



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Sharmiki's Story by Sharmiki Byndum

Hi. My name is Sharmiki Byndum and I'm in a wheelchair because I can't walk. That makes me feel separated from everyone else. I try not to let it stop me from doing what I feel is a part of my daily life.

Sometimes it's hard for me to imagine myself being pushed around to get to places. I just want to tell the world what it's like to be in a situation where I have to depend on other people to feed me and get me ready for things. I just feel upset. I know that it's part of my disability but as a young adult I just feel like why is this happening to me.

I have cerebral palsy which is a dysfunction in the part of my brain that tells my body how to move.

I can put my arms through my sleeves when I am getting dressed. I can stand up to transfer if someone holds me. I can use the toilet if I have the right equipment. I can also feed myself if I have the right tools and someone to help hold my hand.



I can draw when someone puts an oil crayon in my hand. I can paint if someone helps me hold the brush. I can write using a head switch and an auditory scan on my computer. At home, I need my wheelchair. I have a stander that lets me reach for things in standing and help in the kitchen. To get into the house, I have a ramp.

Also, because of my cerebral palsy, I have trouble swallowing safely and at night, I'm on a feeding machine in a hospital bed in an upright position. Because of the problem with swallowing I have had a lot of pneumonias. I can't drink water because it will go down the wrong way into my lungs.



Another work by Sharmiki

Another problem I have is reflux. I have to take medicines for this, use the feeding machine and I had to have an operation called a fundoplication. Before that operation, I used to throw up everything.

I have had other operations. I have scoliosis which is a problem with my back and I had a body brace before I had my surgery. The surgery was scary because I had to stay in the hospital for a month. My body was tired all the time. I couldn't handle being up for more than an hour and I had pain in my back. It lasted about a month. The surgery helped me but I will still have scoliosis forever. I also had hip surgery. I couldn't sit while I was in a big plaster cast and then I had to have rehab in a hospital for a long time. Now I am 20 years old. I am almost finished with high school. When I get out of school I want to be a writer, read my stories to other people and I also want to live in a house with other people my age. I want to be able to paint and draw and show people my work and do photography.

I used to live in Chicago and I liked to paint and draw every day. I tried to get into an art program for teenagers and young adults. They had disabled kids in their program. But my high school told the program that I was not able to paint and draw and I should not be in their program. That made me upset.

In high school, people were making fun of me all the time. They would say, "Why does Sharmiki fall over in her wheelchair?" They thought I did it on purpose and they would yell at me and put me in detention for stuff that I couldn't help because of my disability. It made me feel like I had to get out of there. And so I did.



Sharmiki as Wangari Mathai from the Peace Play, performed for Desmond Tutu

Now I live in Minnesota. In my school, they are helping me become more independent and they are helping me look for a group home to live in with my friends and a program where I could paint and write and do photography. I would also like to volunteer in a recycling program because I care a lot about the environment.

The hardest thing to overcome is the attitude about disability. Some people think that being in a wheelchair means that I am different from everybody else. People think you can't do anything and they treat you like a baby who can't think for themselves. But show them your creativity and don't forget to show them that you do have a voice. So get out there and use it!!

Being in a wheelchair does not mean that I have to give up. I can show people who I am. I hope reading this article will help you see that I can do stuff with the right help. So be sure to read my article and pass it along to your friends.

My name is Sharmiki and I am 20 years old. I live in Minnesota with my parents but I am planning to live with friends in a house and do art because art is what I love.