

### The First Time I Saw a Person With a Disability

-This paper tells the story of the first time I developed a personal relationship with someone who had special needs and the impact it made on my life.

I was a freshman in high school playing on the varsity basketball team, preparing to walk out onto the court for our first home game of the season. The warm-up music was beginning to play in the background as our team huddled together one last time. As we were discussing our game plan, my coach's daughter pokes her head in the huddle and says, "I need Hanna Rose." I knew from talking with my coach about my interest in special needs that he had a daughter with Williams Syndrome, but I guess I hadn't ever thought of him mentioning one of his players to her, especially me. Ever since first hearing about his daughter, Kelcy, and learning about her disorder, I became even more excited about the basketball season.

Following Kelcy's command, I exited the huddle so she could take me aside. Not having a single clue what was about to happen or what she might say, I looked her straight in the eye and waited for what would come next. She began talking to me like I had known her my entire life, almost as if we were lifelong best friends. She told me her name and her age, that her favorite color was red, and that she was texting her boyfriend. A smile spread across my face as I told her how awesome all those things were and that my favorite color was purple. She then grabbed ahold of my arms and gave me a huge hug, while telling me the greatest "good luck" speech I have ever witnessed. What made it so great was her enthusiasm about my performance. She demanded I go out there and play my best, giving 110% each time I stepped onto the court. "You guys have to beat them and I am holding you accountable," she informed me. She continued with some other inspiring phrases until it was our time to take the floor.

My team scored within the first minute of the game and my first move was to immediately look over in the stands at Kelcy. Describing her reaction as happy would be an understatement, for she was absolutely ecstatic! Her hands were fully extended into the air as she hollered for our team. That is one moment I will never forget. Seeing her become so happy over something that seemed so little to me is truly inspiring. I realized that she loved our team like we were her own. From that moment on, whenever I had the opportunity to sneak a glance at Kelcy in the stands, I did. She always gave me that little extra motivation to play harder.

Since being introduced to Kelcy on my first basketball game as a freshman, my life has changed completely. Every single basketball game from our first encounter on, she has given me her "good luck" speech and hug, and was still by far the loudest cheering fan. I never would have guessed that Kelcy would have transformed my whole high school career just by simply supporting our team. I have played in a lot of basketball games since then, but looking back, there is no

greater game that stands out to me than our very first home game...the game I was introduced to Kelcy. To this day Kelcy and I still text weekly and are always talking about the latest gossip together. We also meet up for ice cream and have shopping dates whenever possible. Spending time with her is always a blast and is something we both look forward to.

Developing such a close relationship with Kelcy has only made me even more eager to pursue my career as a special education teacher. When I told her special education was what I was going to college for her eyes instantly lit up. She felt so special knowing that I was going to be teaching children just like her someday. She looked at me and said, " You are going to be the bestest teacher ever, ahhh!!" Hearing her say that almost made me tear up because she seemed even more excited than I was, which I never thought possible!

Her friendship is what truly inspires me to be a better person. I strive to no longer take little things for granted and have grown to appreciate even the slightest of details. I constantly try to have a smile on my face because when I think things are going bad, I remember that somebody else always has it worse. What makes me the happiest is when I see children with special needs smiling, having fun, and enjoying life. I cannot even imagine the amount of impacts still left to be made in my life, most of which will relate to children with special needs. I hope that I can touch every student's life in my classroom, just like I did Kelcy's. I am grateful for my opportunities and firmly believe that no matter where life takes us, Kelcy and I will forever remain best friends.