



At fifteen, I was a prisoner of fear. Nothing this planet offered was able to replace my craving for solitude. Being mute was preferable to planning the perfect combination of words that could express my trauma as a survivor of sexual assault and rape. With heavy eyes and tired hands, I ended each night longing for something that could cure my anxiety and silence.

Everything changed when my younger brother was diagnosed with severe autism. Doctors recommended that his education be centered around manual labor and sign language. I learned that due to social stigmas, his diagnosis deemed him incapable of being seen as an equal by his peers. While my silence was self-imposed, his was prescribed by doctors who did not think he was capable of speaking- but I knew he was.

Our work began with mumbled whispers of phrases from popular children's books such as, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" or "We're Going On A Bear Hunt". I acted as his guide, giving him strength by enunciating complex sounds, articulating phrases, and encouraging him not to give up. Under the protection of pillow-forts and locked doors, the anxiety that was constantly flooding my vocal chords receded as we whispered nonsensical stories and poetry that sent us into fits of uncontrollable laughter. He learned quickly, soon being able to identify and describe images of simple actions and emotions. Our soft-spoken conversations comforted me, decreasing my desire to be mute. His speech therapist and doctors recognized the talent I never knew I had. I was able to give a voice to someone prescribed mute and end my own silence simultaneously. I had found my passion- giving a voice to the voiceless: speech therapy.

This scholarship will allow me to attend San Diego State University, the highest ranking Speech Language Hearing Sciences university in the United States. I will be studying to become a pediatric speech therapist with emphasis on neonatal physical and intellectual disabilities that are caused by addictions during pregnancy. It will give my parents financial security, as it is very difficult to pay for college tuition, speech therapy, and the other costs associated with my brother's disability. Receiving an education is the only way I will be able to utilize my talents and embrace my passion as a Pediatric Speech Language Pathologist. I am now the intern for a speech therapist and I study speech language disorders, hearing



sciences, and speech disabilities. I have also studied and assisted children with varying speech and mobility disabilities. My experience unheard of for someone who is seventeen years old. I know and I have proven what I am capable of. Doctors believed I was crazy when I told them I would give my brother a voice. I am ready to show them what crazy can do. I have great expectations for the future and this scholarship would help me to move forward with my dreams. I will be eagerly awaiting your response.

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- [Interventions for Patients with Neonatal Injuries and Associated Neurological Issues – By Nikki](#)