

Audrey



*Acceptance /ək'septəns/
The action or process of being
received as adequate, suitable,
typical to be admitted into a group*

My disease started when I was six. I remember the day, because it hurt to bend down. My mom was tying my shoe when she realized my kneecaps were the size of grapefruits. It was two years before the doctors diagnosed an autoimmune deficiency as causing the inflammation. I was in high school when the swelling started to impair my vision. Today I am almost completely blind.

My right eye is worse than my left. I don't see anything out of my right eye except movement. It's completely black. In my left eye it's like walking through a thick fog. My pupils are also permanently enlarged, so it can be scary going from dark to light.

After high school, my vision got worse and worse. I was trying to work, but at the same time there are very limited employment opportunities for someone like me. I wanted to work hard, I wanted to succeed, and I wanted to do things on my own. My main motto

is "giving up isn't an option." At all. Ever. But I couldn't sustain myself, and I didn't trust myself handling money in my retail job. So it was a real catch-22.

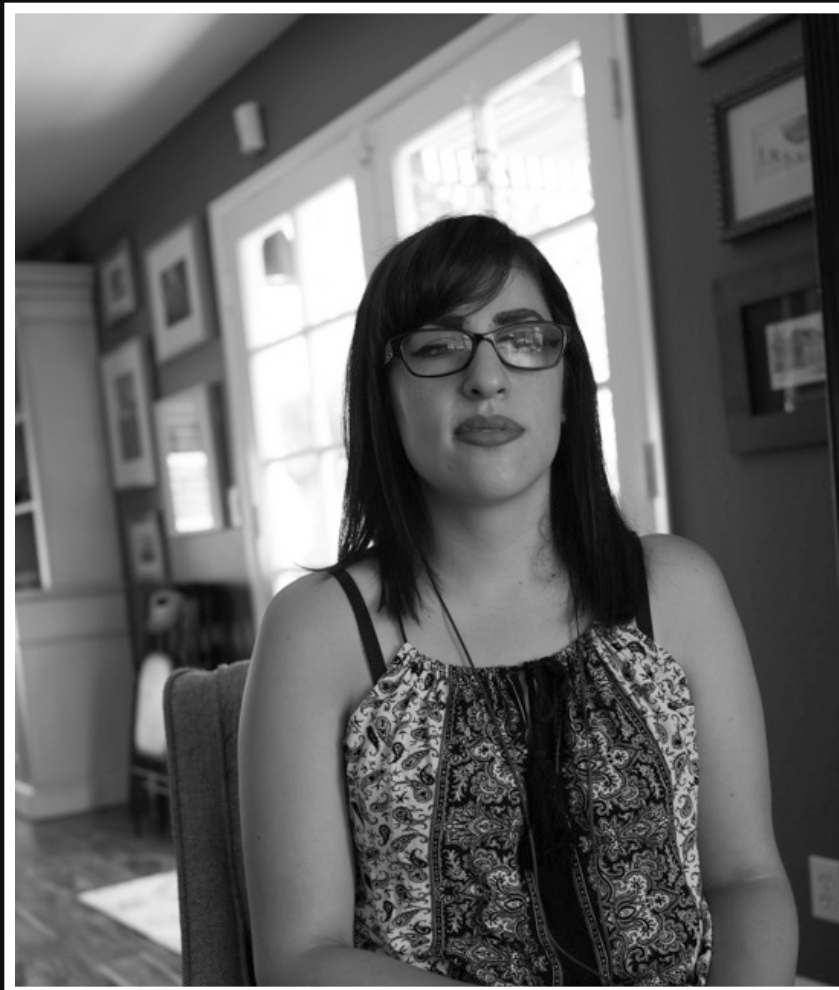
I was 19 when I went the route of disability. It hurt my pride a lot, and it was a last resort. But if I didn't have it I wouldn't be able to live on my own, or go to school. I would just be stuck in this revolving door of poverty, or facing homelessness like when I was a kid. I wonder how much those years of not getting proper medical treatment while we were living out of hotels and the car made my illness worse.

I am studying to be a forensic accountant. When people hear that, a lot of them are like, "Oh, blood!?" No, no, no. Thieves! I can do math in my head pretty well. And I saw the recession of 2008 – how people were losing their homes and companies were getting away with it. I believe that when you do wrong, you should be held accountable.

I'm using what's called a VisioBook for my classes now – it's like a computer pair of binoculars so that I can see the board, and it is amazing. Some people resent that I have these kinds of gadgets provided to me for my schoolwork, or they'll be like, "Ugh; why do you need this special treatment?!" I don't consider things like that special treatment. It's just treatment to get me onto everyone else's level.



Audrey's first pair of glasses after an eye surgery that improved her vision



"My vision was so bad that I was pretty much in a haze all the time ... These were my first pair of glasses after that surgery. They might be old man dorky glasses, but they're my favorite thing in the world."

Another girl in my class actually said that she thought that the audio signals at crosswalks were society's way of making us lazy. I was like "Well, if you can see when you're walking, you know you can cross. For someone like me, who can't always see, we need a little help to be told to move across the street." It's hard to believe that people who have perfect vision can be so blind sometimes.

There have been other incidents, at work, where customers have just been unbelievably insensitive. One time my eye was really red from surgery, and this man told me, "You've been doing dope, haven't you? You're a crack head. Your eye is disgusting." Another time there was a guy who was waving around a flyer that advertised an item he was looking for. I was like, "Sir, I'm visually impaired, if you can tell me what it is, I can help you." And he says, "Well what good are you if you can't even see?" My boss saw me crying and said he would have backed me up if I'd punched the guy in the face.

Violence isn't the answer. I can smack all the people in the world who have given me the short stick because of my disability, but they're still gonna be the same way. Because they can't see me as a person.

I don't want to be treated like some sort of giraffe in the room. Yes, I'm blind, but I can still share the same interests as you. I can't see the puck on the ice, but that doesn't stop me from going to a hockey game. I love hockey! And, I want to be there, just like you, and enjoy the festivities when our team scores.

Sometimes I think I would prefer to be completely blind, because then you don't see as much of the ugliness that is out there in the world. And without visual first impressions you can actually come to see a person for who they are, rather than being drawn immediately to a place of judgment. Tolerance for people with disabilities, like myself, that's not what I am interested in. Just accept me. Accept us.