Dr. B. Duncan McKinlay
Psychologist

London, ON, Canada
url. www.lifesatwitch.com

Website:
Tourette Syndrome • OCD • ADHD
Sensory • ODD • IED/‘Rage’

Publishing:
Nix Your Tics! Eliminate Unwanted Tic Symptoms:
A How-To Guide for Young People

T(r)IC(k)S #1:
Introduction

To quote a breakfast cereal, “T(r)IC(k)S is for kids. It is also for anyone and everyone else with TS. T(r)IC(k)S is a compilation of thoughts, strategies, and ideas for coping in everyday life when you have a disorder. In short, I intend it to be the life-survival guide I wish I had been given when I was growing up! In each new issue of the Green Leaflet I will explore a different topic, ranging from dating to handling tics to learning to like yourself. Sometimes T(r)ICKS will be actual strategies to try. Other times it will be my own answers to some difficult questions TS forces us to think about. This month it will be a song I have written about TS, and a letter to encourage all of the Foundation’s future role models.

While I will start out with some of my own ideas, I hope that as time goes by other T(r)ICKSters will come forward and volunteer to share their knowledge too. So many of you have developed brilliant ideas for living with TS. What better way is there to heal yourself than to share those T(r)ICKS with others? When others can benefit from our lessons learned, our own past pain becomes something of value, worth the difficult struggles. The idea of T(r)ICKS is for all of us to walk away with new ideas, to learn to stop thinking, “I *can’t* do this”, and to start thinking, “*How* can I do this”. We are all in this together, my friends. Let’s also then work together, and win together!

August 1998

It Can Be Done

My heart was filled with both anticipation and trepidation as I em‘barked’ for this year’s TSFC conference in Victoria. At last I was to visit the province of my dreams! But would the experience be anti-climatic? After all, last year’s conference in Waterloo represented a “coming-out” for me – my first official introduction to the TS world, in all its richness. That convention was and continues to be a definitive point in my life – proof that I *was* OK, that I *did* have something to contribute, and that I *could* make a difference in the lives of my fellow Touretters. Can an experience like that be repeated? DOES lightening ever strike twice? Apparently so…

I am fast learning to cherish these functions as an annual “battery-recharge”, an opportunity to shed all inhibitions and become fully, completely ME again. This year I spent more time watching others absorb the experience, and learned that it is truly beautiful to see people evolve over a mere weekend. One teenager I met stands out particularly well in my memory, as she seemed to me to embody everything that the Foundation is meant to accomplish. Initially wary and guarded, she literally transformed over those two days. What began as hesitant disclosures of tics led to less and less restraint, as she realized that she was surrounded by friends. By Saturday night her body almost crackled with energy as she spun, cartwheeled, and pranced about the dance-floor, elated over the peace that she had found. She returned to her school the following week with newfound assurance that she is fine the way she is, and for the first time ever arranged a presentation to her school on TS. I hope that she is reading tis article, as I want to tell her that she is an inspiration.

Life is a joyous thing for me now, a journey in which I cannot wait to see what lies around each new bend. This to me is nothing short of a miracle. I had planned to say here that the Foundation has given me a new life, but that isn’t quite accurate. It’s more like they helped me to FIND my life. Here’s what I mean: perhaps one way

It Can Be Done Continued...

of defining “normal” is to be born into a world that you “fit”. Those of us who are “abnormal” are only mismatched with the world in which we are born, like a locomotive built in a city without any tracks. We are unhappy, not because we are wrong, bad, or stupid, but because we haven’t yet found a place that lets us feel capable, liked, and wanted. The upside to that is once we DO find the world that fits us, living there is infinitely more wondrous than it could ever have been if we didn’t have to strive for it.

Right now my TS is invaluable to me; it is my greatest asset. A few years ago, it was my greatest nemesis. What has changed? Certainly not the disorder itself – if anything, I’ve become MORE symptomatic. Then what? I’ve changed my world – I’ve immersed myself in areas in which my TS is the very reason WHY I’m strong and special. And this move has afforded me many gifts. Acceptance of myself, for one thing. Old beliefs that the way that I am is somehow wrong, and should be resisted, have given way to comfort and self-confidence. I’ve grown less concerned about others’ perceptions of me, and become more focused on my own. I recognize now that my TS is simply a quality of myself; much like being unusually short or tall, it is an aspect of oneself that can be made to be either a positive or a drawback depending on how that feature is interpreted, and what environment you place yourself in. A person cannot constantly dwell on the fact that they are too tall or short, for then they miss seeing opportunities, and the good that they do just the way they are. Likewise, I no longer allow my TS to overwhelm me – I acknowledge and accommodate it, I take responsibility for it, and take advantage of the unique and positive advantages it affords me, but it does not rule me.

It sounds deceptively simple to merely say, “you find what you look for”; perhaps that is why so many overlook this truth. Changing my attitude changed so much more than my views of TS – it changed how I thought, what I saw in my world, and how I regarded myself. It changed what kind of environments I sought out, and how people in those environments treated, and responded to, me. It gave me new opportunities, and opened my eyes to possibilities that had always been there but I had previously been too self-consumed to see.

This year I received the Todd Axelson Sr. Role Model Award. I would like to thank both the Foundation, and those who nominated me. Although I had no relatives with me at the conference, I truly felt surrounded by family. The real miracle to me isn’t that I won this award. It’s that I’m proud and happy with myself for it. I want anyone out there struggling with themselves right now to know that things are only hopeless if you decide they are. There was a time not that long ago when I wasn’t fit to be anyone’s role model, but here I am now. And you have the power to be someday too. I’m not anything special – if I can do it, so can you. It takes time, faith, and a lot of tears, but I believe in each of you. It Can Be Done.

cheers!
Duncan
November 1998