

## The Softball Dream by Larsen B.

If there is one thing I want more than anything, it's to join the softball team at our school. I can already imagine myself, wearing the gold knee-high socks, the black pants and Jersey with "stocks middle school" across the back. I can see myself in the black cleats with the gold flakes all over them. I can just picture myself with my red hair pulled back into a ponytail by a black and gold bow, and a gold helmet to top it all off. I want to be like this so bad. Unfortunately, there is one small cork to me- I'm handicapped.

I can't walk without support from my trusty walker. I can't communicate with anyone- my therapist can barely understand me. I have to wear braces on my ankles to keep them from rolling under. I'm not showing any progress in the exercises, swimming, or horse riding we do in therapy. I can read just fine, but not out loud. It's embarrassing to have a teacher following me around and babying me 24/7.

So one day, I decided that would change. My special ed teacher was sitting with me at lunch asking me about how my day was going. I replied with the simple "great", which sounded more like "Gwaaay". She smiled. "Good job, Aries!" she exclaimed. She does that every time I say anything, or even blink for that matter. Then, I saw the softball team passing by, not looking at me once. They looked so perfect and athletic- two things I'm not, and never really will be. The captain tossed her hair, a beautiful bunch of golden curls. This makes me look down at my ugly red hair that goes to my waist. Oh, how beautiful would it be in a ponytail and gold bow! Then, I had an idea. What if I had joined the softball team? Nobody would look down on me again, or laugh when I try to say hi but it sounds like "eyeeeeeee". From that moment on I would be Aries the Softball player, not Aries from Miss Sunny's special ed class. As soon as I got home, I got to work. I threw the orange my mom gave me, to work on my pitching. My mom was obviously pretty frustrated with me. Eventually, she got the point after I eyed the softball game on the TV. "Aries, do you want to play softball?" she asked me. I squealed with excitement- she finally understood! A big smile burst across her face, and I just knew she was thinking what I was- that this was so going to happen.

I used a stick I found on our driveway to practice swinging at the foam softball my mom bought me. This was difficult- especially since half the time, I had no control whatsoever of my arm. I hit myself three times, which really didn't bother me, but every time I did, my mom insisted we take a break. So, on my break time, I thought about my arm movement, and what my therapist had taught me about being in control. "Slow, steady, yet strong movements are key." says to me every time I come in. I finally got it to where 3 out of 4 times I could hit the ball, which was a big accomplishment for someone like me. My arm was sore, but that did not stop me. I threw the foam ball so far, my mom had to go pretty far to get it. Then, there was running. That was no problem, since I practically sprint every day during PE, since the softball coach is always there with the rest of the team.

It took weeks and weeks, on top of lots of frustration, screaming, tears, and disappointment. Some days, I just could not hit the ball. Others, I couldn't even run without my feet collapsing. It felt like I would work so hard, but I got nowhere. But out of all those rainy days burst a rainbow- I got better and better at what I did, and soon enough, it was time to talk to the softball coach.

I was freaking out the day the coach would talk to me- I wore my hair up higher than I have worn it before, and a big softball bow my mom bought for me topped it off. I wore a Stocks

Middle School Softball t-shirt, and softball pants. I might as well have been talking to the president- I was shaking all over. When we pulled up to the school, my palms were drenched in sweat, and I was scared I would pass out. My mom gave me a big, friendly smile that said "you can do it!" which made me feel a little better. When I walked in, I was so ready.

I was a little disappointed that the coach really only talked to my mom, but when she did talk to me, I answered in my best voice- I don't think I have ever spoken so clearly in my life. When I got home, I was surprised to already see an email from the coach in my mom's inbox.

I walked onto the field with gold knee-high socks, black pants and a jersey that read "stocks middle school" across the back. The black cleats on my feet felt so good- the golden flares must work magic. My red hair was pulled back into a ponytail with a big, black and gold bow, and a helmet to top it all off. I took my seat in the dugout, smiling from ear to ear. I high fived all 14 players, and kicked back and relaxed- I may not have been playing the game, but being the softball team manager felt just as good.