

House lecturer targets the struggle for disability rights

In the midst of Women's History Month, Harriet McBryde Johnson, a nationally recognized disability rights attorney and activist, presented Georgia Law's 25th Edith House Lecture, titled "Disability Rights: A liberation movement for all people."

"I am now living in a world very different from that which I was born into – very different from anything I had ever imagined," Johnson, who has a congenital muscle-wasting disease, said.

Chronicling her life's journey in conjunction with the changing nature of disability rights, she alluded to the ugly duckling fable to illustrate her story. "[Those with disabilities] all have one thing in common – they are different than the ducks," she said.

For nearly 30 years, Johnson has been active in the struggle for social justice, particularly in the field of disability rights. She said disabled people "didn't quite get to be people in the 1970s but were still persons with disabilities. [Today] society still sets us apart, outside the norm."

Her private law practice in Charleston, S.C., specializes in benefits and civil rights claims for poor and working people with disabilities. She is currently involved with Charleston's Disability Resource Center, the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment and the National Lawyers Guild Disability Rights Committee.

Johnson earned her law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law. She also holds a bachelor's degree from Charleston Southern University and a master's degree from the College of Charleston.

The Edith House Lecture Series is hosted annually by the Women Law Students Association (WLSA) in honor of one of the first female graduates of Georgia Law. House, a native of Winder, Ga., was co-valedictorian of the law class of 1925, the first class to graduate women.

– Nikki Girard