

I have autism. I feel proud to be autistic. It makes me unique.

At times I have felt like a complete outsider. I really had trouble learning what reality is all about.

I used to feel treated like someone who knows nothing. I was often picked on because I would do things that I didn't mean to do, like saying things that didn't make sense in the moment. In elementary school I struggled a lot to use my words instead of gestures in order to communicate. I knew how to say things but I had so much fear I felt the need to stay quiet.

During lunch in middle school, other kids would say bad words and talk about things that I didn't know anything about, and talk as fast as they wanted to without making sure that everyone was keeping track. They spoke too fast, making it impossible for me to keep up with what they were trying to explain. For 3 straight years I ate lunch all by myself. It was unpleasant to be alone and not have a lot of friends. In my senior year of high school I started a lunchtime club called E.A.T. It stands for "engage and talk", and it's all about including others during lunch. Students ask a student that's sitting alone if he or she would like to join in and eat with others during lunch.

Back in my early teen years I felt very jealous that my peers were hanging out with each other and I saw them doing things that I thought would be more fun than what I was doing. I would see them go to the movies and to sporting events and parties and amusement parks. I would see them dress in ways that were inspiring and it made me feel like I wasn't cool at all because of the way I dressed and the way I looked. Not getting invited to many places made me feel very hurt and I felt under pressure trying to figure out how to be a wonderful person. I didn't want to be someone who was underestimated all the time.

One day I learned the actual meaning of cool. The word "cool" means to be your own best self.

I want people to know that there are different ways to learn. Certain people learn best by using playing computer games; people who have good coordination are able to do things with their fingers and feet like playing guitar or playing sports. People who have trouble using communication skills might be good at singing songs or at dancing.

When you have a challenge you don't always see things the way most people do...but that can be good, because it can make you more creative.

I can remember what has happened on almost every day of my life. I'm good at playing music. I'm good at finding things. I always tell the truth.

I want the world to know that people should not be labeled by their looks or by the way they communicate. An individual's exterior is different from their interior. There are many things inside of us that are invisible, but those are the things that show who we actually are.

My advice to all of you is to be aware of others who have many wonderful abilities in their hearts. Dedicate yourselves to them so they feel free and have access to resources that matter

to them. In order to make someone feel that they belong you have to initiate a positive conversation. Every human being on earth really deserves love, encouragement, justice and respect.