

**WE'RE PEOPLE FIRST**  
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**Through his music, Jeff Moyer works to raise the awareness of all people:  
Before race, gender, ability or disability...**

Musician, songwriter and teacher Jeff Moyer believes that changes during the past 20 years have had a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities in the United States. Moyer's fighting spirit, and that of many others, has led us to the dawn of a new century equipped with mandated wheelchair-accessible buildings, Braille button pads in elevators, technological adaptations, and classrooms where children without disabilities are joined by classmates who a few years ago would have been sent to a separate room or school.

Even so, Moyer feels most able-bodied people never think about the quality-of-life barriers that many of those with disabilities still face every day. That's one message he is conveying through his musical workshops and concerts.

Back in April 1977, two years after graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, Moyer was one of 150 protesters in a 28-day sit-in at the federal building in San Francisco.

Most of the demonstrators had some disability — physical, mental or emotional. Their purpose was to urge the government to put some teeth into section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which theoretically ensured equal access and opportunity to people with disabilities but lacked regulations to implement it. Their efforts helped raise awareness not only in the government but in society at large.

Moyer, who grew up in a Cleveland suburb, started going blind at the age of 5. He says his experiences in California changed his life forever.

"As a teenager I thought of myself as a blind person, and I was concerned about issues that affected the blind community," he said. "When I got to California, I discovered that there was a much bigger community of people with all kinds of different disabilities. It was a time when many disenfranchised groups were demanding their fair chance. I began to see myself as part of a larger community of disabled people.

"Now, I've entered my third phase in terms of how I view myself and the world — I see myself as a person, and I see others that way, too. To view our existence in this universe any other way is an expression of loss, incompleteness, I think," he says.

Moyer credits his mother's suffering over his blindness and his brother's mental retardation for motivating him to learn how important it is to look positively at everything. His father's battle and final victory over alcoholism taught him to take action against suffering.

"My music is about giving people opportunities to experience themselves and everyone as whole," Moyer says. "Some of us can see with our eyes, some of us see in other ways, some of us can walk upright, some need wheelchairs, some of us are quick thinkers, some of us have mental impairments, but regardless of whatever else we may be or how we do the things we do, we're people first."

*We're people first.* That simple statement says it all for Moyer. In a songbook/workbook of the same title, on the companion CD, and at informal and animated concerts and workshops with audiences of all ages in schools or religious settings, Moyer creates music with a wide array of instruments from around the world.

Whether he's strumming his guitar while singing harmony with himself on CD (karaoke-style), beating a homemade drum, whistling and wailing through a mouth harp, or playing

ancient songs on a Native American flute, his message is the same:

“Don’t look at race, gender, ability or disability, but recognize our commonness. That’s why we’re here, that’s the lesson these lifetimes can teach.”

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