciates all the help that has been offered to him.