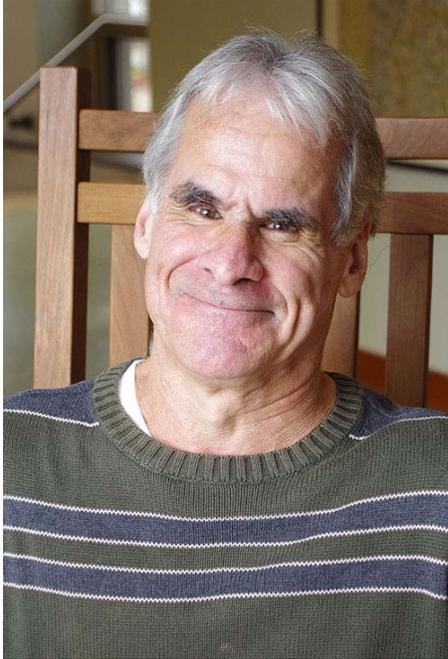


**ALUMNI PROFILE:
David Lacroix '87**



David Lacroix '87 was born with a disability that would profoundly affect him - but maybe not in the way one might think. He was born in St. Johnsbury, Vermont on October 28th 1955. His father was salesman for a lumber company and his mother worked in the home. David's childhood activities consisted of participating in sports and clubs. He really enjoyed these outlets, but it was challenging to fully engage because of his physical limitations.

David's journey has not been an easy one – his disability and the loss of two siblings shaped the man he is today. David's brother Paul was killed in Vietnam while attempting to save two fellow soldiers and another brother, Chuck, was killed in a motorcycle accident in 2010. It's safe to say that the limitations and obstacles have, at times been overwhelming and yet they have never defeated him. As an advocate for disabled citizens, David has received numerous commendations and awards for the work he has done. But more important to him is the feeling of accomplishment and the joy of knowing he has made a difference in the lives of others. I recently had the privilege of asking David a series of questions about his life and work. His answers were truly inspiring.

1). Tell me about yourself, and your childhood.

I was born with Cerebral Palsy, a developmental disability. From ages 6-15, I attended a special school for the learning impaired. It was a very frustrating time for me and my parents because I was never mainstreamed in the public school system. This kind of situation was common at the time as it was several years before passage of IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) which was enacted by Congress in 1975.

I am proud to say that I received an Associate's Degree in Social Services from Champlain College in 1987 and a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Trinity College in 1991. I have overcome many obstacles in achieving my educational

goals because of my strong determination to succeed. I advocated for myself and others. I learned quickly that if I didn't stand up for myself and others who may need a voice, no one was going to. If I had not been so determined, I would likely still be diagnosed as learning impaired.

2) When did you get involved in the volunteer work you do?

When I first started classes at Champlain College, I was required to complete three semesters of fieldwork experience (Social Service Internships). The internships were mostly volunteer assignments ranging from a working in a nursing home to a center for independent living. I benefited greatly from these internships by practicing what I have learned from my courses at Champlain and it gave me an opportunity to be of service to others – I liked that feeling and sense of pride.

During my senior year at Trinity College, I was appointed by Governor Kunin to serve on the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council. I was reappointed again by Governor Dean in 1994. That same year, I provided assistance to the Department of Developmental Services in creating a self-advocacy network for adults with developmental disabilities. In addition, I worked as a disability consultant for the UVM Center on Disability and Community Inclusion. I also served as Vice President of the Developmental Disabilities Council from 1995 to 1997 and was appointed by Governor Dean to serve on the Special Education Advisory Council for the State of Vermont. After sixteen years of service, I retired from that Council in 2013. At present, I am Vice President of the Board of Directors at Disability Rights of Vermont (Formerly VT Protection and Advocacy). I have been a disability rights advocate for 23 years. Now, at the age of 59, I will soon be retiring from my volunteer work. I hope that this legacy will not be forgotten.

3) What are you most proud of?

I am proud of my many commendations and awards. I have received letters of appreciation from Governor Shumlin and the UVM Center on Disability and Community Inclusion. I have given speeches at UVM and Trinity College on my own personal experiences. I spoke about disability issues at committee meetings in front of the legislature. I am proud of the work I have done to support disabled citizens and the role I played in making a difference in the lives of many

4) What made Champlain a good fit for you?

As a transfer student from UVM, I started Champlain College as an advanced standing student in the spring of 1986. At first, I worried the school may not be a good fit because of its so-called reputation of being a remedial level institution. But again, I was proven wrong. The courses were intellectually challenging and demanding, and I was able to meet the required coursework and demands despite my disability. I was successful because of its smaller classroom size. Many instructors demonstrated a high degree of empathy toward students. They were willing to provide individualized attention to students, especially to those who have disabilities. By the end of my first semester, I had earned a GPA of 3.0. Indeed, it was an excellent fit for me.

5) Was there a professor that had special meaning to you?

Many professors at Champlain had a special meaning to me. But there was one professor who inspired me to fulfill my dreams - Fred Koch. He was the type of person that would take his shirt off and give it to you if you were in need. He clearly understood what it was like for a person to have a disability. He was a great advisor to all of his Social Work students. He was very willing to provide me with instructional accommodations when it was necessary. Since his retirement, he has been missed by many of his former students. I too, have missed him.

6) What do you wish you could change?

I wish that I could change people's perception of disability by eliminating many of the stereotypes that tend to harm many of these vulnerable individuals. I would like to make the world a better place for everyone. I believe that the problem of "isms" (racism, sexism, and ableism) is becoming a much wider problem now. I would like to see this problem disappear. I believe that all individuals have the constitutional right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and they should exercise that right.

7) One thing about you people might not know that you would like to share?

I would encourage people to get to know me better - I would like to be accepted for who I am and what I have accomplished. My disability does not define me.

8) Why do you stay connected to Champlain?

Because I love Champlain. I am actually trying to get more involved with the college. I want to come to campus more. I love having opportunities to meet and talk with people I think that it would be great if alumni attended more events. Since I have a lot of free time on my hands, I make every effort to visit the campus as often as I can.

9) Do you have a favorite memory from Champlain?

At my graduation in 1987, Howard K Smith was invited to speak at commencement. He moderated the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon Debates. He made a great speech on that day. I had a great time socializing and partying with my fellow students. I also attended a Champlain College basketball game during the early spring semester.

11) Is there anything else you would like to say about the work you do?

I can identify and relate to the needs and desires of children and adults with disabilities who fall through the cracks. I believe that all children with special needs can learn and succeed regardless of their intellectual or cultural differences if given the opportunity and encouragement. I hope that the state will continue to identify positive solutions for providing effective services that will enhance the success and welfare of all individuals who have disabilities.