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CONVENTION REFLECTIONS, AND A THANK-YOU.

I first learned about Tourette's Syndrome five years ago - on that most wondrous day pieces of the frustrating and cumbersome puzzle that is me began to, for the first time ever, interlock in a comprehensible and satisfying picture. Until this summer I believed that one is probably only privy to such a pivotal and life-definitive moment only once in his/her life; however June marked an experience for me that not only bested that moment from five years ago, but in fact bordered on self-actualization. I had the privilege to attend TSFC Conference 1997, held in Waterloo on June 6th and 7th. It was my first exposure to the TSFC membership, and was by far the most intense weekend of my life -- I felt as though it was the first time a group's perceptions of my demeanor matched my intentions EXACTLY; there were no misinterpretations of my actions, no lengthy explanations of why I am the way that I am meeting disbelieving ears. In short, despite being molded over the years into a fairly guarded individual, I released myself into a serenity and contentment among these virtual strangers within hardly any time at all. I know that over the years I have accumulated many caring friends who have taken the time (and displayed the patience!!) to get to know me, but never has it been so automatic and effortless. I was sorry to see the experience end, and wait eagerly for Victoria in 1998.

Just in case cloud nine wasn't quite high enough, I was quite unexpectedly honoured at the convention with the Richard Stein Memorial Award, for making "an outstanding difference in the quality of life for those with Tourette Syndrome". I cannot fully articulate the impact that this gesture has had on me, but I'm going to try; much of my "pre-Tourette's-awareness" life I did not understand, nor like myself. Life was not to be enjoyed, it was to be endured. I was not only incapable of deriving genuine simple enjoyment out of anything in my world, I was incapable of even imagining it. The few, rare times that I managed to wrench myself from my own self-absorption was when a friend needed to lean on me for advice or support. In those brief personal respites the chorus of self-deprecating voices were silenced, and I would go home glowing with a certain contentment, and with the knowledge that I was a good person, despite the fact 99% of the world had difficulties seeing that.

Following my diagnosis, I remembered those moments, and gravitated towards a field and career choice which would allow me to maximize them. Now, with five years of psychology training beneath my belt, I feel not only better equipped to deal with myself, but I have learned that I can help other children and adults with TS overcome, or even circumnavigate, many of the strife I experienced. To me, it is the most tangible legacy I could possibly hope to leave in this world, and fully intend on making it a life's commitment.

Having said all of this, I return to my award. Those of you who thought of me, and nominated me for this honour, vitalized me. I was never quite sure whether I was really doing any good at all, and whether I would be valued as a Tourettic psychologist (a remnant of the severe esteem problems I had as an adolescent I suppose). You made me feel legitimated, you made me feel as though my purpose and goals are good ones. It is a lesson which I will remain grateful for my entire life. Thank you so much.

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