

Student 2H

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Growing up, I always felt out of place. It all started because I lived in a home where I was the only daughter in a house full of sons. This posed a lot of problems because I liked watching Powerpuff girls, as opposed to WWE wrestling. Because I was the only girl, my opinion was always thrown out the window, leaving me with nothing but my imagination and a few decapitated Barbie's. The boys would always ram my opinions to the wall and break my toys, but after awhile I got used to liking what the boys liked. I played with Lego's and watched Pokémon and Dragon Ball Z. These "boyish" activities became my favorite things to do in my pass time, except watching WWE, that was obviously acted out and I didn't understand why my brothers were so entertained when a table broke in half. As time passed, my brothers were nicer and became more tolerant of my girly outbursts because I still liked doing "what boys do". I started to feel like I somehow belonged when suddenly I had to begin 1st grade.

At first I thought 1st grade was going to be like daycare and kindergarten, but I was mistaken. I was at a crossroads between hanging out with my brothers and playing with the girls. I opted for my second choice, but ended up to be my worst mistake. Those girls I called my best friends would always make rude remarks and all I knew how to do was laugh it off. Their animosity towards me finally became clear when we were in line and they made fun of me and said they didn't want to be my friend. I didn't know why they were confronting me so suddenly,

but I felt so alone in the world for the rest of 1st grade. I'd sit by the trees and watch the boys play soccer, because I was too afraid of asking to play and getting rejected again.

By the time first grade ended, I was used to being shy and distant. When I got home one day, my mom announced that we would be going to a different school, the one she worked at. I was so afraid to go to a new school because that would mean having to meet other people and not having the peace of mind that being lonely offered me. The first few weeks of second grade were very difficult. It usually consisted of me crying and running to my mother's classroom to escape being with everyone else because I was too afraid to make bonds with others. Second grade didn't get any easier when my teacher insisted that I wasn't doing my homework.

Although I struggled doing my homework, I would turn it in, so I was confused and scared when my assignments disappeared. Every day I would watch anxiously as the students passed down their homework to make sure mine was also in the pile. Still, my teacher would pull me aside and threatened to give me detention if I didn't turn them in. So for 1 month I had no lunch break and I was beginning to believe that all those afternoons spent on doing homework were all a figment of my imagination. I still continued to do my homework, but this time, I was checking to see if someone took it out of the pile. Every day I would watch as one of my 'friends' would take my paper and put her name on it. I felt so enraged that all my hard work and endless anxiety was caused by someone putting their name on my homework. I tried consulting my teacher, but she wouldn't believe me because I already had a long record of not turning in my homework. I gave up doing my work and just cruised along the rest of the year, barely managing to pass.

Third grade rolled by and I found myself behind in reading and math. We were learning how to multiply and divide when I barely knew how to subtract. I was too embarrassed to ask for help because I felt like I would slow down the class, so no matter how much I willed myself to

learn, I could not remember. When we took math tests, I would put random numbers then awkwardly watched the other students answer the questions with ease. I felt incompetent and the students seemed to have everything I lacked. They were smart and seemed to know what they wanted to be when they grew up, while I was barely managing to suppress the urge to cry at my worthlessness.

By the end of the year I was faced with having to take the STAR test, a state test that determined your proficiency level in core subjects. I refused to take the test knowing that I would disappoint my family by earning a “below basic” level in the test. My mother and third grade teacher threatened by telling me if I didn’t take the test, I would be held back a year. I took the test because I didn’t think I would survive another year in school. I already had to pass high school, which would take 12 years in total, I didn’t want to face another year of disappointments and arguments with my parents and teachers.

My results on the test solidified my status as a “student with learning disabilities”. Because of this, I was enrolled in the Resource program, a program that worked with students individually to help them catch up in school. The program itself was helpful, but the process to getting qualified was agonizing. I had to go through an interview process where someone took me into a room and asked me questions about my home life and education. I felt like I had committed a crime and was now being questioned by a police officer in a dark room. The man began showing me ink blot pictures and asked me what they were. I was confused by the method, but I knew enough to understand that he wanted to know my thought process and how I view the world. I wondered if there was something fundamentally wrong with me because I was getting bad grades. The questions he asked me made me believe that there was something

psychologically wrong with me, and it scared me because I knew that I had a hard time learning, but I didn't see it as something that I couldn't escape.

Once I entered the Resource program, it was easier to concentrate on learning. I would meet someone everyday for 45 minutes. I worked one on one with someone who I would read to and answer comprehension questions. That program was geared towards reading, but every now and then they would help me in math. I really liked the program because I would learn at my pace without slowing everyone else down. I also got to escape the claustrophobic feeling that being stuck in a room with 30 students felt like. I still got bad grades, but that program eased the anxiety I had towards school.

As I transitioned into 7th grade, I found it a lot easier to learn. I don't know whether it was because I didn't have distractions from people being mean to me and teachers focusing too much of their attention on my progress, but everything was an epiphany because I suddenly knew math and was at the top of my class. I made new friends who weren't rude to me or tried to steal my homework. My new friends were supportive and nice. They made me feel like I belonged and I had more self-esteem than insecurities. When it was nearing the end of 8th grade, my friends pressured me into taking pre-AP English. I was hesitant to take it because although I was improving academically, I was still unsure of my ability to pass the class. With the constant bugging of my friends and English teacher, I enrolled in the class.

The Pre-AP English class could possibly be the best decision I made in my life. I felt so at ease with that class and I wondered why I never thought of school in a positive way in elementary. Everything fell in its place and I had amazing teachers and friends that helped me through my troubles and empowered me to do my best in school.

The rest of my high school years went by really fast and were far different from my grueling years in elementary school. By the time graduation rolled by, I met many amazing people who empowered me to do my best, as was given the title salutatorian at my school. Being a salutatorian meant that you had beyond excellent grades throughout high school. I shared that privilege of being a Salutatorian with 16 other people. All those people were smart, confident and had amazing personalities. They all had something that I had now, but would never imagine having as a little girl struggling to even keep my emotions intact. Getting away from a bad environment really changed my outlook on life and school and I became more positive and optimistic about everything.