

Q&A with **Emily Seelenfreund**



Q: How long have you lived in the Bay Area?

A: I came to the Bay Area two and a half years ago. I moved with my partner Natacha when she started as a professor at UC Berkeley. I grew up in New Jersey and before moving to Berkeley, I was living in New York City. I've really fallen in love with the Bay Area, and I can't say I miss the snow or the widespread architectural barriers very much!

Q: What are some of your favorite places to eat, sights to see, and/or things to do here?

A: For eats- I'm a huge fan of Burma Superstar. I always get the tea leaf salad, and their coconut rice is addicting. I also can never say no to ice cream, and Humphry Slocombe serves some of my favorite scoops.

I'm so grateful for all the accessible trails in this area- on Saturday mornings you can often find me strolling with Laffy, my 10-pound labradoodle, at Point Isabel. One of my biggest hobbies, outside of sports, is board games and the Victory Point Cafe in Berkeley is a great way to spend an afternoon.

Q: What about Cilantro, does it taste like soap to you?

A: Haha I'm definitely team Cilantro! Please send me recommendations for the best East Bay Tacos. Sadly, my mom has the Cilantro soap gene, but on the flip side that sometimes means more guacamole for me!

Q: Looking at your resume, it seems like you've been prioritizing disability rights advocacy work while doing adaptive sports on the side. The new position looks like a pretty dramatic departure. Can you talk about that?

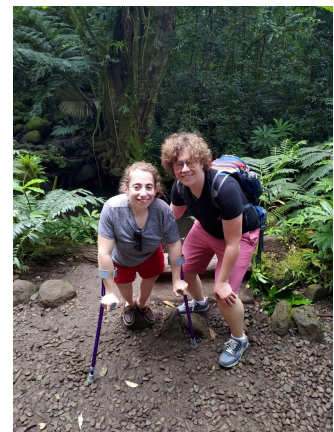
A: I am proud of my work as an attorney, and I think class actions are a powerful tool to effectuate change for the disability community. But, as ParaCliffHangers (PCH) grew, I realized how passionate I am about adaptive recreation and direct advocacy within an organization as opposed to, often contentious, litigation.

To me, the game-changing work BORP does, IS advocacy: access to recreation provides so much more than just fun and physical fitness (although those are important too!). Adaptive sports have given me community, self-confidence, courage, and a drive for independence. Plus,

with more adaptive athletes, it becomes easier to push gyms and public parks to increase access. Within a year of my bringing PCH to the Bay Area, the local climbing company installed ramps at four previously inaccessible gyms. I am so excited for this opportunity to advocate from a different lens, and I can't wait to get started.

Q: Who's one of your heroes, and why?

A: Judy Heumann, immediately comes to mind; I've been reflecting on her legacy often since her passing this March. I'm forever indebted to her and the other disability rights activists of her generation. They founded the independent living movement, successfully fought for disability civil rights, and made it possible for organizations like BORP to thrive. She also helped me realize that small, female, wheelchair users can be powerful leaders, especially if they strive to be smart, savvy, and brave. Her memoir, *Being Heumann*, is a must-read. It will be such an honor to roll past her photo, along with many other legends of the disability rights movement, on my way to BORP's office at the Ed Roberts Campus each day.



Photos clockwise from upper left

- 1) Attending BORP's opening day and giving some encouragement to a kiddo trying out adaptive sports for the first time. (Credit: Misako Akimoto)
- 2) With mother and little sister at one of Emily's first adaptive sporting competitions
- 3) Posing with Partner during a hike in Hawaii.
- 4) Posing with Laffy at the end of the ride for BORP's 2022 Revolution Ride, Roll, and Stroll.