

Tick-tock

Business



Making the Most of It Tick. Tick. Tick.

The sound of the non-stop ticking from the clock above the chalkboard is deafening. School is done for the day, but not for me. I'm an enthusiastic student locked in a staring contest with my favorite teacher. My teacher's eyes squint. Mine are blank. My situation is becoming more desperate with each tick of the clock.

I know what I want to say, but I have trouble saying it. When emotions and functions mix, my anxiety soars. Finally, the impasse ends. My teacher puts a caring hand on my shoulder and extends the deadline, as if having additional days might help me turn in a better essay. I have had trouble collecting my thoughts and formulating sentences my entire life. Absence of language is a term that got my attention while I was researching my disability.

I began thinking, why do we need words, anyway? Artists and composers do not use words to express their ideas or their passions. I am not Picasso and I am not Mozart; these are great masters and I do not compare, but I do have passion. In fact, I have two: playing basketball and helping those who are less fortunate. Although neither of my interests needs words in order for me to express my dedication and commitment, I often imagine how I might bring these two pursuits together in a way that could make a meaningful difference. Fortunately, I found an outlet for my expression shortly after I arrived at IMG Academy. One of my most gratifying opportunities at IMG was to sign up as a volunteer at the Paralympics.

On our scheduled day, some members of the basketball division travelled together. Along the way, I teased my buddies that my team would dominate. My preconceived notion of the event came to a screeching halt, however, as soon as I entered the stadium. There would be no teams slicing down the court; most of the participating athletes were severely disabled, but it did not matter. I interacted with the Paralympic athletes assigned to my group and I quickly realized that having the courage and the strength to overcome a disability is a powerful discipline. As the day progressed, I found ways to use my skills as an athlete to help others have the most rewarding experience possible.

I can't help being learning disabled, but I can choose the kind of life I wish to live. I can be respectful of others, responsible for my actions and resilient in the face of adversity. One day, I hope to use my education, as well as my sport, to make a significant contribution to individuals, to the community and, possibly, to the world. I am determined, more than ever, to turn my existence into a meaningful life. From the challenges that I have faced, I am grateful for realizing that making social contributions that will lead to positive and necessary change is not only my choice, but my obligation.