

Karman Mobility Scholarship Essay

“No, Natalie. The bunny goes up, down, around, and *then* through the hole,” my mother said, exasperated, for what must have been the millionth time that day. “Try again. And this time, use both hands.” I tried again, grasping the frayed shoelaces and attempting to force them into some semblance of a knot, but to no avail. My left hand, weakened by cerebral palsy, just couldn’t muster up the strength necessary to make a perfect bow. “I’ll never get it,” I wailed, dismayed at the prospect of wearing velcro Barney sneakers forever. “Yes, you will,” my mother admonished. “All you have to do is try.” So I practiced and practiced, every single day, looping one lace over the other, training my left hand to make the intricate moves, until finally, at eight years old, I had learned how to tie my shoes.

Although it may seem minor, the experience of learning how to tie my shoes while living with cerebral palsy has influenced my development by giving me the determination and perseverance to achieve my goals. It showed me that even though things may seem impossible at first, with determination and practice, you can often do things you never thought you could. And finally, it showed me that there is no substitute for hard work when it comes to achieving your goals.

More than anything else, the experience of living with a disability has shaped my life by teaching me the value of a strong work ethic. I have set many goals for my life, and the traits I have learned from experiences such as learning to tie my shoes have prepared me to be able to obtain these goals. Cerebral palsy means many things to me, but most of all, it means being creative and resourceful, learning how to adapt to a world not instinctively made for me. To me, living with cerebral palsy means putting my socks on with one hand. It means opening packages with my mouth. It means navigating a college campus in a

wheelchair. It means trying harder than everyone else, even when I just want to give up. It means having a never-ending source of perseverance and determination.

All of these traits that I've learned from living with cerebral palsy will continue to help me achieve my future goals. I am currently a second year graduate student studying applied linguistics at the University of Maryland. I want to become a bilingual speech-language pathologist or translator so that I can help other kids with CP. I know the path ahead won't be easy, and will likely involve many years of schooling ahead of me. The rigors of university can sometimes be demanding, but I know that with the right attitude, I will be able to successfully balance my studying, socializing, and extracurricular activities. And when things get rough, I'll just tap into the determination that living with cerebral palsy has given me—that I learned so many years ago when tying my shoes— and it will see me through. Living with CP has taught me that life may not always be easy, but if I just keep on trying, it will be worth it in the end. And that's a valuable life lesson for anyone to learn.