

The University of Iowa Council on Disability Awareness

2011 Voices on Disability Writing Contest Winners  
In Honor of Priscilla McKinley

2011

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# Autism

Maya Magaraci

Ouch! What's that sound? Its hurting ears. Ouch! What's poking me? It really hurts. It's just the clock ticking? It's just my shirt? Why do those things hurt me? I'm different, I know but I don't know why.

My brain doesn't work like everyone else's, I think differently than you and your friends. Sometimes people laugh at me and make jokes about me because I am different, but everybody's different, I am just different in a different way. I see things in a different way, I hear things in a different way, I feel things in a different way, I smell things in a different way, I even taste things in a different way.

This is because I have a disability. My disability disables me to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste things like everybody else. All though I don't think like everybody else I can be very smart. Just because I am different doesn't mean I am a freak or gross, it just means that I am unique in my own unique way and that's oaky with me.

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## What is Autism?

Kiya Law

We all have heard of or knew someone with autism, but do we really know everything that autism entails? So we ask ourselves, what is autism? Is it an illness, disease, or disorder? Is it hereditary or can you catch it like the flu? But sadly, the answers to most of these questions about autism still have yet to be answered.

Autism is a disorder that is not easily summed up in one paragraph. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a term that describes several different neurodevelopment disorders known as Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD). Overall, autism is a developmental disorder where symptoms occur within three years after birth. Autism can affect social and communication skills.

What are the symptoms of autism? Some signs that your child may have autism is if they have delayed speech, limited movement, little to no eye contact, and or repetitive body moments, like shaking their head and or moving hands often.

Autism does not have any specific causes, but there are some studies that suggest that certain things are more likely to enhance a child's chance of developing autism, such as genetic factors, diets, vaccines, and inability to produce minerals and vitamins properly. Even if these causes may be true, there is still a lot to learn before any decisions can be made about the real causes of autism. Because there is no apparent cause for this disorder, there is unfortunately no solution. There are some cases in which people have 'survived', 'got rid of', or improved greatly. Sadly not many people with autism have those miracles, and about 20-30% of autistic children get epilepsy later on in their adulthood.

How common is autism? Approximately one in every 110 children develops autism, and in America currently 1.5 million people are suffering. That may sound like a lot now, but a government statistic shows that the rate is increasing 10-17% every year.

Autism can have a major impact on people's lives, not just the one with autism. The families of children or relatives with autism have to endure everyday challenges and very stressful situations. About one-half of people with autism do not learn enough communication skills to meet the needs of everyday life. Most autistic people have to live with someone or be taken care of throughout their lives. This disorder is also not very cheap. In the United States alone, we spend over \$90 billion on autism annually. This means that over the lifetime of an individual, they would spend about \$3.5 to \$5 million.

There are many ways that you can help others with autism. You can visit the websites for the Autism Society, the National Autism Association, or the Help Group. You can donate, volunteer, and do other things to get you involved in the autism community. Even a small donation can make a huge difference.

There are still many unanswered questions and undiscovered cures that we may never know for sure; but we should never stop trying, and together we can make people more aware of the seriousness of autism. Eventually we may find a cure to this disorder, and one day the question "what is autism?" may finally have a complete answer.

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## My Sister

Megan Jans

You haven't met beauty  
Until you've met my sister.

She's not too hard to find.  
She's that girl who gets pushed around between classes  
That girl who sits by herself during her lunch period  
That girl who can never get a partner for a project  
That girl who talks and looks and acts just a little differently than anyone else.

But those aren't the things  
That *really* make her stand out.

She's special because of her huge heart  
Her cheery, never-fading smile  
Her hopeful, optimistic attitude  
Her bright, good-natured humor.

Her view of the world as a beautiful place  
Instead of an ugly one.

I wish I could agree with her  
But I can't.  
I've seen what this world can do.  
This world can be very ugly.

If the world was beautiful  
My sister would have friends.

My sister would be accepted.

My sister would be healthy.

My sister wouldn't be like this.

If the world was beautiful

We would be able to walk down the street

Without being stared at

Without being shunned

Without being scoffed at

Without being avoided.

If the world was beautiful

Her doctor would actually be empathetic

Would truly care about her.

Her teachers would treat her

The way they treat all the other students.

If the world was beautiful

My sister would be like everyone else

Would have the same opportunities as everyone else

Would be able to learn things just as fast as everyone else

Would be able to live the same life as everyone else.

Would have a fate better than the one she's been dealt.

She deserves it, after all.

I believe the world is ugly.

But my sister

Is beautiful.

# Flash

Evan D'Alessandro

A dusty road with small-withered shrubs  
My ceramic armor clinks softly against my rifle  
Suddenly my world explodes, a blossom of red-orange flame  
The black cloak of shock encompasses me  
I wake, an excruciating pain in my legs  
I look to see what is causing the pain, but the sight sickens me  
The dust around it is a crimson stain  
Someone picks me up and pain besieges my leg  
A black cloud covers me, washing away fears and soothing earthly pains

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## Disabilities

Matilda Sofia Claudia Mackey

Crash, boom, door slammed closed.

Abruptly the door opens, light shining for me.

I shudder.

People stare, my heart crying, I am yearning for them to stop.

For them to stop.

Stop, stop, stop!

Boom, pow, realize. Realize the flaws in my genes aren't the foundations of me.

Cry into my mother's lap as she tries her hardest to soothe me.

Then I remember.

Not a lame child was I, not a child who required special assistance was I.

No different from you, was I.

And no different I remain, just special as the rest.

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## My Disabilities, A Matter of Perspective

Maureen McCue

My grown son Michael has worked diligently to help me overcome my various disabilities. It's a mighty task to even list all my challenges—much less mitigate or adapt to them. While Michael might not have said it in so many words given his generally positive affect and unique verbal skills, over the years he's communicated his concerns about my impairments in countless ways—some of which have been easier or harder to hear, understand or accept given my perceptual limitations. Since my disabilities come in so many sizes and shapes, it must be a major challenge for him to maintain his patience with me. Oppositional behavior at times in this setting could be considered adaptive for Michael—what other choices does he have?

Michael was actually quite small when I slowly began to realize how deeply I was impaired by a troubling set of inflexible needs and behaviors. At this point in life I'm forced to admit that my disabilities go well beyond any common laundry list like having a short temper, a short attention span, being forgetful, and unable to face the day until I've had my obligate coffee and quiet time. I have always been driven by time lines and a sense of obligation and propriety defined by faceless "others." Thus, while not exactly hearing their voices, unseen others have burdened me with a rigid sense of appropriate behaviors for public and private spaces.

From day one, Michael was free of these onerous limitations. Instead he liked to focus in on and appreciate so many of the tiny, odd, colorful or unusual things that pervade everyday life. He was fascinated by the things the rest of us cannot see, tend to overlook, or take for granted in our busy lives. As Michael and I would be going places and hurrying about our daily errands, like most children, Michael would have a very different set of goals; but I never quite understood that as I doggedly pursued my own agenda. Rather than seeing life through his eyes, I expected him to see and respond to life as I saw it. As an adult now, Michael continues to respond to his own time line and goals often oblivious and indifferent to the constraints others, including me, try to apply to him. He casually accepts or ignores others if they don't respond to him as he expects. In

contrast, I carry an ill-defined yet deep seated fear and anxiety about what others might think if I break free of the many shadowy rules that define and confine my behavior.

I have long been deaf and blind to many diffuse elements that make up my life, ignoring the attractions of the ineluctable sensory pleasures, the abundant curiosities or mysteries life regularly offers. In fact, the narrow nature of my awareness would have completely eluded me if not for Michael's persistent reminders. For example, as a child he could sit quietly stroking the cat under a blooming lilac bush or talking through the fence to his horse for long, long periods of time barely stirring or requiring additional stimulation. I was left to wonder what he saw and thought in such quiet periods of contemplation.

Similarly, at the grocery store Michael would have liked to spend a good deal of time watching the live lobsters, but I'd be pushing him to come along with me and get the shopping done so we could move on to the next thing on my list. Perhaps if I'd stopped to listen or had been better able to see and hear as he did, I could have discovered what Michael may have wanted to learn about the lobsters. He was amazed at the presence of captive wildlife there in the store even as most of us fail to even notice them, much less stop to consider the lobsters' perspectives on life inside such a tank, or the lobsters' sense of comfort with their situation. Thinking about it these many years later, it's no wonder Michael would throw such tantrums—what a drag I was, what an inconvenience! From his perspective I missed out on many important observations of life and intruded on his natural curiosity.

Michael gently but regularly reminds me I have yet other disabilities. So many times or places, I shyly wait to be introduced to someone, or contrary wise, make snap judgements about who I can or should speak to in a given situation. I tend to shrink into myself in a social event as I search the crowd for the cues about "appropriate" or "accessible" others. While I stand feeling shy or uncomfortable inside, much to my surprise at such times, I've been accused of appearing aloof or intimidating. In sharp contrast, Michael has never been afraid to bravely approach strangers of any age, size, race, class, or ability with a big hug, a smile, or a high five. He readily introduces himself and thus makes a new friend. He wants to make others feel good with his easy, "whaz up bro?" No matter the setting, he never forgets that we are all part of the same human family and

all equally deserve regard, love, and respect. Just how many times does he have to demonstrate to me how easy it is to meet people before I get over my fear of strangers?

This easy open unconditional inclusiveness is observable in so many of Michael's friends as well. None of them ever seems to see a stranger, only a potential friend. Despite my intellectual understanding of the golden rule, of universal spiritual teachings about loving others as yourself, I struggle daily to develop this fantastic skill that comes so easily to Michael and his friends. Their enviable ability to make people smile, to demonstrate and communicate the importance of love for all others as oneself is truly inspiring. How can it be so difficult for me and so many similarly disabled others I know?!

Michael and almost all of his friends also know how to have a good time, make the most of the present company, living in and enjoying the moment. They are completely unfazed by unimportant externalities like whether the background tune in a public place is appropriate for dancing or singing. To be enjoyed, a musical composition need not be saddled with only one proper tune, pitch or rhythm. Music is for fun, unless you're some kind of an expert.

Guided by stultifying self-consciousness, I persevere on my clothes, my "look" that is just so predictable, so boring, so like everyone else of my approximate age, professional and educational demographic. Michael could not be more different in his public persona and the way he likes to gussy up. He cheerfully and unselfconsciously enjoys the flamboyance of wild hats, eye catching jewelry, unique sunglasses, and combinations of bright colors and eye-catching patterns. He boldly and joyfully goes his own way unimpeded by any sense of negative self-consciousness. Despite the years of Michael's coaching by example, I have yet to overcome my inability to "get loose" and break free of my inhibitions.

Too often I'm not only frustrated by my own limitations and disabilities, but in the end feel that I may simply be a product of a disabled society. How is it that our modern society is unable to see the harm being done to our home the planet earth? How is it that we are unable to hear the cries of alarm and pain coming from so many corners of the earth where so many do not have safe homes, enough to eat, or adequate clean water? Why do I and the people around me, so often feel that buying more, wasting more, and trashing more of the earth's finite resources is a good thing?

This seems to be a disability of far greater significance and proportion than any one individual of us exhibits—regardless of his or her skills or limitations.

Michael too has developed some of this inability to resist the manufactured desires of today. Like most in our society, he now lives to shop. So many of today's consumer items are deliberately designed to attract the child in all of us. With their new and novel, shiny array of intriguing colors and functions, their attachment to powerful movie images or nostalgic reminiscences of a past that never happened, the siren pull of today's consumer items tempt all of us. Fortunately, Michael's natural ability to take pleasure in so many objects means he is equally satisfied with items that are used or even broken. He still enjoys a freedom of imagination that most of us, especially our business and elected leaders, lost long ago. For example, almost any digital device, whether new, old, expensive, complex or simple can serve many functions without ever having to actually be or do the things Michael imagines it does. His resourcefulness fills in for malfunctioning or out dated technology. Imagine if others only had this ability—to imagine new functions for old equipment and resources, we might be able to clean up our environment and provide enough material goods to satisfy everyone's basic needs.

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## Incommunicado

Rebecca Kaplan

The moth sprung from grass to shade, and the dusk settled far and thick as they moved. She slid her arm through his, and he appreciated her perfume, drifting through the fresh air in sandalwood and cherry blossom. She watched the earth, soil breaking between the green, as he stared at nothing.

Her throat dried like the sheets of paper she left before the window, through which the sun blasted the bills and apologies until salt water left their surface. She stood with him among birdcalls and humming bugs, and the wind brushed, reminding her of the whispers they exchanged before the yellow times. They left their dreams like crumbs on the table, and spoke of the mundane and common people. She imagined if they pursued their dreams during the wonder times.

She stood before the future, but saw nothing.

Unsettling and cold, dusk sunk to darkness, and they felt the chill of spirits, rising from the earth. She wanted to leave, but she knew he wouldn't. They stood like two ships, mentally anchored, but drifting back and forth between speaking and silence; love and actuality. Watching the emptiness before them, they filled it with dreams, which flitted like the silver moth, passing over earth—nothing deterring its glide, but wind and thought.

She looked at him and thought, Always invisible things, as he stared above the thick and rigid rock—permanent among the transparent and drifting—and said, “It’s getting cold.”

“Would you care to go in?” She moved closer to him, feeling the stiffness of his arm.

“Not yet.”

“That’s fine. We can wait.”

“I’d just like a minute if you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.”

“Sometimes I hear things.” He heard the old man whisper, “You’re coming home”, but ignored him. “Like the sound of a car, maybe a street or two away, or the mice scampering beneath the floor. You can hear them squeak if you listen closely.”

“It’s nice to know some things have their benefits.”

“Sometimes I hear you at the neighbor’s. Yesterday, you watered the flowers and yawned, and I imagined you: arms stretched and mouth wide open. I wanted to join you, but you were far away.”

“I’m sorry. Perhaps next time we can water them together.”

“It would never work. Flowers scattered everywhere, and bumbling with a watering can, I don’t think I would feed them well.”

“It’s not that hard. It just takes some imagination.”

Aspiring to imagine and falling to reality, he stuck his hands in his pockets and said, “I suppose.”

Time eroded the stone before them, and she imagined the lights of a truck piercing shadow as it sped across the country—wary from travel, like Odysseus—its company, waiting like Penelope, but an industrious mess. The high-beams broke through her nothing, enlightening her, but with a shriek and whistle, the memory faded, and she clung to her savior who watched thick and impenetrable shadow.

“Good stone don’t crumble,” the old man said to him, but ignored as always, the wind and crickets replaced him. The old man would never sit like the dining room chair or the silt of

abandoned gardens. Always would he ruin, like the mythological and studied Greeks—ancient, but relentless. The old man nagged like that sourceless, creeping shadow at the foot of the stairs, whispering tales of forgotten lands and memories into the early morning, but the old man would not touch him until dawn set still across his borders.

She said, “What a shame”, but it was an atrocity. Hearing whispered prayers from forgotten lovers and family, understanding the somber Latin phrases with which they blessed earth and man, he nodded. He loved the soil, which bore moth and grass, and holding her close, he heard the collapse and inflation of her lungs. Her heart beat the rhythm to which they once laughed and danced, but they left those times with the crumbs on the table.

“Good stone don’t crumble,” the old man said, but he wasn’t listening.

She recalled her young wonder among leather and plastic, reflecting the endless yellow as it enveloped them. She granted him laughter and charm, and thought if anything happened like that treacherous light to her stiff companion, she would end. The promise of death relieved her because she set the circumstances of her passing. She marked their lives together, and with her solemn promise, gravity strengthened. It brought them deeper—downer—and he said, “Now’s a good time.”

With a nod and smile, she loosened her grip on his arm and rested her head upon his shoulder, thinking things turned endless gold when they were yellow. He patted her hand like the brush of moth as they stood under blackened sky and over blackened earth. They turned from the rock, gliding past the praying groups and forgotten ones, and she believed in things she could not see, but for him, the world whispered and the old man said, “Nothing.”

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## Mattie's Story

Kathy Last

“Mommy, I feel funny.” “Go lay down on the couch, hon.” Suddenly, little Mattie grabs her mom around the leg and stares off into space. Her grip is so tight, her mom can’t get her to let go. Finally, little Mattie relaxes and says she is tired. She goes to the couch where she lays down and falls asleep for several hours. Mattie was diagnosed with seizures when she was just over a year old. She had taken a rough fall down just a few hard wooden steps and needed to get stitches. Who would have ever thought this would have been the outcome of that fall....

Mattie’s family was very loving and protective of her. She finally was old enough to go to school. Mattie loved school and making new friends. However, she found it hard when she had these “spells” as she called them. The other kids laughed at her. She didn’t think anything of them. She was used to them and she just went on. She couldn’t understand what was so funny about them. It hurt to be laughed at, it really hurt a lot! As she got older, Mattie became more of a loner and had fewer close friends.

Fast forward to the teenage years. Nobody from her hometown, which was quite small, seemed to want to date Mattie. Finally, a boy from another town, whom she met at a dance, asked her out. They went out one time. They also talked on the phone several times. During these conversations, Mattie told him she had epilepsy. She said it was a mild form but that she took medicine for it and that it was under control. She told him she had it most all her life. She didn’t think it was a big deal and neither should he. Funny thing...after that night on the phone...he never called again. Mattie spoke to his best friend and point blank asked him if it was because of her seizures that he never called back. His friend said yes. Again, that really hurt. Why should that make any difference? That doesn’t change who I am as a person? It’s just a physical thing I happen to have. No big deal! But, apparently, he couldn’t handle that.

Throughout her entire teenage years, Mattie struggled with those questions. It seemed to happen over and over. Nobody wanted to date her. Nobody wanted to go out with a girl who had seizures. THEN there was the driving issue. State law at the time said that a person had to be seizure free for twelve months before a person could obtain a license. Mattie made it eleven months and two weeks and had a seizure. She was devastated!! All her friends could drive. This just wasn't fair!! She always had to rely on a couple of good friends to take her everywhere. It was either that, or stay home. Mattie felt like she missed out on so much. She would go to school on Monday and hear about all the fun things kids did on the weekend and she would be left out. It just wasn't fair!! She would go for long walks or sit in her room and cry. She just wanted to wish the world away at times...

Mattie finally graduated high school and went on to college. College was a little better. She still didn't have a driver's license, but people seemed more mature and she had more friends. She met another girl who had the same condition as her and so it felt good to know someone else who experienced the same things. One day, Linda had a seizure in the dorm lounge. Friends came running asking Mattie for help. Suddenly, she was the expert and she was the calm person in control. Linda was fine and the others were grateful that Mattie was there to help. Mattie tried to teach the others as it was happening, what the procedure was and what to do during a seizure, in case it were to happen and she were not around.

Mattie only stayed at that college a year and moved back home. When she moved home, she was able to get a license and a car. She was 20 years old. FINALLY! She could drive and she had freedom! But she had never driven a car on the road...She froze...Talk about being scared to drive!!! A family friend gave her a few driving lessons before she went to get her driver's license. The day finally came to take the driver's exam. Talk about a nervous wreck! She passed, but the parallel parking portion of the exam was NOT her friend!

Mattie was finally able to get a job, take classes and live a home on the farm with her folks. She eventually moved. After several moves, she ended up at a large law firm where she met her husband Adam. Mattie and Adam worked in the same department for some time and became friends. One day, Mattie nonchalantly said something about having seizures to Adam and Adam walked away saying, "Join the club." Mattie didn't quite know what to think about that. It took a

few conversations, but finally she found out that Adam had been working overseas in Guam where he was in a really bad auto accident. He had been taken to the military hospital and later transferred back to the U.S. once he was stabilized. From that auto accident, he obtained a seizure disorder.

Mattie and Adam became very good friends. It took some time, but eventually they began to date each other. They had a bit of a rocky start, but they worked through that and they got married a couple years later. Then came the question of do we have children? Adam was 10 years older than Mattie. If they waited too long, Adam would be having kids in high school and college when he wanted to retire. They decided not to wait very long. Mattie became pregnant almost three months after they were married. They found out they were expecting just a few days before Christmas. They were so excited! Then came the horrible morning sickness. Mattie felt awful! One day, she felt exceptionally bad. She went home from work. Adam came home to find Mattie curled up on the couch and crying. He took her to the hospital. By the time she got there, the pain was so bad she couldn't stop screaming. She was losing her baby! Why God? Why is this happening?! It was the worst night of her life!!

Then came the comments.... "With your medical condition, maybe you just weren't meant to have children...."

These comments terrified her. Mattie cried and cried. She loved her husband so much and wanted nothing more than to have a baby. After several conversations with her doctor and calming her fears, Mattie and Adam tried again. Mattie was scared to death the entire time she was pregnant, but this time they had a healthy baby girl. They would go on to have a second child a few years later. Neither of whom have seizures.

Fast forward. It is over 20 year later. Mattie still takes medication for her seizures. She has not had a full blown seizure in over 25 years. However, she still has to take medication to control it. Mattie knows the warning signs. There are rare days she doesn't feel the best and she has learned to either have someone else drive on those days, or just stay home. She and Adam have been happily married for over 20 years

## Mental Health Disability

Suzanne Mitts

Shame. Embarrassment. Hopelessness. These are just a few of the feelings that a person has when they have a mental illness. In today's society, most people know that a person can be disabled because of his mental illness, however, that does not lessen the stigma that is still attached to the mental illness diagnosis. An employer can have many policies and procedures in place to deal with a mental health disability and they can claim that no one will be discriminated against, but the fact is that it does occur. Most of the time there will be no overt signs of discrimination, there will be no paper trail pointing to exclusion, but there will be the word of mouth, incorrect information being given out by a third party and that can just worsen the symptoms of a mental illness.

A person can have an exemplary background in his education and work experience but most employers forget about that as soon as they are exposed to the problems of a mental illness. Professionals stress to patients that mental illness is just the same as heart disease or diabetes and in their world it is but it is not treated the same outside of the clinical office. Employers understand the symptoms of a physical illness, it's something that is tangible, but a disabled person who does not show any outward symptoms of a disease is cause for suspicion of malingering. A person who starts getting behind in work or starts taking many absences is just frowned upon and is often looked at as if he is slacking.

A person with a mental health disability not only has to deal with the symptoms of his disease, he must also wrestle with the thoughts and actions of people who do not understand his disease. And oftentimes it is a struggle to open up about the thoughts and feelings one is having. No one wants to admit how much he struggles to just get out of bed, brush his teeth, or even take a shower. No one wants to admit how often he thinks of suicide just to get over the excruciating pain of just being alive. A person has to disclose these things in order to get treatment and still

there are people in society who will downplay those thoughts and feelings because there is no concrete evidence such as an x-ray or blood work.

Even if a person's support system is well informed of his condition, it can be draining to have to continuously deal with the limitations and the unpredictability of the person's ability to function. And the disabled person is able to sense this and it adds to the guilt and shame he already feels. Often a person with mental illness will isolate which just makes his family, friends and co-workers angry and they in turn might just decide to cut ties with the person. They might feel as if the mentally ill person does not appreciate them or just no longer wants to associate with them when in reality the opposite is true.

Usually people do not want to be classified as disabled. It projects an image of weakness, of needing help, of not being "good enough." And being disabled with a mental illness is worse because a person thinks that the thoughts and feelings he has are wrong and that he should be able to deal with them and not let them affect him. People don't tell a diabetic person with little feeling in his feet that he can walk faster if he tried but yet some people have no problem telling a mentally ill person to "buck up" and quit giving into his feelings.

Part of the problem is the treatment of a medical illness versus a mental health illness. If someone is hospitalized for a heart attack, usually people will visit, call, send cards or flowers but being hospitalized for a mental illness pushes people away. And if one is hospitalized on a locked unit that just adds more of a "hush" factor. It's almost like the mentally ill person is in prison and people are uncomfortable visiting in that kind of an environment. People have all kinds of negative connotations associated with a psychiatric unit and it just seems that their view of anyone that has been there drops dramatically. With outpatient treatment, employers feel that the mentally ill person just needs too much time off especially if the person is having individual therapy or group therapy or pharmacological management.

A person may have a mental health disability but that does not mean he is no longer a competent and important member of society. It does not mean that he can no longer participate and make a meaningful contribution to his job. The employee has to believe, though, that he can be honest and open with his supervisor about his illness and what limitations he could have. The supervisor

has to be supportive and understanding and has to value the employee and what he contributes to the job. The work environment has to be agreeable to the employee's needs and if it isn't then reasonable accommodations should be made. Many employers have a strict black and white thinking of how an organization needs to be run. If there is no room for compromise or if the employer is unwilling to entertain different possibilities, a truly good and dependable worker could be lost. While the employer may be annoyed with having to train a new employee and think little else of the loss of the mentally ill worker, the fact is that they have lost a person that probably knew the subtle nuances of the job and could more readily handle the problems that could creep up into the position.

It is a shame, that in the 21st century, people are still so ingrained to think of mentally ill people as crazy, weird or creepy. Even the person with the illness often times thinks of himself like that because he knows that others think the same thing. When will society begin treating those with a mental health disability the same as those with a physical disability? Our country has come so far in treating people equally but there is still much work to be done. When it becomes normal for a person to say that they were hospitalized for depression, just as he would say now how he was hospitalized for his diabetes, then we will be making some headway. When people no longer attribute a person's behavior to the effects of psychiatric medication and when they no longer joke about someone having electroconvulsive therapy that will be a sign of progress. It is a huge blow to someone when he is classified as disabled due to mental illness but if society can practice patience and compromise and empathy, hopefully, that person will feel supported and will be able to live a meaningful and productive life.

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## She Blinked

Elyssa Sasuta

*She blinked.*

She saw...she saw her family portrait that hung on the mantle. The mantle in their old-English style home. Their old home in the countryside. She hadn't been back there since...since it happened the first time. The portrait that hung upon the mantle quivered in fear as it fell crashing onto the uneven masonry. Fragments of glass and frail wood splintered into the dimly lit room. The discolored photo gently floated to the floor and created a small dusty cloud.

*She blinked.*

A large cloud of dust was visible in the distance. She heard a thunderous sound. She relished in the scent of the dewy grasslands that filled her lungs as the sun warmed the nape of her neck. The earth began to rumble beneath her bare feet, and the dust cloud grew progressively larger. So large that she could now discern that a mass of wild stallions were headed her way. Fascinated by the beauty of these wild beasts, she stood and watched as they rapidly approached. Terror gripped her as she realized, too late, that she was in their direct path. A gust of wind surrounded her. She could smell the sweat that matted down the wild stallions' hair.

*She blinked.*

The rustling of clothing. A rattling of keys, and ragged breaths filled her ears. The air reeked of men's cologne, sweat, leather, and liquor. She distinctly caught the scent of spiced rum and single malt whiskey. Steamy air making its escape through the cracked passenger window. Her eyes adjusting to the darkness around, saw his figure leaning over the passenger seat, adjusting the radio for the proper mood music. He settled on a station, and she felt him run his warm palm

over her pale flesh. Her heart thudding rapidly in her head drowned out the radio. Her stomach twisting in knots of anticipation and desire. As he leaned in to seal his lips with hers...

*She blinked.*

Gasping, panting, struggling to reach the shore. Black abyss. Coarse, warm sand glued to her nicked up flesh. Finding its way into each abrasion, sending a wave of unbearable pain as it swam through her blood stream. Blistering white skies and blue land. Figures bent over, a man's voice. Words incomprehensible, just noise blending with the distant thrashing and crashing of the wicked waves. *Saved*, she thought as she felt herself going under once more...before she did, a glimpse of steam rising off the warm water, battling with the crisp morning air....

*She blinked.*

Her feet caressing the frigid tiles. Shaking, she turns the faucet on. Watching her reflection disappear, engulfed by the steam from the scalding spout awaiting her nearly lifeless body. Grasping the porcelain sink, a single silent teardrop escaped her downturned eyes. Throwing her ratty clothing items in a pile in the corner, she steps into the small shower stall. Insufferable sorrow overwhelms her body. The water flicks over her, searing through the layers of ice and stone, it is a fire, and burns through her numb skin. Unable to stand any longer, she falls to her knees....

*She blinked.*

Darkness all around...frigid air assaults her weak lungs. Limited oxygen remains between her and her companion. Muted sounds, lowered senses. Panic strikes, her chest tightens, rapid breaths. The man clutches her frozen hand. He gazed deeply into her terror stricken eyes. Sorrow gripped his heart. He managed to utter from frosted lips, *I love you*...she forced a smile.

She blinked.

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## Still Travelling

Saadi Simawe

A Bedouin, famous for his wanderlust, was one day struck with a mysterious disease that reduced him from a world traveler to a mere spectator confined to a 10 by 20 foot space. This is the expanse between his desk and the sofa stationed in front of a large picture window where he loves to read and watch people in the street. One day his friend wanted to know how he was coping with the restrictions of this new life.

The Bedouin, who had lost his voice to the disease, turned to his I-Pad, and wrote in a defiant tone: “I am still travelling, with these books, and with my own writing. Without reading and writing, I would be dead.”

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# Cajoled, Coaxed: Carried

# Brendan Sheley

## Brother

Beading  
perspiration  
Pools  
Mother's  
brow  
winces.

...sobs

To Grapple an arm—  
His,Hers  
?Exodus— (car,)  
Ark to stares

## Girdled by contrition. Survival under my auspices?

An antiphon would return ?  
Hope

Cars impregnable  
wrenched boughs

things mundane  
Standardly Quotidian

Monumental.

Mother Does Not Say  
I understand.  
I need two cuts.

stranded hair  
floor scattered  
Sliding  
beyond Mother.

Smelling this horror  
No Tonic Stronger

lope into the Koken,  
Hydraulics ascend  
Taking an inaugural cut–

squirms and squeals.

My face: calm, poised.

Coiffeur's eyes twinkle vivacity.

abeyance immediate,  
Surveying for torment.

Mother's back  
audibly releases  
Concurrent is  
disposition. astriction dissipated.

They say  
terrible things

Come in threes  
– Who  
For all 63  
21s  
Come better than  
42s  
I know.

John Langdon Down  
Construed  
it  
to ascertain,  
not so arduous.

I've gripped

Hopefully the righteous aggregate  
Will grip next

Not a lesson.  
He is my Brother

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## Pay Attention

Emily Hinkler

*Dedicated to my friend Irise*

If I can't see you, you think it means

I have a disability.

But really it's

*you*

who does.

Disability.

Ability.

Why do we call it a "dis"ability?

What are we considered

not able

to do?

We can feel,

think,

learn and

love.

Because I am not like

*you*

I have a disability.

You think that because you can see

*you*

have the advantage?

You don't.

Being the majority doesn't mean you're better.

You're superior, huh?

You live in a blind world.

Blindness means

I am special.

I know how others are feeling without  
literally  
looking  
at them.

Look at people from every aspect you get.

Pay attention.

Pay attention  
to the world.  
Sight is the  
easy way out.

And it's not even a practical sense to have.

Do you enjoy  
seeing pain on other people's faces?  
Seeing people on the news suffer?  
Seeing your family suffer?

There's so many negative images in the world,  
It is a  
blessing to be blind.

You're taking away your imagination.

You take things  
literally and think every word looks like  
this or

that.

‘This is grass and it’s green. This is what the color green is supposed to be.’

If you do that, you’re taking away  
everything else.

How grass smells when you mow the lawn,  
how grass feels when you have no shoes on,  
what it sounds like when you walk in it.

Go deeper,

Why aim for the obvious?

Never mind.

You don’t get it.

You’re just like  
everyone else.

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## At times...

Millarahi Delso-Saavedra

At times...

I wish I ‘looked’ disabled.

Then, I would not have to explain myself.

I would not have to justify myself.

I would not have to convince others -

That I am disabled.

Instead, I look ‘normal’.

Like everyone else –

Except that I am not.

I cannot do all that ‘everyone else can do’.

My ‘healthy appearance’ seems like a betrayal to others.

That they should be able to point me out of a crowd,

And know.

I know,

I should not want to ‘look disabled’ –

But I do, and it sucks.

At times... it seems

That some indication to the world would make life easier –

To everyone else and, maybe, even for me.

Fortunately,

I love myself as I am.

I will continue to

Explain

Justify and,

Hopefully,

Educate;

That disability has no ‘look’.

## A Person with Disabilities

Patricia A. Silvia

I am a person who has more than one disability  
You would never know it just looking at me.  
I have a brain injury  
Which makes me very weary.  
I have been diagnosed with B.P.D.  
For which I went through lots of counseling you see.  
I have also been diagnosed with E.I.D.  
A disease that makes me want to flee.  
Then to top it off I also have been diagnosed with depression.  
Which now I seem to have in total recession.  
I have also been a major drug addict  
I no longer use which is something I pick  
Although I have all these disabilities  
I am still and always will be me  
With or without all these things  
I will deal with whatever life brings.  
You see just because a person has disabilities  
Does not mean that they can't also have many abilities.

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