

Chandra's Grade 8 Speech (2004)

In December, for an assignment I asked some of you to describe me. Here are a few of the words that you used. Hyper – Strange – Different – Weird – Odd. These words hurt me, but then I thought they do describe me but do you know why? Let me help you understand the way that I am.

I have a genetic disorder, actually three rolled into one. It is nick named “the big three”.

When I was in grade one I was diagnosed with ADHD – attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Now I am sure that does not surprise many of you. I was unable to sit at my desk or pay attention to anything for very long at all. I was always on the go and because I never finished anything it was left for others to do.

I was interested in what we were learning but I was not able to sit still and learn. When you have ADHD it is hard to concentrate on anything for a long time. The brain wants to get information on all the stimulus that is around. Stop and think about all the noises that can be in a room. The teacher talking, the clock ticking, someone walking by, feet shuffling, someone sneezing, a fly buzzing around just to name a few. There is just so much happening that my brain zigzags to get a little bit of everything. Today I am still like this, but I take medication and it helps me concentrate.

The second part of the big three is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder AKA OCD. People with OCD have different types of things that they MUST do. For some it can affect their lives very badly and for others it is not even noticeable. A number of people cannot leave their homes because they must check that the door is locked or the stove is turned off 100 times or more. Even though they know that it is ok – they just cannot go without checking one more time. My OCD is mild. I like to make things even. If I have 11 cents, I'll go around and look for another penny so that I have an even amount.

Later it was noticed that I was doing strange movements called twitches or tics. I would continually shrug my shoulders and pull at my clothes. These were the first signs that I had Tourette Syndrome, a neurological disorder. This is the part of the big three that you see the most. It consists of involuntary, rapid movements or noises. I do things like extending my mouth, pulling at my clothes, flipping my hair or clearing my throat.

To help you understand my need to twitch – think about when you have the urge to sneeze – can you stop it – maybe you can prolong it – but eventually the sneeze comes. While you are waiting for the sneeze to happen it can be quite annoying. This is the way tics make me feel. There is an overwhelming urge to make that body movement or sound.

I can sometimes prolong or postpone my tics. After some time I must let them loose and there will be a lot come at once and even possibly more exaggerated than normal. Stress can increase the tics. That is why you see me twitch, bounce and squirm when we are doing a test. On the other hand when I am relaxed or concentrating on something I enjoy, I have fewer tics.

I am certainly not alone with this. About 1% of the population has the big three. It is more prominent in boys. My brother has it but his is very unnoticeable, unlike mine. Many famous people have or had it too. People like Alexander Graham Bell, Walt Disney, Cher, Tom Cruise, Albert Einstein, Henry Ford and Robin Williams.

Some may find it amusing, but it is not fun and games when it interferes with your life. I may have little control over what my body does but I do have control over what I do with my life. I can help other people with it. Dr. Duncan McKinley is a psychologist who specialized in TS. He was diagnosed with it when he was 19. He helps children around the world deal with living life a little differently. He has helped me a lot and I have returned the favour. I did a presentation with him in Sarnia. There, I said the speech that I did in Grade 5. I am also on his web site so kids can write to me and we can talk. It feels good to help others.

You may or may not know it, but I am aware that some of you make fun of me. I hope that this speech will help you understand why I am the way that some of you described me - Hyper, Strange, Different, Weird or Odd.

You may wonder if I will always have this – probably yes – but maybe in a gentler or more stable form – but it is my hope that you will get beyond the tics and twitches and see the real me. I am very comfortable with who I am and I pride myself on being different.