

I lay on my bed. Thinking about what tomorrow will bring. Each day is an adventure for me. It may be good. It may be bad. Whatever it is, it is an adventure. To me at least.

If you were standing in front of me right now, you probably would not understand what I am trying to communicate. If you were walking by me on the street, you would probably stare at me until I stare back.

Some kids want smart phones or video games, fancy clothing or hair accessories. I want a voice. I want to communicate. I want to be heard.

With writing, I have a voice. I can say all that I want, even if I find it a little bit tough to type. With writing, I can share my thoughts with others.

School is a nightmare for me. Everyday I get dropped off by my mom because she thinks that I am too much of a baby to walk alone. Deep inside, though, I know that she only does it to try to make me feel better. She does it because I am lonely.

Even though my parents try really hard to treat me just like every other kid they know, they always treat me differently. They talk to me very slowly, like I can't hear. They ask me questions, but end up choosing whatever they want instead. The only person who treats me normally is my brother Michael. For as long as I can remember, Michael has always treated me like a normal kid. He and I have an unbreakable bond. The fact that I have Autism has never bothered him.

At school, the kids treat me like I am not really a person. The teachers are very kind, but whenever they aren't around, the other kids make faces, and imitate me. I try to not let it bother me, but it seems like an impossible task when kids like Cory Collins are always laughing in my face. I despise Cory Collins.

I wake up to my favorite song playing on my alarm clock. Birds are singing just outside my window, and the first rays of sunshine are coming through my curtains. I get dressed with help from my mom, and walk to the kitchen for breakfast. Michael is already sitting at the table eating cereal.

"Hey bro," Michael said.

"Good morning Jay. Did you have a good sleep?" My dad asks, talking very slowly. I nod and sit down. I have a chart of all of my favorite breakfasts, so all that my parents have to do each morning is to hold the chart out, and let me point to what I want. This morning I choose cereal.

After I eat I get my things ready for school. I don't need much, because I am in a special education class. I tried going to a normal class one day, but the students kept staring at me. I was out of there faster than you can say cheese.

I arrive at school, and walk through the front doors with my mom. Even though I have gone to Placid Elementary for my whole life, people still stare and point at me. I try to ignore them, and walk down the hall to the familiar door labeled 'Special Ed'. Next to the door is a piece of paper showing all of the students who are in the class. Luckily, I am not on the list. Mrs. Mendel never ended up updating it again after I moved back from the regular 5<sup>th</sup> grade class. I hope that she never will.

In the morning, my class goes to gym, where we play on the four-wheeled scooters. Then, we go back to our classroom, and play some games. Before I know it, we are walking down the hallway to the cafeteria.

I sit at my table with the six other students in my class. We are all silent as we eat. Mrs. Mendel offers to help me eat, but I decline her offer. After all, our lunch table is just on the other side of the cafeteria from where the other 5<sup>th</sup> graders are sitting, and I don't want them to see somebody feeding me. Even though it takes a while, I manage to finish my lunch in the allotted time. I walk back to our classroom, and try to sit through another day of school.

At the end of school, Mrs. Mendel walks me and three other students to the front door to find our parents. Ms. Patty, the student teacher, takes the students who ride the bus to the bus loop. I quickly find my mom, and hurry her out of the schoolyard, not wanting to encounter Cory Collins on the way home. I know that he wouldn't be mean to me in front of my mom, but he always manages to flash his signature look when nobody is watching.

When I get home, I go directly to my bedroom. I can tell that my mom thinks that something went wrong at school, because I didn't go find Michael. I always go to see Michael when I get home from school.

Instead, I take out my phone from my pocket. Now you might think: why does a boy with Autism need a cell phone if he can't talk very well? I don't talk. I text.

I am feeling so lonely today, that I create a new contact, type area code of my town, and type a random number that I remember seeing somewhere. Without thinking about what I am doing, I hit the save button, and open up the texting screen.

**Jay: Want to be friends?**

Just as I am tapping the send button, I realize how childish the statement sounds, but there is nothing I can do now. I sit in my room for ten more minutes, waiting for a reply. Finally, I get one.

**555-8352: sur.**

The minute the reply comes in, I know that this person is different just like me. This kid can't spell. I am so excited, that I start jumping up and down... maybe I am making a friend. After I calm down again, I type a reply. After about five more minutes, I come up with something.

**Jay: What do you like to do in your free time? I like writing.**

After another five minutes, another reply comes in.

**555-8352: I lik listenng to musc.**

**Jay: Cool.**

When I get called for dinner, I see Michael in the hallway. I run up to him and try to tell him the great news. I can tell that he understands, and acts really excited for me.

At school the next day, I ask Mrs. Mendel if I can play educational games on my phone. She says yes. I take it out, and look to see if I have gotten any replies. I turn my phone on, and see one new message waiting

**555-8352: If we ar goig to be freins, wat is wun thig that i shoood knw abot yoo?**

**Jay: I have Autism.**

I don't get a reply for a long time. The day drags on with the normal lunch and the normal bullying. Finally, after what seems like an eternity I am walking up to the front door of my house with my mom. Today I go to see Michael first.

"Hi Jay. How is it going?" Michael asks. I flip him a thumbs up, and sit down at the dining table next to him. I see several sheets of paper filled with letters and numbers in front of him, and behind that, I see papers talking about the early settlements of India. I sit there next to him for a while. For some reason, sitting next to him makes me feel like there are no problems in the world. After a while, I feel a buzz in my pocket. I quickly go to my room and shut the door.

**555-8352: ok. I hav dkleksia.**

I am so relieved to see this response. I thought that I would lose my only friend by typing that in the message.

In the morning, I finally convince my mom to let me walk to school with Michael, even though his school starts earlier than mine. Michael and I both walk out the door at 7:30 AM. The sun is just rising when we leave. As we leave, it starts to rain. Soon, puddles start to form on the sidewalk. Michael holds my arm to make sure that I don't fall. He knows what will happen if I fall, and I do too.

"So, are you excited for a fun day of learning?" Michael says sarcastically. I told him the truth by shaking my head. Michael nods. "Yeah, me neither. I have a test today in Math. At least it's Friday though." I nod. We walk up to the front door. "Let me walk you in." I shake my head. "Listen, Jay. I know that you are old enough to do this by yourself, but mom and dad told me to walk you in. They trust me. I know that you really don't want me to walk you in. Lets make a deal. I will walk you in, and you will walk down the hallway by yourself. I will be watching all the time though. Sound good?" I nod. "Ok." Michael says.

I walk down the hallway very carefully. I hear the terrible sound of my shoes on the floor. Just as I am about to reach the carpeted floor of the classroom, I slip and fall on my head.

I scream. Michael immediately drops his things and dashes down the hallway. Mrs. Mendel is suddenly on the floor with me examining my head. Michael is also there on the floor muttering something under his breath. Mrs. Mendel says something to Michael that I don't understand. The last thing I see is Cory Collins standing in the hallway staring.

I sit in the living room watching TV. The screen starts hurting my eyes so I turn it off. I feel so tired, I feel like I could sleep for weeks. I got a concussion when I fell at school. I haven't gone to school in two days. Instead, I have been sitting at home, trying to figure out who the person I am texting is.

It could be anyone, really... anyone who has the same area code as I do. I just randomly dialed a number. Could it be someone at school? An adult? No, adults are out of the question. They wouldn't spell things incorrectly. I think about what has recently happened at school. Falling comes into my mind. Who was there? I remember seeing Michael, Mrs. Mendel and Cory Collins. Cory Collins! Could I really be texting him?

Just as I start to put pieces of the puzzle together, Mom comes in and tells me that I need to get to sleep. She asks what I am thinking about. I just shrug my shoulders and lay down.

A week later, Mom finally lets me go to school, but she doesn't let me walk with Michael. On the way, I find a piece of paper on the ground, covered in mud. I signal to mom to pick it up. As I rub the mud away, I see that it is a spelling worksheet. As I try to make out the writing, I see that there are tons of spelling and grammatical errors. I look at name at the top of the paper. Written in black ink is the name Cory Collins. Even though I don't want to believe it, more and more clues are leading me to the answer. I have been texting Cory all along.

I couldn't understand how this could be possible. Cory makes fun of me because of my Autism. How could he not mind when I told him over texting? The answer popped into my head. Cory Collins is faking it at school.

At lunch that day, I saw Cory sitting down with his friends. I stared at him until he stared back. For the first time in years, he smiled and nodded.

**Jay: Friends?**

**Cory: Freinsd.**