

I Really Love My Life

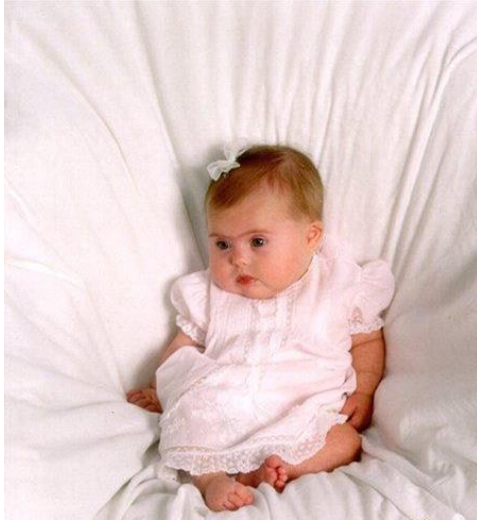
By Rachel Nicole Mast





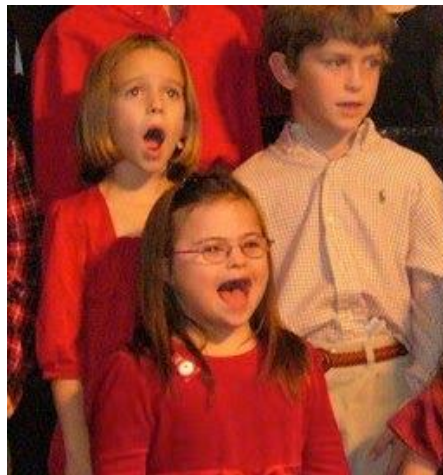
Who I Am...

- I am Rachel Nicole Mast.
- I am 20 years old.
- I love to tell people about my life, my hopes and my dreams.
- I am proud to be a voice for others with Down syndrome and different abilities.



Who I Am...

- I was born in Memphis, Tennessee.
- This is my friend Ben. We met when we were babies, and we are still friends.
- My parents found out I had Down syndrome before I was born.
- People told them a lot of things I would not be able to do, but they did not listen.
- They wanted me to grow up and live my dreams.
- They made sure I was included and did the same things as other kids.



Who I Am...

I have participated with friends in all kinds of activities.

- I started dance when I was four.
- I spent 16 years in my church choir.
- I took voice and piano lessons.
- I played soccer and t-ball.
- I was an Upward Cheerleader.
- I have been in 23 plays.
- Most of my plays were at Christian Youth Theater (CYT).
- I made lifelong friends at CYT and some of them go to my college.
- I love being on the stage.

***Dancing and acting
are my life.***

Who I Am...

- My kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Brewer. She called us Brewer's Babies.
- When I was in 3rd grade, we moved to Olathe, Kansas. Olathe is my hometown.
- When I started school, I was in the same classes as my friends. I like being in school with my friends.
- I also went to all of my IEP meetings. I didn't stay for long because I do not like to miss class. My parents wanted to be sure everyone was focused on what I needed.



Just Like You

- When I was 13, I was cast in the “Just Like You – Down Syndrome” video.
- This is my friend Savanna. She was in the video with me.
- If you watch the video, you will see that I am Just Like You!
- After the video came out, people wanted me to come and talk about my life.
- That’s when my parents helped me make a Powerpoint to use in my presentations.
- I wanted to name it “I Love My Life.”
- I wanted people to know I have a great life.



Sharing and Teaching Others



- I have shared “I Love My Life” in 13 states.
- It gives me the opportunity to tell others how I:
 - have been included in school, community and church,
 - how I have been a leader and
 - how I have been an advocate and a self-advocate.
- Now, people want me to come talk about being a college student!
- I hope it helps them to include others with disabilities.
- I hope others with disabilities will get to go to college, too.
- This picture is when I spoke to the leadership from schools in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas about how I was included in the same classes with my peers.

Some of My Middle School & High School Classes

- English
- Resource Math
- Parenting and Child Development
- Astronomy
- Biology
- Acting
- US History & American Government
- Clothing Design
- Baking

I liked most of my classes. I do not like math very much. Math is very hard for me.

My favorite class in high school was acting.

I liked English a lot, too.

I liked reading the same books as my friends.

Writing is hard for me, so I need a scribe. I don't really like help.



We learned about Shakespeare in English and Acting.

I love Shakespeare.

I was cast as Strato in my high school's production of "Julius Caesar."

Child Development & Teaching Career

- I took parenting and child development.
 - I had to bring home a baby and take care of her.
 - I named her Sarah Nicole.
 - She cried during dinner.
 - I decided I didn't want to have children.
- I always wanted to be a teacher.
 - My junior year, I was the first student with Down syndrome in my school district's Early Childhood Careers Program for future teachers.
 - I learned a lot, but I decided I did not want to be a teacher.



School Inclusion, Advocacy & Leadership

In high school:

- I was on Student Council for four years.
- I was on honor roll and inducted in the National Honor Society.
- I was an Olathe South Thespian.
- I was elected to the Winter Court my freshman year.
- My junior year, I was elected Prom Princess.
- I won the dance-off the first day of high school!
- Andrea was my peer mentor. She was my friend in Christian Youth Theatre. It made my heart happy to have her there when I started high school.
- I went to four proms my senior year! Did I mention I like to dance?



School Inclusion, Advocacy & Leadership



- In middle school, I stopped getting speech therapy and had a social/leadership/self-advocacy group. I had this kind of group in high school, too.
- My freshman year, our student council hosted a **Take the Pledge to end the R-word campaign**.
- When I was a sophomore, I asked my parents if I could get speech therapy again. I told them people don't always understand what I say. We set it up so I would not miss my classes or clubs. We worked on my monologues and speeches.
- My junior year, our student council made a video about respect and kindness and shared on social media.
- My senior year I volunteered in the counseling office and attendance office.
- I loved greeting people and showing them around our school.
- I think I would be good working for a college that I love.

Personal Advocacy

Sometimes, I need extra help:

- I don't always like people to help me because I want to do things myself.
- Sometimes, it takes me longer to learn something. I need to practice over and over.
- When I was a junior, I told my parents and my case manager, I did not want to leave the classroom to take my tests. I wanted to stay with everyone else.
- Sometimes, I am embarrassed if I don't know something.
- I like it better when my peers help me and not a para.
- My good friends treat me with respect.
- They become advocates for me.

Friend Advocates

- My senior year two of my best friends went with me to Washington DC.
- We met with Senators and Congressman and my friends helped me tell them why they should pass policies that helped people with Down syndrome.



The Best Thing

- One of the best things about high school was serving as the girl's volleyball manager for four years.
- Ms. Fitz was my case manager, teacher and friend.
- She was also the volleyball coach and invited me to be the manager
- I felt like I was part of the team.
- I gave pep talks.
- The team said I was their pep coach.
- They taught me how to serve.
- The last game my senior year, the girls brought me out on the court. They had arranged for me to get to serve in a game.
- I served it over the net.



A Diploma like my Friends

- I graduated from Olathe South High School on May 20, 2018.
- I received a diploma just like my friends.
- My parents said that not everyone with Down syndrome is able to get a diploma. That makes my heart sad.
- I am forever a Falcon!



My Advocacy and Self Advocacy

In 2011, I started going to Washington D.C. with my mom:

We visited Kansas

- Senator Moran
- Senator Roberts
- Congressman Yoder
- Congresswoman Jenkins

I went to Washington D.C. five times.

I had to miss school, but I would give a report in history class when I got back.

I don't like missing school, but I knew the ABLE Act was important for me and my friends to be able to live our dreams.



My Advocacy and Self Advocacy

- I shared my hopes and dreams.
- I told them I wanted to go to college.
- I told them I want a job I love. I might be an actress on Broadway.
- I told them I wanted to get married.
- I told them I wanted to live on my own.
- The first time I met Senator Moran, I told him I wanted to live in a pink house and that's why he should co-sponsor the ABE Act.
- Senator Moran says I'm the best lobbyist in D.C.
- Senator Roberts says I am his top advisor.



My Advocacy and Self Advocacy

I ask them to sponsor the ABLE Act.

Guess what?

They did!

The ABLE Act passed the House and the Senate.

President Obama signed the ABLE Act into law!



My Advocacy and Self Advocacy

- State Representative Erin Davis invited me to come to the Kansas Capitol and talk about the ABLE Act.
- I told them I wanted to live my dreams:
 - Go to college.
 - Get a job I love.
 - Live in a pink house.
 - Get married.
- The group liked my speech and they passed the KS ABLE Act.
- On January 26, 2017, I opened the 1st Kansas ABLE Savings Account.





My Advocacy and Self Advocacy

- Now, I have a new Representative, Sharice Davids.
- I met her over spring break.
- We danced together.
- I told her about my hopes and dreams.
- I told her about college.
- I invited her to sponsor some bills. She sponsored the employment bill so people like me can work in the community and be paid just like our friends.
- She made me think that maybe I can be the first Congresswoman with Down syndrome!

Social Media and Teaching Others to Advocate

- When I speak to groups, my advocacy is a part of what I talk about.
- Every self-advocate has a voice and our voices matter.
- I teach people how to make videos and use social media like Twitter and Instagram to advocate so they can use their voice, too.



Rachel with Congressman Yoder at the Step Up for Down Syndrome walk in Kansas City.

Sometimes we all can become cynical about the legislative process and the ability for real people to be heard in the halls of Congress. On this bipartisan vote, we ensured that Rachel's voice and millions of other families' voices were heard.

Hired!

- When I'm not in school, I work as a hostess at the Olive Garden.
- I like greeting people and making people feel happy.
- I really like people.
- I also like making my own spending money for college.
- I am able to add money to my ABLE Account, too.



I Want to be a College Girl

Since I was a little girl, I dreamed of going to college like my parents and my friends.

I visited college programs at:

- Vanderbilt
- University of Arkansas
- University of Kansas
- Roswell, New Mexico
- University of Missouri at Kansas City
- Missouri State University

There were things I liked about all of them.

I thought I was going to be a Razorback like my parents.



[illegible]

- ## Missouri State Bear Power Acceptance Letter

Missouri State Bear Power Acceptance Letter

I am a College Girl!

- I started in the Bear Power program in January.
- I was one of eight students in the first Bear POWER class.
- We went to the SOAR orientation with the other students starting in January.
- We live in suites in a dorm called Hutchens House.
- I have five Bear Ambassadors (mentors) who help me with:
 - Academics,
 - Social and
 - Health and Wellness





Bear Power- My Dreams, My Classes

- My dream is to be an actress on Broadway, but I might want to work at Disney or a theatre or a nursing home or I might want to be a Congresswoman or work for Missouri State University.
- My parents said I cannot take just acting because I need to take classes that will help me earn money.
- My advisor said theatre classes would help me with anything I do.
- I decided to study acting and hospitality. Both will help me have skills to be successful in a job.

This semester I have:

- Acting (so excited!)
- Hospitality Leadership
- Academic Advising (work on job skills)
- Speech Language Clinic
- Internship in the Service-Learning Dept. We are working on a project to supply healthy food to food trucks.

Bear POWER – Missouri State Activities

- Student Senator for Student Government Association
 - I am brainstorming ideas that will help include Bear Power students on campus.
- Social activities at the Plaster Student Union
 - Bowling, movies, themed parties
 - I won best dressed at the Oscar party.
- The Vine – campus student ministry
- I also go to the Life.Church
- Service Learning
 - Volunteered at the Dream Center and Robberson Elementary teaching children to dance



One of my favorite things

- One of the highlights for me was going to the ADPi formal with my Ambassador Grace and her friends.
- I hope I get to be a part of a sorority.
- My program director and the ADPi's are trying to make it so I can be a member.
- That makes my heart happy.





Rachel's Reflections

- I love being a college girl.
- I really like my classes.
- I like making new friends.
- It is hard to stay organized and understand my syllabus. My ambassadors really help me.
- I am learning a lot about being independent.
- I like to stay up late and watch Netflix and YouTube and eat snacks.
- Sometimes, I have dance parties.
- Almost every night, I make a Sneak Peak SNAP about my day. People love to watch them.

Rachel's Reflections

- I live in a suite. I have a roommate and two other suitemates. They are not in the Bear Power program. They are so nice and help me a lot.
- I cannot drive. Sometimes it's hard to find someone to take me to do things especially on weekends.
- Some weekends I am kind of lonely.
- I love the eating in the cafeteria and socializing with friends.
- It is really hard to watch what I eat because I can eat whatever I want and as much as I want. The pasta and desserts are really good.
- I still do not like to have people help me.
- I am getting better at asking for help when I feel overwhelmed.



Inclusion Matters



- My favorite class my first semester was Public Speaking.
- My professor wanted me to do my final speech on why including everyone is important at Missouri State University.
- My final paragraph said:

“While you are here at Missouri State, there are lots of ways you can get involved.

I think you will agree that getting involved and supporting the Bear POWER program would make a lasting difference for you and others.

People with disabilities should have opportunities like everyone else.

Programs like Bear POWER have been created to give people with and without disabilities opportunities to work and learn together.”

(continued on next slide)



"I have Down syndrome, but I am not Down syndrome.

I am Rachel.

Like most of you, I have hopes and dreams.

The Bear POWER program, Missouri State, my ambassadors, my teachers, and all of you are helping me to live my dream.

Now, I hope you will help others to live their dreams.

That would make my heart happy."



Thank You and Contact Info

Rachel Nicole Mast

Speaker & Self-Advocate

rachelspinkhouse@gmail.com

IG: @rachelspinkhouse

Twitter: @rachelspinkhous

