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I Was Six

by Tina Blower

I was six when my Mother taught me the art of invisible strength. The headmaster had told my Mother that I wasn't going to learn what the other children were learning. That I wasn't capable and that I was to be put in another class that would deal with my 'special needs'. I could feel the anger as I sat next to her, feel her grow hot. I wondered how she was going to deal with the headmaster. He seemed to have made up his mind and I also wondered whether the headmaster was right. I had no idea what the other children would be learning so how would I know if I would be able to cope? I knew about calculations, I could read pretty well. I could make up stories but writing was a lot slower due to my twisted arms. I really had to concentrate where I was putting the pen and then my head would not behave. I could do it, but it took a long time.

My Mother had heard about something electronic that I could press to help me with that. There was no way that I could do Rounders or running as I was in a wheelchair, but I didn't see how important that was. Were the children in this school way ahead of me, then? My Mother told me I was really clever, so perhaps they are geniuses. That was not the case, however, when my Mother quietly persuaded the Headmaster to let me spend at least one day in the classroom. They were only doing really simple sums and were reading the kind of stories that I write. The teacher put a page of sums in front of me. It took a long time to write them down and the teacher didn't really seem interested in me anymore. Instead, she ignored me and carried on with the rest of the class, praising here and there, delighted when someone gave a right answer.

At the end of the class, she didn't even look at my paper. My Mother came to fetch me and patiently waited to talk to the teacher. She asked her to look at my paper.

The teacher seemed nervous and busy but my Mother waited calmly. Eventually, we were the only ones left in the classroom and the teacher reluctantly looked at my paper. I had finished all the sums and got a bit bored, so I made up some of my own. The teacher suddenly changed. Her full attention was now on me. She gave me lots of praise and for the first time that day, I smiled. It had been hard sitting there and being ignored but my Mother said when we got home 'don't anyone ever let you feel like you are anything less than you are'. She had been really angry that the headmaster had said those things in front of me but showed me that grownups, even ones in charge like the Headmaster, can be wrong. All she had to do was believe in herself and me and hold onto that feeling. I have had to use that several times in my life when I come across a new person, but my husband and literary agent sure do get me now.