

What's a beginning? Is it a definable start, firm and separate from an ending, or a middle, or just a change from one thing to another? The beginning of a school year is no more than the end of summer; a point in a cycle. Bad or good, a beginning is often labeled “beginning” because it is something profound that has an effect on what happens next in the circle. My beginning was a realization, a changed perspective on life itself.

CRUNCH! That’s how it started, with a wrenching of bone and muscle, the scream of ligaments twisting free, tendons popping, all of it ending as I fell with the nauseating sound of flesh on hard unfriendly wood. THUMP. In ten seconds the world had changed, because of a slightly wrong landing in a dance move, I was in a wheelchair. I don't even remember it clearly; my unfortunate beginning. It was a blur of tears, pain, surprised faces and sickly glowing hospital lights. Yet, it opened the door to an alien world, one where I moved by the rotation of wheels, friction between plastic and carpet, where people were always looking down at me. To be in a wheel chair, was something I thought would be easy. I was completely unprepared for the drastic reality of this new world.

Girl Scouts, fun, full of giggles and high pitched discussions, it was something I always look forward to. These were people I knew and loved, my best friends, my peer group, girls I had seen through thick and thin, planned with, and failed with. Yet, when I showed up disabled, the feeling in the meeting room was disturbed, and broken. It was almost like I was a complete stranger. Nervous under their confused stares and blinking eyes, I just smiled and moved to an area of the room where I could face the leader; a big

feat for such a small task, then silence, unbearable, tense and weary. What was wrong? I didn't really understand. Perhaps they were concerned with how bad my legs looked? All bandaged up... Or maybe, though I shunned the returning thought. I suddenly was a "retard" and a "loser" because I was disabled. No, that couldn't be. These were good kids, my friends, they weren't like that. Were they? Perhaps this is was how the term "lame" turned into an insult.

It wasn't just my friends either. It was all people, thick thin, tall short, black, white, and brown. Every shade of humanity seemed to feel the same sort of distance towards me. Like I was mute, or too stupid to think or talk for myself. They presented themselves in many categories. There were the ones that ignored me, and left me feeling hated. There were ones that trampled me in the hall ways. Then there were the nice ones that believed it their responsibility to help me with every thing, all the while sporting a baby talk, looking down on me with silly faces on. None of these made me feel like a human being, but alienated and strange, like a freak on display at some twisted and horrid circus. It made me so frustrated and upset to be robbed of the respect others so easily gained. I was starting to understand what it must be like for someone to have to go through this every day of their life, the whirling confused feelings wrenched open my eyes to a shadowed world. That's when I started thinking, this needs to change.

People don't understand how it feels, what it's really like to be in a wheelchair. Still, I only have a taste of the concept, how can I possibly grasp all the feelings of

discrimination, when I've only brushed the surface of the experience? Even so, I can make a difference to strive to make the world a better place.

My beginning: life in a wheelchair was a good lesson, even if it came in a painful package, because it has given me insight and inspiration. My own new knot in the circle, now a quest for equality and understanding. To be a sister, to every Girl Scout, lame, or cool. On my honor.

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