

Near the end of third grade, my parents sat me down and told me that I was no longer going to my same old elementary school. And that I was transferring to a different school, an hour away. That I was getting ripped apart from all of my neighborhood friends.

Not seeing everyone was a big adjustment in my life; I was forced to meet new people and try to fit into the groups of people that had known each other their whole lives. I was the “new kid” for a while at Charles Armstrong, a school that specializes in supporting students with dyslexia. At the time, I was eight years old, still trying to figure out what dyslexia even was. I was gifted by going to Charles Armstrong to help me learn the fundamental bases of learning. But leaving the school was harder than going, as I was leaving a space where I felt protected from an education that was built around my academic needs throughout my elementary school years.

Near the end of my time at Charles Armstrong I knew I had to make the jump back into a school that wasn't specialized for my learning style. I had left Charles Armstrong in seventh grade to join High School. I had to get back in the rhythm of a “normal” school. Since being back at a public high school that wasn't specialized according to my learning style I lacked in many other ways academically. I had never learned to hand-write my papers, as the curriculum was entirely digital. I also struggled with many fine motor skills, compounding the handwriting issue.

When I entered a traditional high school, I quickly fell behind my classmates. During my classes I began to compare myself to my peers' work—the smooth lines of their letters, their easy translation of thought to movement—and thought to myself, “a third-grader could write better than I can.” I doubted my ability to prove myself to my teachers in this new school, and I doubted whether I belonged with my peers. Nearing the end of my first year of high school, I was not confident with my grades, and I knew I had to change in order to prove to myself that I was able to put in the work.

I began searching for ways to improve my ability to prove that having dyslexia doesn't define who I am as a person. Through teaching myself the foundational motor skills to complete my English paper, relieve stress, and improve my handwriting, I began creating art. It started off with a blank canvas in front of me and some old paint and paintbrushes from my stepmom. As I practiced my brushstrokes, I realized I had the mechanical ability to translate ideas from my head to canvas. As I developed my fine motor skills through painting, I began to view handwriting as another form of artistic expression for painting offered a new perspective. I was able to incorporate two different types of media, one being the artistry of handwriting, and the other being traditional painting.

There is such an opportunity in a blank canvas, as the possibilities for beauty and creativity are endless. After hours of hard work, trial and error, and some unique perspective, you will have an outcome of a beautiful painting. I am able to create art in many different ways, through words or painting. I feel at home in my body; with my arms and hands, I can transform the beauty I see in my mind's eye into a reality others can enjoy.

I feel at home with my peers, knowing I am just as capable as they are, and will put in the work, even when it is a struggle. I feel at home in my academic pursuits, knowing that if I face a setback, I am able to pivot and find a new perspective to look at problems. I love having the ability to celebrate art, even though I've learned that it often takes an initial failure to find

new joy. Eventually, after trial and error, I am able to find beauty in unlikely circumstances, and this will allow me to thrive wherever I go.