

Don't Give Up

Sometimes life is hard, unfair and painful. When people face difficult things, they have two choices. One is to give up. It may feel okay at first because you stop struggling; but, in the future, you may look back and realize you could have done something that mattered. The other choice is to keep going and surpass the problem. I know something about this because I was born deaf. Being deaf is difficult because you can't hear what people are saying. It is harder to learn to speak and sometimes people don't understand you. You miss out on things, and sometimes you feel invisible because nobody talks to you. Even though I have felt these things, I don't give up because it's my life and I want it to be the best it can be, and that's my law of life.

I learned a little bit about not giving up three years ago when I decided to come to Springfield Middle School. When I was a little kid with hearing aids in my ears, I went to Springfield kindergarten. I liked it but I wasn't learning to talk so my parents thought that I should try again but at a different school in Ida, Michigan, where they had special teachers for deaf students. I liked the school a lot and made a few deaf friends, but in 5th grade, I started thinking about how far it was from my home. I wanted to go to a school that was closer to home, but there wasn't a school for deaf students near Springfield. I didn't say anything until my mother asked if I was ready to go back to Springfield Middle School where I would be almost the only deaf student.

During my 6th grade year, my parents, my teachers, and I talked about the decision a lot. I went back and forth like a Ping-Pong ball. I really liked Springfield, but I knew there would be no special teachers and no deaf friends. Finally, we decided that I would go to Springfield in 7th grade. When I told my friends, they really wanted me to stay with them but, when they realized it was what I really wanted, they started to support me because they loved me like a sister. I was scared and sad about leaving Ida after all my teachers, friends, and counselors had done for me.

During the summer, I did a lot of work to get ready for Springfield Middle School. It was almost like home schooling. At the end of the summer, I was starting to feel really nervous because I realized how hard it would be to be the only deaf student in the class. I met with my teachers and counselors but they didn't really know very much about what it was like to be deaf. I had a note-taker and a special teacher to help me to get through my classes but, at first, it didn't seem to help much. I felt lost, left out and overwhelmed. I started asking my mother if I could go back to Ida. She told me to try it a little longer, so I did. A few weeks later, I started to feel less scared. I worked very hard on my schoolwork, but it was still hard to make friends. However, I didn't give up and, by the next year, Springfield started to feel like my own school.

In the winter of 2002, I learned another lesson about not giving up. I tried out for the 8th grade basketball team and I made it easily because I had been on the team the year before. I worked hard and thought I was getting better, but the girls on the team didn't seem friendly. Every day after practice I saw them talking to each other in the locker room. I couldn't understand what they were saying and I thought maybe they weren't talking to me because I couldn't hear them. I wasn't having a lot of fun with my teammates and I wasn't playing much in the game. One time in practice, I didn't understand something the coach said even though I thought I did. The coach was so frustrated. It seemed like she couldn't believe she had chosen to have a deaf girl on the team. After the practice, I was crying and the girls tried to ask me, "What's wrong?" I didn't want to tell them but one girl said to me, "Come on, tell me, I won't tell anybody. Trust me." I trusted her and told her that the coach seemed upset because I was deaf. She said, "No way, that's not true" but I didn't really believe her.

At home, I told my mother I was thinking about quitting the team. I was about to give up. My mom suggested we go and talk to the coach together, so we did. She told me I needed to work more on my rebounding and shooting but I could tell that she still wasn't very happy about having a deaf girl on her team. The next day, before practice, another player came up to me and asked, "Did you talk to the coach yesterday?" I told her, "Yes, I did." Then she caught me by surprise because she said, "We all know you are thinking about quitting." I was so confused because I hadn't said one word to anybody about quitting the team. Suddenly I

realized the other players really cared about me staying on the team and it made no sense to give up basketball, my favorite sport. I decided to work harder. The coach still got frustrated but I got better and, in high school, I made the junior varsity team my freshman year. If I had given up, I wouldn't be playing the sport I love today.

This year, I am a freshman at Springfield High School. The classes are very hard, especially English. Hearing people learn English easily because they hear it all the time. Deaf people have to learn English almost like a foreign language. I know how to talk and think in English, but it is sometimes hard to read and write it. When I read things like Of Mice and Men or Romeo and Juliet, I get really confused. Sometimes, I understand things but I can't put them into words. That happens to me a lot. At the beginning of the year, I tried really hard in English, but I didn't get good grades. I felt really discouraged. Hearing people didn't seem to understand how hard I was working and they didn't know how to help me.

In the middle of the semester, I started to get angry and I stopped trying so hard. When my parents found out that I was almost failing, they told me I had to work harder but I said I didn't care. They told me if I didn't do better, I wouldn't be able to play basketball and I would be grounded. I decided to use my anger to make myself work harder again. I started paying attention more and working more on homework when the teacher gave us time. I know that English will never be easy for me like it is for a lot of hearing students, but I need to keep trying because learning to use English better will make me a better student.

All of these experiences have made me realize that I can do things I didn't know I could do. It's not that deafness has been a wonderful experience, but it has helped me learn that I can't give up when I want something. Sometimes I see hearing kids who seem to have it pretty easy but, when things get tough, they quit. They don't understand that they have to work hard to get through problems. I'm not perfect and nobody else is either, but we can all be better than we think we can be if we don't give up.