

The Heumann Perspective Podcast
Girl Scouts' Inclusion and Advocacy Work with Lidia Soto-Harmon
Transcript

Kylie Miller

Welcome to The Heumann Perspective, a podcast with the internationally recognized, bad-ass, disability rights activist, Judy Heumann.

This episode, Judy chats with Lidia Soto-Harmon. Lidia is the CEO of Girl Scouts Nation's Capital. Previously, she was the Deputy Director for the President's Interagency Council on Women under the Clinton administration. In this episode, Judy and Lidia discuss the initiatives that Girl Scouts is taking to become more inclusive and encourage advocacy. They also discuss Judy's experience as a Girl Scout and the shared experiences that Judy and Lydia have from working in the Clinton administration.

The Heumann Perspective is produced by me, Kylie Miller, and Judy Heumann. So let's roll up, lay down, dance around, whatever makes you feel best. And let's meet this episode's guest.

Judy Heumann

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to The Heumann Perspective. Today, we're going to have a combination of rolling backwards down my memory lane and going from when I was a Girl Scout, or first a Brownie, in the 1950s to bring us up to date with Lidia Soto-Harmon. So welcome to our show, Lidia.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Thank you, Judy.

Judy Heumann

Can you give us your current title?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Sure. So my current title is Chief Executive Officer of Girl Scouts Nation's Capital. I run the largest Girl Scout council in the country with over 46,000 girls and with the amazing adults that support them. It's 76,000 members in the greater Washington area. So we include 25 counties in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Judy Heumann

Now, Girl Scouts are all over the country, right?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

That is correct. We are 111 councils in every zip code in the United States, and we have close to 1.2 million girls who participate in Girl Scouting.

Judy Heumann

Well, I was really fortunate when I was growing up in Brooklyn, New York on East 38th Street, to have a church right up the block, although it had steps, that had brownies and Girl Scouts. And I was even more fortunate that one of the leaders was my neighbor, Mrs. Melham, and my mother and Mrs. Melham were very close friends. And so as I was approaching seven, I presume, Mrs. Melham suggested that I join Brownies. And why that was so important for me was-- as people can read about in my book, *Being Heumann*, and for young Girl Scouts, *Rolling Warrior*-- I didn't start going to school till I was nine. So I was at home alone with my mother, with a teacher who came twice a week for a total of two and a half hours a week.

So Brownies was really, in some way, more important to me than for many of the other young girls because they were in school. And, you know, this was like an after school activity. I mean, it was an after school activity for me, but actually was very different because it was every week when I would go to the Brownie meetings, when I would be involved with a lot of other girls my age that were not just on my block.

So were you a Girl Scout or a Brownie?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

I was not a Girl Scout. Interestingly enough, I grew up in Latin America. So Girl Scouting was not something that my family, I think, was aware about. But I have lived the Girl Scout experience through my own daughter who joined at the same level that you did, Judy, as a Brownie, and went all the way through high school. And I know that you have the Curve Bar, which is the highest award in Girl Scouting at the time that you were in. And my daughter has the Gold Award, which is the highest earned award in Girl Scouting. And actually, we did a proclamation a couple of years back, and we anointed anybody who had earned the Curve Bar, the First Class, you're all part of the Gold Award family. So you can now claim that you are a Gold Award Girl Scout, which is the current terminology.

Judy Heumann

You know, as I was going through my closet a couple of years ago, I found my Brownie outfit and my sash for Girl Scouts, so I still have it.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

It's funny you say that, what we hear a lot is that the two things that women keep well into their later years are their wedding dress and their Brownie uniform. And it sounds like it is true. Part of it is that it's I think, you know, your sash is really a history of all the things that you earned. You might not remember all those badges that you have on it, but it's the history of all the work that you were doing in Girl Scouting. I think that's why women keep them.

Judy Heumann

And I do have my wedding dress. So I have them both.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

See!

Judy Heumann

So, Lidia, you held a position, I believe it was at the White House. And what was that position?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes, I was the deputy director of the President's Interagency Council on Women, which was created after the Fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing. To do the follow up, the federal government follow-up, to the Beijing conference. And we were moved from the White House to the State Department because prior to the first female Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, it had been Donna Shalala, who at the time was the Secretary of Health and Human Services who had chaired the Presidential Council. So after that, it had been Secretary Albright and so we were housed at the State Department. And we had an important document that we produced for the country. It's called America's Commitment, which had all the federal government agencies work towards completing the 12 areas of the Beijing platform for action.

And I have to say, for me, that was... Of all the different amazing things that I've gotten to do in my life, working at the State Department at that time, for the first woman Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, we miss her, and working on issues of women's human rights across the world. I was fortunate I got to travel to Thailand, to Peru, to Switzerland for all the preparatory meetings that led to that meeting we had at the United Nations in June of 2000. It was a life changing experience for me to meet so many women around the world. And I know the stories that I remember about accessibility and quite honestly, the lack of accessibility, that the Beijing conference had. You know, those are legends for us when we think about everything that happened to the women that actually got to go to Beijing.

Judy Heumann

Yeah and it was such a wonderful opportunity for me to participate both in the event in 1995 for the UN meeting on Women in Beijing, as well as the follow up activities. And at that point, Secretary Albright... Well, she was then and until her death, such a really warm, ingratiating, inclusive person.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes.

Judy Heumann

And I remember attending a meeting with her at the State Department, because I was a delegate from the U.S. Department of Education.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes, I remember.

Judy Heumann

And how the staff that worked on this from Sharon Koons and others from the State Department and other agencies, how people were really learning more about disability. Because disability under the Clinton administration, was beginning to be integrated not just domestically, but also with a number of U.N. international activities. So it was a very fond memory for me.

And I know that you weren't at the convening in 95, but there were a couple of hundred disabled women that Mobility International USA and Susie Sygall had brought. And just, you know, for our listeners, the convening in Beijing, it was raining one of the days when there was a big event and the non-delegates had been given space outside of Beijing. So when driving there, it was really difficult and the ground was so wet so that all these people in wheelchairs were having a difficult time.

But I have to say how very proud I was working for the Clinton administration, because that was also the time that the US government sponsored the first and only ever International Disabled Women's Conference, which was headed up by Education and Social Security, the late Susan Daniels. And we raised about 1 million dollars. Donna Shalala was very influential, as were our respective agencies and others. And we had 600 people from 82 countries who came. Mainly like 95% disabled women. Who today, you know, you can meet some of those women who've moved up into positions in government, in the private sector, and are leaders in their communities. So this, to me, very much relates to the Brownies and the Girl Scouts.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Wow, well as you're remembering those stories, I'm remembering. Because I was like you, part of the delegation to the U.N. for the Commission on the Status of Women five years after Beijing, and then for the special one that we did in June of 2000. And what I remember, which was so interesting, because I got to travel around the world for all the preparatory meetings leading up to that, that even on the accessibility issue, I remember being in Lima, Peru and the accessibility was not there. I remember, and I wish I could remember who it was, we had someone in a wheelchair who could not come into the hotel because they had a revolving door. They had to carry this delegate inside the hotel and carry her out in their arms. Which was I mean, when you think about that from a disability perspective, it's just shocking. Like I'm going, "Oh, my God" I can't believe that they would have a hotel where our delegation did not have the accessibility that they deserved.

Judy Heumann

And I also think, one of the points that you would just raising, because disabled people have not yet really be seen as an essential part of whatever the work is that's going on. You may remember, it was last fall, when a senior level minister from Israel was unable to get into a global meeting on global warming and the environment, because it wasn't accessible and she was a wheelchair user. So unfortunately, it's still a problem that many of us face. And again, I know that Girl Scouts had, for example, Andraéa LaVant on staff, I think for five or eight years.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yeah.

Judy Heumann

One of the purposes of her being hired was to help advance the inclusion of disabled people into Brownies and Girl Scouts. What changes do you feel have been made both in your region, but around the country, regarding meaningful inclusion of disabled people in Brownies and Girl Scouts?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

So I think of the founder of the Girl Scouts, Juliette Gordon Low, who founded the organization in 1912. And she was a disabled person, she couldn't hear. The legend is that somebody threw rice in her ear and then it got caught and then they put some medication or something that made her deaf. And so they say when you look at old pictures of Juliette Low that she always has this surprise look in her face and that's because, you know, when they say, "Okay, we're going to take the picture," she never knew when that was happening. But she clearly had a disability and from the very beginning wanted to make sure that the organization that she founded was inclusive of all girls.

I think for us, the biggest change that I have seen, and it's baked into what Girl Scouts are doing, is to create accessibility as a given. Because the reality is that we want all girls to feel that they're part of it, not that there is something special being done for them, but that they are part of everything that we're doing. So when we did, in 2012 the Girl Scouts celebrated the 100th anniversary of Girl Scouting and I orchestrated this huge event. We had a quarter of a million people. We had 250,000 people who came to the nation's capital, to the Washington Mall for a big celebration. And so we had lots of, both girls but also leaders, who needed accessibility. And I remember as we were designing the space, I said, "I want it to be a VIP section. I don't want it to be 'this is where we're putting the wheelchairs.'" And to the point that one of the stories that I loved from that event is that people that were walking by said, "Oh, look, that's where the VIP's are sitting." And I'm like, "Yeah, that's right. That's where the VIPs are sitting." It wasn't like, "Oh, that's where all the people with wheelchairs are sitting." So I'm proud of those kinds of experiences.

We work very closely with troop leaders so that we can help them figure out... You know, we have a lot of girls who not only have physical disabilities, but cognitive disabilities, and how do you make sure that we create spaces for those girls to feel part of something that is really about friendship? I love hearing, Judy, what you were sharing about how Brownies was important to you because it kind of gave you a friend group, if you will, that maybe since you were homeschooled, you didn't have that on a daily basis. And for me, I think long term what I think about is that inclusion is about exposure at the youngest age for all of our young people. If you are exposed at a very young age of people of different races, different backgrounds, you know, wheelchair, no wheelchair, diabetes-- Whatever the issue is, if you're exposed at a very young age, then this

becomes just part of... You learn a competency as you grow up and you think about that as you grow up.

I mean, one of the examples from one of our camps, we have a big Muslim community that participates in Girl Scouts. And this is religious, but you know, the girls during Ramadan need to pray five times a day. And it just warms my heart when we have camps and we create a place where they can go and do their prayers, to see the other girls at camp going "You're going to be late! You got to go pray!" And it's like, those girls will have a competence just by exposure that you wouldn't get any other place so that, I think, is one of the things that makes me proud about the Girl Scouts and the work that we're doing on inclusion.

Judy Heumann

I know that you have a daughter and that your daughter has a hidden disability and that she's also been in the Scouts, obviously.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes.

Judy Heumann

And you're very proud of her, so maybe you can speak a little bit about her and both what she has given and what she has gained from scouting.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yeah. So it's interesting. We have a lot of girls that when they earn this Gold Award, which is the highest earned award in Girl Scouting, do a specific project that it has to be meaningful to them because they're going to spend over 80 hours working on this project. And I have seen more than one girl, if they have a disability or they have something that they're living with, that they use their Gold Award as a way of helping others understand what it means to live with whether it's an illness or a disability. Or like we had one girl who created a scholarship fund for children of incarcerated parents because that was her experience and she didn't see a lot of scholarships out there.

But my daughter, her hidden disability is that she has dyslexia and she's had it since second grade, and it has been a challenge as she has grown up. And one of the things that she did for her Gold Award is that she created a curriculum around how to stop bullying in elementary school of kids with learning differences. She did in many elementary schools in her area. But I think that the confidence that she gained being able to talk to adults about, "Okay, you want to help me? Let me tell you the things that I need for you to help me." That advocacy, self advocacy is huge because you only learn that if you have to share it with others. Right? They say you learn the most when you teach.

Judy Heumann

Right.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

And I think that for her, it really was that kind of thing. And so I am hugely proud of her Gold Award project, about what she has learned, and how she has really become an advocate for herself and for others, both in college and beyond. It's really a testament to Girl Scouts and that it provides that safe space for girls to explore things that are really important to them.

Judy Heumann

How would you say your job with the Girl Scouts has changed you?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

It has changed me in so many ways. It's changed me in terms of humility. You know, you think, well, I'm here to help girls, but I learn from them every day because, you know, the issues that they face. And I will say these last couple of years with the pandemic and post-pandemic have been incredibly challenging for young people. Mental health issues that have become more prevalent. We're seeing that in Girl Scouts, the socialization I mean, you think of kids that schools were closed when they were in fourth grade and didn't come back until sixth grade. You think of the social emotional health of a young person during that time period is pretty dramatic. So for me, I think what it has done is taught me humility.

It has also created an urgency I think, for how do we create change? How do we... You know, the Girl Scouts promise and law talks about making the world a better place, and so that commitment to how do we make the world a better place for all young people is something that fires me up. And, you know, I know that it is through their voices that we create a better place because when I think of what girls have done to advocate for legislation to stop puppy mills or dress code or, you know, environmental cafeteria supplies at their local schools or help the environment. It was a girl who got-- a Girl Scout-- who got a Starbucks to change their straws to paper straws because of the impact that it has on the environment. All those voices of young people, we are able to support them to make this change. I think that's where we need to be focused.

Judy Heumann

And I think, you know, on the issue of straws, there still is debate in the disability community because there are some people who can't use the paper straws because they disintegrate.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Oh.

Judy Heumann

And I think, you know, for me, one of the issues of value with the Brownies and Girl Scouts is this ability for people to come together and to be able to work on issues like the environment. Are there new issues that you have seen that the scouts have taken on over the last 10, 12 years?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yeah. So we have focused all of the work that we do into four pillars. One is STEM, you know, science, technology, engineering and math. And we also add arts because that is part of that. So STEM is a big focus. The environment, the outdoors we call it. We know that there is a huge upside both for mental health and for protecting our planet if we get girls outside. And that's why camping is so important because there's now research that shows that if a child has not had the opportunity to sleep outdoors by the time they're in fourth grade, they don't select that as a pleasurable activity as adults because they get scared of the spiders. And actually, by fourth grade, parents can still tell their child, "You're going to camp." After fourth grade, you know, it's a little bit harder. So the outdoors is hugely important to us.

Entrepreneurship is the third pillar. And I understand, Judy, that you were one of the top cookie sellers in your day.

Judy Heumann

I was always the top cookie seller and very proud of being the top cookie seller.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

And, you know, and sometimes people say, "Oh, Girl Scout cookies, how is that important?" Well, it is hugely important for what it does for a girl to learn the skills; Having an elevator speech, being an ethical leader, knowing how to navigate and meet adults, look them in the eye and say, "I want you to buy not the two boxes you passed last year for me, but four boxes. Double your order." Kind of thing. Those skills, those entrepreneurial skills, I think are hugely important. And most business women, they say 80% of all business women in our country were top cookie sellers at one point when they were growing up. Which I could not disagree.

And then the last one is life skills, and that is, you know, it's everything from how to organize, how to pack. There's a funny story of this woman who she says every time she's going on a trip, she remembers the Girl Scouts because she went to sleepaway camp and her mother said, "Did you go down the list? Do you have everything on the list?" And she was 12 and sassy and said, "Of course, mom." And she got to camp and she didn't pack any underwear. So she says, to this day, I have to make sure. It's like, you know, and having underwear when you travel is a very good thing. So there you go. That's a life lesson. But you know, everything from, you know, mental health issues and things like that, all of what is life skills. You know, how to save, how to plan, how to be a good friend to others. All of that is part of life skills.

So I think with those four pillars, we really cover what we call the Girl Scout leadership experience. And I think, you know, I will say because we serve girls, but for any young person, if you have competencies in those four areas, you're going to be a well-adjusted, successful person in terms of having a life that you feel comfortable in your own skin because you have learned those early in life.

Judy Heumann

How did Girl Scouts fair during the pandemic?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

It was hard, but we pivoted. We pivoted almost immediately, Judy. We decided that that was the time where we needed to step up and be even more present because we knew that girls were home alone, were you know, distraught. School systems were closing down. It was just hugely difficult.

So what we did is we were able to get Zoom licenses for all of our troop leaders. So we had in the first four or five months, we had 36,000 troop meetings online. And then as things started to open up, we were doing troop meetings at schools, before it got very cold, in places where girls could gather outdoors with masks and things like that. We were able to do— and this is now staying, which is fantastic-- the entrepreneurial piece, we were able to do a lot of the Girl Scout cookie sales, girls were able to create online storefronts and create videos. We saw an increase in our cookie sales because of that. So I think it was hard. I mean, I have stories of troop leaders who, you know, hung white sheets in their backyard and did movie nights for their girls so that they could be together. I went to one troop meeting where a mom had taken paper bags and spread them all over her front lawn so that girls would have a sit upon-- that's a Girl Scout terminology-- so that they were socially distant and wearing their masks and they still were doing Girl Scout activities. There was an overwhelming support for first responders. We'd get all these cards and cookies that were delivered to hospitals and fire stations. And, you know, just the outpouring of support was really, you know, again, it shows what an important part of the fabric of local communities Girl Scouting is, because that's, I think, where girls shined.

And as we come out of this, some of those activities that we did online have continued which I think in some ways has given an enhancement, if you will. Clearly in person is always better, but, you know, online also means you can do trainings a little bit easier. I did a series on virtual mentors where we did 36 mentors who came and talked to girls online. And a lot of them were middle school girls for whom, they don't drive. They can't participate unless their parents take them. So for them, they could get on at 4:00 and be part of something. Girls with disabilities could just show up and they would, you know, they could put in their chat or sometimes they wouldn't turn their cameras on. So, you know, we just had to pivot and we had to be creative and thank goodness that we're not doing that 100% now anymore because it was hard.

Judy Heumann

Is the Girl Scouts outside of the United States?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes. We are part of a world association similar to the United Nations called WAGS, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. I think the last number I looked at was 158 countries that participate in Girl Scouting or Girl Guiding. As a matter of fact, just last week I had 22 girl guides from Scotland who came to visit and brought me Scottish

shortbread and a beautiful scarf. So it is an international sisterhood, which is another reason why I think Girl Scouting is here to stay after 112 years. And the issues that girls are facing, as you know from our work at the State Department, you know that girls are facing around the world. Some of these issues, whether it's human trafficking or child brides or just education, something as simple as having a second grade education for a girl. Child labor is another one that our girls are very interested in supporting. How do they support and learn how they can be advocates to ensure that the child labor is not happening around the world?

Judy Heumann

When you think about the Girl Scouts in the United States, has the racial diversity of the Scouts changed over the last decades?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yes, I mean, we in our council-- So I'm very proud because we were the first council to have an African-American president of our Board of Directors, before even the national organization did, in 1972, Ethel B. Harvey. And in 1963, the story of the Girl Scouts in the Greater Washington area is that there was DC, Montgomery, Alexandria, and two other councils, there were five councils. And in 1963 we merged as one council. And at the time, the president of our Board of Directors, Bobby Lerch, who amazing Girl Scout. She died at 104 and she actually met Juliette Gordon Low in the 1920s and she would tell me stories about like "If I knew that meeting the founder of the Girl Scouts was going to be so interesting and important, I would have paid a little bit more attention." But Bobby Lerch tells the story of 1963. Think of the time period where that was. We integrated all of our sleep away camps. And back then it's not like you can send an email out to tell people that this was happening. So she tells the story that she and the treasurer of the council went out to the sleepaway camps and as parents brought their children, Black or white, they would say, "This camp is integrated. So if you have a problem with that, we can write you a check right now and give you your money back. But this is what's going on." She says very proudly that nobody wanted their money back. Everybody stayed.

And since then, we have continued to really look at, you know, racial and ethnic diversity as a hallmark of what we do and everything we do. As a matter of fact, we are now celebrating Juneteenth, not only as a federal holiday, but here at the Girl Scouts. And we had a young Girl Scout from Loudon County. Her name is Bellen, who when she was eight years old, three years ago, she realized that in her school, crayons only came in peach. Skin color was only the peach color. So she thought this was wrong because she's an African-American girl. So she created a project called More Than Peach. And she has now created a set of crayons for all the different skin colors that she could think of and Target is going to start carrying them. Which we're super excited.

Judy Heumann

I bet.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

She's written a children's book and it's all about celebrating the vibrancy of what Girl Scouts are. And what I love about that story, and again, this kind of hooks back to what we were talking about the Gold Award, is like, she saw an issue and she didn't say, "Well, that's just not fair." She said, "Well, let me do something about it." And, you know, I give a lot of credit to her mom and to her troop for supporting her. But what she has been able to do to bring that awareness that, no, it's not about not seeing color. It's about celebrating the diversity of all the colors that we are. Those are the stories that make my heart burst.

Judy Heumann

You know, I've been talking recently to some other organizations that are doing work with seniors in high school, college students, for example, to talk about the importance, in this case, of young disabled women to be able to come together. Because as we've been discussing in part, disabled girls and women are still not integral parts of discussions that are going on for young girls and women. And additionally, I think many younger disabled people are not meeting other disabled people. Because in the past you might meet people in a segregated class only for disabled children, and as they are being more and more discouraged, disabled girls-- and boys, obviously. But I'm talking right now about girls and young women-- are not only dealing with having a disability when they don't necessarily meet other people like themselves, but dealing with the issue of being a young girl or young women.

And as you were mentioning and data is showing that one of the adverse impacts of COVID has been that a substantial number of women have fallen through the cracks for various reasons. So I think the Girl Scouts and Brownies, both domestically and globally, really are more important than ever to be able to help people address these issues. What are your thoughts on this?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Oh, my goodness, I could not agree with you more, Judy. You know, what COVID has done for people with disabilities, people of color. You know, domestic violence, accessibility. I mean, as I was telling you the story of the middle school girls being able to join online, you know, not everybody has high speed Internet.

Judy Heumann

Right.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

You know, having the awareness, you know, sometimes people are not turning their camera on because if they turn their camera on, it slows down their speed and then they can't participate. So even something that we used to call the digital divide, but high speed Internet is not available everywhere. And depending on where you live and what resources you have, having a laptop to be able to communicate with others is not always a given. Right? So I absolutely think that COVID has had a very negative impact for communities that need... I guess we all need that in-person connection. But we also

know that there are some communities for whom... You know, I think of girls and staff that I've had who need to have somebody come and help them get ready to come to work.

Judy Heumann

You know, that whole issue of personal assistance, because I use a lot of personal assistance.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Yeah.

Judy Heumann

And the last couple of years have been hard. We're coming to an end and I'm really... This won't be an end for us.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

No.

Judy Heumann

But I think it was a great way for us to reconnect, to do this program. But I have one question that I try to ask all of our guests as we're ending, and that is what is something about you that most people don't know about you?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Okay. I've never said this publicly, but I'll say it today. I love Elvis. I just found out there's a new movie. This is how out of it I am. Somebody said to me there's a new Elvis biopic. I think I must have been a kid.... I can't remember when Elvis died. It must have been like 78 or something like that, around then. But there was, it was called Million Dollar Movie. It was in the afternoons.

Judy Heumann

Oh I remember the Million-- Yeah.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Million Dollar Movie! Because I was in New Jersey, you were in New York. So Million Dollar Movie. So they showed every Elvis movie as I was getting home from from school. So I watched Elvis. So to me, like all those silly songs and all, it's connected to being a kid. So I can't believe I'm admitting this, Judy, but I'm an Elvis fan. I actually when I leave the office sometimes at night, I say "Elvis is leaving the building."

Judy Heumann

Well, I think that's a great ending and a different ending. And so for the audience, I have a couple of thoughts. One is, if you have a daughter or a granddaughter or a younger girl that you know who is like 7 to what, 14, 15 years old?

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Well, actually, kindergarten. We start in kindergarten now. They're called Daisies, the little ones. So, yes, Daisies to Ambassadors. Yes.

Judy Heumann

Oh, sorry. Five. We'll put online how you can learn more about the Girl Scouts, but really look at doing as much as you can to help young girls and young women become a part of this. Also, if you haven't had Girl Scout cookies, and you may have gotten out of it during COVID, begin to look for and ask for where those Girl Scout cookies are. Buy them. And you know, if you don't want to get the calories, just give a donation.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Exactly. Because that's how they send all those cookies to first responders. And also members serving our country overseas, to our soldiers. So that is another beautiful thing.

Judy Heumann

And the final point is some of you who don't know who Elvis is or who were Elvis fans, now, go ahead. Find the music, watch the movie. And thank you, Lidia, so much this was a great opportunity.

Lidia Soto-Harmon

Oh Judy, thank you for this opportunity. And I want to, if I may, I just wanted to say, you know, it's such an honor for me to be with you. I'm so excited to reconnect with you. You are one of my heroes. What you have done for women, especially for women with disabilities, in your whole career. You know, going back to when you were in New York and fighting to make sure that you could teach. You know, it is a real honor and privilege to have an opportunity to have this conversation. So thank you for your leadership.

Judy Heumann

Ditto. Thank you, everybody.

Kylie Miller

Now it's time for Ask Judy, a segment where Judy answers questions sent in by listeners.

Judy, I loved learning about your time as a Girl Scout in this episode.

Judy Heumann

I loved being a Brownie and a Girl Scout. I learned so much.

Kylie Miller

And I know we do have a picture of you in your Brownie uniform that I'm going to make sure is uploaded with this episode because it's too cute to miss, guys.

Judy Heumann

I love it, too.

Kylie Miller

And I thought a good question, after reflecting on your childhood, for Ask Judy comes from Carly Fahey. Who is a friend, I believe, right?

Judy Heumann

Yes, Carly is a friend.

Kylie Miller

And she asked, what were you like as a young advocate? Has your personality changed?

Judy Heumann

I think you know, as a young advocate, I was learning about what advocacy was and gaining my voice. And I think about brownies and Girl Scouts and the role it played for me in advocacy around selling cookies. Because being an advocate for me has over the years really evolved using my voice and using my voice in areas that I may not be as comfortable in, but venturing forth. So learning how to sell cookies, learning how to get people to buy more cookies than they necessarily wanted to buy, and learning how to— I really was quite competitive and I think almost every year, if not every year, I sold cookies in my brownies and Girl Scout troops, I sold the most cookies. And I loved it. But seriously, that really did help me learn how to engage people I was talking to. Are they like more engaging with me? Are they kind of more retracting? And how to kind of work around that.

But at the end of the day, also, one of the important parts for me about Brownies and Girl Scouts were the badges and needing to learn the work that needed to be done in order to get the badges and sometimes it really did require speaking up, learning more. While I was in high school and this transition of going from segregated special ed classes to regular high school and mainly in regular classes, Brownies and Girl Scouts definitely were really important for me in so many different ways.

Kylie Miller

And I guess a follow up I kind of have is, how do you feel like that led to the advocacy you ended up doing in your twenties and thirties and today?

Judy Heumann

People ask me this question and I don't think there is an answer. And for all of you who listen, you know, who are advocates, there are so many different ways of being an advocate. I'm an advocate more with my voice. Other people are advocates with writing. Other people are advocates by supporting other people to speak up for themselves. And as we get older, I learn more about advocacy. I look at other people and how they do their advocacy. I try to be thoughtful in the issues that I'm choosing and how I work with other people.

So I think like life— I don't mean this in a trivial way— but like life advocacy is something that you learn more about and may decide you want to focus on a particular area or multiple areas or take a break. But I kind of can never take a break from advocacy because I live in the real world, and that means that there are things that I'm addressing every day, even when I am not leaving my apartment with the intent of finding anything to advocate about, something happens.

Kylie Miller

I can attest that this is true. Well, thank you, Judy, and thank you, Carly, for the question. If you're listening and you have a question for Judy, you can send it to media@judithheumann.com or to Judy on Instagram or Twitter.

Judy Heumann

Thank you.

Kylie Miller

Thanks for tuning in to The Heumann Perspective. Be sure to subscribe, rate and review our show on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. You can also follow Judy on Twitter at Judith Heumann and on Instagram and Facebook at The Heumann Perspective. If you want to find out more information about this episode's guest or resources relating to the discussion, check out the description of this episode or visit judithheumann.com. You can also find a shortened video version of this interview on Judy's YouTube channel dropping a week after this podcast is published. Otherwise, be sure to check back every other Wednesday for a new podcast episode. The intro music for The Heumann Perspective is Dragon, which is produced and performed by Lachi, Yontreo, and Jaurren. The outro music is I Wait by Galynn Lea.