

# Confessions of a Multi-modal Man

by Michael B. Williams



**I** use the Liberator, Lightwriter and letterboard everyday at various times during the day. Why do I need three devices? Isn't one sufficient? In a word, no.

If I didn't have the Liberator, I wouldn't be able to give any of those sparkling speeches I'm noted for. But the Lib is big, awkward and heavy. I carry the Lib on my lap, and it's very hard on my knees. You want to know why I don't mount the Liberator on my damn wheelchair? The short answer to this question is, I don't want to mount the Liberator on my damn wheelchair. Okay? Call me silly, but I don't want tons of assistive technology dripping off my chair. It scares people off to see all that technological firepower coming at them. You think I'm kidding about this? I'm deadly serious.

There's a more important reason I don't mount the Lib on my wheelchair. Sitting here, I may look very disabled, but actually I have quite a bit of functionality in my body. I can transfer in and out of my wheelchair by myself fairly easily. This allows me to do some very important personal things without the help of other people. Things like go to the bathroom. Have you tried to negotiate your way into a public bathroom stall with a big old communication

device mounted on a wheelchair? You may get in the stall, but how do you get from your wheelchair onto the throne without falling on your ass as you hold onto the grab-bar and gingerly attempt to swing past your communication device and lower yourself onto the seat? That, too, dear reader, is why I don't mount the Liberator on my wheelchair.

I bet you never expected to read anything like that in this newsletter!

Here's another thing to ponder. Observe the size of the Liberator. Notice its rather large footprint. Now imagine you have a really hot date and you want to book a table at a swank restaurant. How big a table do you book? If you book a table for two, one of you ain't gonna eat or one of you ain't gonna talk because the Liberator soaks up too much table space. If you book a table for three, you risk igniting the ire of the maitre d'. Either way, your evening is a bust and your budding relationship is down the tubes.

You're asking yourselves, what would Michael Williams do at a critical time like this? Well, I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd use either one of the following handy-dandy AAC tools. The letterboard lies nicely next to you on the

table. Its basic black contributes an additional touch of suaveness to an already elegant dining ambience. The letterboard, however, also provides a slightly more intense conversational experience. Your partner watches intently as your hand glides slowly across the smooth surface of the letterboard. Your long, lean finger languishes lovingly over each letter as it slowly constructs linguistic meaning out of chaos.

Don't care for such intensity? Try the Lightwriter. It's small, it's simple, it's elegant. And, yes, dear reader, it provides the perfect atmosphere for conversation while dining. It sits primly on a corner of the table. Your partner need only flick a glance to the screen now and then to see what you are saying. And you have the added assurance that if your partner misses something, you need only push the talk button at the end of your thought, and the Lightwriter will say it for you.

And that, dear reader, is why I use more than one communication device.

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