

You Are Unique

Written by Ben Bourne Flosman

This essay is part of a lesson plan to coincide with the *DisAbility* issue of *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids*.

Disability means what? The word can be used in many different ways, and its uses tend to suggest certain facts about disabled people. For example, you can describe a ship which has been damaged severely as disabled if it cannot move. I've also heard people describe a power generator which has been switched off as disabled. The point is: the value of an item is usually based on how it works or how it looks and disabling something decreases its value by impairing its function or appearance. This applies to people as well since, in my eyes, many people look at the word disabled in a negative context because they think that disability is bad. Yet in reality, your value as a human being is rooted in something deeper than how much weight you can lift or how fast you can move.

I use a wheelchair, and the importance of my life in the world is not changed by my disability. I have a disease that prevents me from walking and doing other physical activities. I obviously was never the star athlete in school, or the one who made beautiful art. However, I know that I am skilled in many other ways! As I grew, I realized that I am a talented communicator: through public speaking and through writing. I know that I'm socially skilled and can support others by my knowledge of people. I also know that I have a good memory which helps me in university.

As kids, perhaps you don't know what your skills are right now, but I guarantee you that you have more potential than you can imagine! Once you realize that you are unique and truly special, you have gained a wonderful quality: confidence. But others having confidence in your abilities is a different animal, which is why you must learn to speak up for yourself.

Entering my first year of university, I was denied from living on campus during my first semester because of my disability. I was treated unequally to my peers based on something I couldn't control. Of course, this bothered me and made it difficult for me to be confident in myself. I had to use my voice and advocate for myself. In situations like these, it is important to realize your own abilities and that you deserve the same opportunities as everyone else, this will make standing up for yourself a lot easier. I'm proud to say that after writing an article in the paper, many difficult conversations with university representatives, and a lot of patience, I eventually made it into residence. I was able to go to school in person with my peers!

What we all must take from the lesson of disability is this: we cannot judge ourselves based off what others think is important. We must accept who we are and know that we all have a unique perspective and skillset that makes us a necessary part of this earth.

Ben Bourne Flosman is a political science student who loves music, traveling, and public speaking. He hopes to work in government, live a fulfilling life, and to continue advocating for himself and others who need help.