

Congratulations to Elizabeth Bannerman of Year 10 whose short story "The Ability to Belong" entered in the Sale College House Cup Short Story Competition for 2018 was awarded 3rd Place. Elizabeth has earned 50 Points for Grainger House.

The Ability to Belong

By Elizabeth Bannerman

I moved quickly to the left as I heard the splattering of fruit behind me. I was just another day at St Anna's school for special kids. I wouldn't say I was special, merely different. However that didn't stop them from throwing me in this excuse for a school. It was a prison for kids who didn't act or look like 'normal kids', and those in here rarely get along. I guess I got picked on the most for my lack of limbs, but maybe they were just jealous that they didn't have a cool wheelchair like mine or that they didn't get to go in the elevator all the time. My parents wanted me to believe that I was just like every other kid in the world, normal. Life without a arm or legs has been hard enough, but becoming a teen, discovering who I am and having to watch my siblings walk and be able to do stuff without help just made my life miserable. I mean what kind of future could a person with almost no limbs have? When I say almost I only have one arm... half an arm. If there is a God, thanks a lot, you have officially have made my life miserable.

Luckily there were two people who I could talk to. My best friends Ashleigh and Molly. Like me they were in wheelchairs but for different reasons. Molly had a brilliant mind (I believe that she is the next Albert Einstein personally) but she had a slow-progressing motor neurone disease, so far she could no longer walk and it had begun to affect her arms, and Ashleigh was lucky, she was only paralyzed from the waist down she didn't want to say how it happened. She also had a slightly severe case of autism which made it hard for her communicate a lot but she was amazing at any sport she was able to play.

"They were doing it again weren't they?" Molly questioned.

"How'd you guess?"

"One, you have that look again. Two, you have some nectarine stuck in your hair"

"Great...Could you give me a hand? Hey, where's Ash?"

"On the basketball court practicing." Molly replied as she pulled the sticky fruit from my hair. She and I both knew that Ash dreamed of making the Australian team one day, but we already knew she could do it. Even at 16 we knew she had a bright future. Well, brighter than ours looked. As we head towards the gym we could hear the ball bouncing on the court. As we turned the corner we saw her lining up a shot.

"Ash-" I began to say

"Wait! She's going to get this." Molly said. I couldn't help but stare in disbelief. Ashleigh was sitting just outside the three point line at a 60° angle. There was a very small chance of her getting it in. You could see the concentration on her face, the sweat dripping down her face, the determination in her eyes. As she prepared to shoot I crossed my imaginary fingers and toes, just hoping it would go in. The ball soared through the air. Just as I blinked it ricocheted off the backboard, the edge of the hoop and only just went in. It was when we started cheering that Ashleigh finally noticed that we were there. She was estatic about her shot.

"Did you guys see that?!?"

"Yes! That was amazing Ash!" We said.

"I wish I could do that..." I sighed. I wanted to be happy for what my friends could do but sometimes I couldn't help but feel jealous. I was never going to be as smart as Molly and I certainly couldn't participate in sport like Ashleigh. I never would be able to do the stuff they could.

"BETH!" Both Molly and Ash shouted

"Huh. What'd I miss?"

"As Molly and I were trying to tell you, it doesn't matter if you can't do what we can. You already have one of the best skills ever."

"What? Being able to touch my nose with my tongue?"

"Firstly, gross. Second the thing you have is..." Before Ash could finish the bell rang loudly in our ears. It was time for class. The one class that I could never do. Health and Physical Education.

"Oh no... Not HPE, Ash can we swap?"

"Sorry, I've got Spanish and I'm not missing that."

"Molly? Please help me"

"Sorry, Chemistry is calling me. We'll meet after class, ok?"

"Fine. See you later"

We had all said bye to each other when some of my classmates were coming into the gym. Some were ok and left me alone but others... Best not talk about them it might draw their attention. To put it bluntly, they push people out of the way, trip, punch and worst of all peg balls at your face. Andrew was the worse.

"HEY! Stumpy!!" He called out. No one laughed except his group. His insult did hurt but I always tried not to show it.

"What do you want Andrew?" I sighed turning my chair slowly to face him. He always picked on me. If it wasn't for Molly and Ashleigh, I wouldn't be at school.

"You know exactly what I want." He said.

"Like I've told you before Andrew. You can't have my lunch money." I honestly don't know why I bother sometimes, he asks everyday and almost always I bring my own lunch to school. Luckily before he could respond Ms Walker came in.

"Alright everyone gather round!" She yelled over the chatter. "Now today we have a new student joining our class I hope that you welcome her, Laura can you come in please?" As she came in I couldn't help but stare. She was just like me, no limbs. Her face was hidden slightly by a veil of brunette hair.

"Laura do you want to introduce yourself?" Ms Walker asked.

"Um...Sure." She turned herself to face the class, "Hi... My name is Laura I just moved from England and I'm 16" She spoke so softly that I could only just hear her. I didn't know if she had seen me yet, but when Ms Walker left to grab equipment Andrew made a point to pick on her.

"Hey there freak, I'm gonna call you stubby, you should go over with the other freak" I just couldn't take it anymore the taunting, teasing and bullying.

"ANDREW! LEAVE HER ALONE!" Before I could stop myself I was yelling at the meanest person I knew. "I can deal with you picking on me but leave her alone! She has never done anything to you!"

"Oh no.. I'm so scared. What are you going to do about it stumpy? Nobody cares about freaks like you." The sarcasm was so thick you could choke on it. Then, suddenly someone shouts from behind me.

"Really if nobody cares then why are we here?" I turned my chair towards the familiar voice. When I did I saw Molly, Ashleigh and Laura sitting next to each other.

"What are you guys doing here?"

"We transferred classes so you wouldn't have to fight this battle alone." Molly replied, "We wanted to surprise you." I was amazed that my friends went to the effort to change there classes for me. I went over to them and gave Molly and Ash what was and attempted hug.

"Listen up!" Ashleigh said, "If anyone messes with Beth, Molly, Laura or myself. You mess with all of us." I saw Laura blushing brightly. I smiled at her and she smiled back and said.

"No one has ever done that for me before... Thanks."

"No problem. I guess that's what friends are for" I turned to Ashleigh "Hey Ash. before class you said I had the best ability ever. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that you have the biggest heart out of everyone in this school." I shed a tear or two after that but afterwards I couldn't stop myself from saying.

"All for one."

"And one for all!" My friends responded.

Soon after we started our first class together and to my surprise Andrew left us alone. Later during the term the bullets of fruit stopped coming, I was finally accepted. Laura and I became inseparable, we spent all our time together and went out after school with Molly and Ash. Nobody could bring us down. Other people started talking to me and I had more friends. I felt something that I had never really felt outside my home before. I felt safe. I had friends that I could count on, but more importantly I felt that I belonged.

The End