

The Stars in My Head

By: Gianna Parolin

“Hailey Neville!” yelled my teacher, Mrs. Kingstone. “Will you pay attention to your grammar? You haven’t written a single thing about nouns.” Nouns. I couldn’t believe we were still on nouns. In my head, they looked like all the other stars – just balls of light in a big sky of words.

As a Down syndrome kid, I’ve been seeing stars in my head every time I heard a word. Each star looked different depending on the part of speech. Verbs shone a bit brighter than nouns, but it depended on the verb tense and if it was a linking or helping verb what the star would look like.

Adjective stars were a different shape than the others, but their brightness varied depending on their form- normatives were dull, comparatives were bright, and superlatives were the brightest of all.

Adverb stars look completely different, you may think that the two forms are two different parts of speech. The –ly adverbs were twelve-pointed and very bright, while the others were nine-pointed and flickering.

Pronoun stars are all different shapes and sizes depending on their type. Reflexives were six-pointed, possessives were beautifully swirl-shaped star clusters, and so on.

As I was finding the bright stars in Mrs. Keystone’s sentence, before I knew it, our grammar lesson was over, and I trudged to lunch hour. I wanted to tell someone about my stars, but I couldn’t. Down syndrome made me unable to speak.

I sat at a table with two random people, and I knew why they were sitting with me. The principal of Daiken High School, Mr. Twinleaf, paged these two kids from one of my classes to the office to tell them they had to sit with me at lunch. The kids were different every week.

This week my lunch buddies were two super-chatty girls, Ariana Dursley and Kayley Hanning. They seemed to be talking about a cute boy in school.

“Where does he live?” Ariana asked, eager to know where to find the boy.

“I think he lives across the street from the Doubtfire’s,” Kayley replied.

The conversation went on for a while, but three words from it really stuck out to me: “across the street”. The stars that made prepositional phrases were my favorites- I loved the moving rhythm of the preposition star, the dim glimmer of the article star, and the plain gleam of the noun star.

“Hey, look!” Ariana boomed. “Downie has those moony looking eyes again!”

They always refer to me as Downie, as in Down syndrome. That was it. That was the last straw. I walked away from those mean girls to a different table, where another girl was already sitting.

I braced myself for another name calling interaction. Braced myself for the slurs referring to my inability to talk. But this girl did none of that. Instead, I heard her say, “Sit! Sit!”

I couldn’t resist that offer, so I took the empty seat next to her. She asked, “Were Ariana and Kayley bullying you, seven-eight-nine?”

I didn’t know why this girl said numbers at the end of her sentence, but I nodded.

“I’m Ventana,” the girl told me. “I have Autism, four-two-five-six.”

That was when I knew I had just made a friend. Ventana was another disabled girl who knew who could understand who I was and accept it. I knew we would become the best of friends.