

Finalist, Poetry

Nothing I Cannot Do

By Cassie H.

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They will think you to be weak,  
Not knowing each day is an uphill battle  
Not knowing each day requires a full commitment to climb upon that saddle  
And ride up through the deep night to fight stereotype and label  
To win wars against “slow, handicap, and unable”  
They will think you to have a thick skull,  
As if only emptiness sits in your head,  
As if you, like one of them, cannot think thoughts while lying awake in bed.  
They will think you to have unending sorrow,  
Constant depression for your plight  
As if during your birth, happiness just up and took flight.  
They will think you to be different  
Oh, so completely different  
On the opposite end of the human spectrum  
As if from the same God you did not come.

I warn them,  
My class of 10 students.  
Who are just that - students  
Not “special kids” or “slow kids” as they are often labeled.  
Just students who happen to be disabled.

I warn them,  
Jocelyn with the upturned face, whose body is contorted at an angle  
Who always wants to lend a helping hand  
Who alerts us with joyful grunts as a butterfly lands on her wheelchair  
Whose favorite time is time for art  
Who holds in her small frame the largest heart  
Whose laugh is enough to tear you apart  
And send the joyful tears flowing,

I warn them,  
Gabriel with Autism,  
Who improves his communication each day,  
Who, after class is the one that asks, "Can I stay?"  
Who refuses to use black or grey  
And paints only blue skies and yellow suns in the top corner.  
Who loves animals with every ounce of his existence  
And believes anything unrelated to them as "boring-er"  
Whose joy is contagious and never ending.

I warn them,  
Amy with down syndrome and the halo of golden hair  
Tomas with tourette syndrome and the smattering of freckles  
Raven with autism and the passionate love of games and play.

I warn them,  
Because who else is going to?  
The world can be a cruel, cruel place.  
And with a disability they assume you've already lost the race.  
They count you out,  
They limit, underestimate, and doubt.  
So I instill in them a confidence and love of self.  
Because as we say each morning, and each afternoon at 2,  
"I am me. I am wonderful, I am smart, I am capable and there is nothing I cannot do."