

Student with Cerebral Palsy Challenges Perspectives

Stung by slights from classmates, teen writes column in response

Associated Press

SPOTSYLVANIA—Chandler Pascale got tired of the nasty comments.

It was bad enough that some students snickered behind his back about the way he walked. But when they yelled at him to get out of the way and called him names like "retard," Chandler did something about it.

The 15-year-old, who moves slower than others because he has cerebral palsy, wrote a column in his school paper.

"Lately, I have heard people laugh at me, mock me, cuss me out [which I may add is an act of the purest cowardice] and plainly insult me right to my face," he wrote. "To stab me in the back when you think I can't hear or see you is like spitting in my face."

The column appeared in the December 2006 issue of the *Lightning Bolt*, Chancellor High School's newspaper.

It generated a lot of feedback, said adviser Tom Panarese.

Several people wrote letters to the editor, and at least one teacher read the column to all her classes.

Ninth-grader Courtnie Wolfe was among those who showed the story to friends and parents.

"I thought it was heartbreaking," Courtnie said, "I didn't realize it was that bad. It must have taken a lot of courage for him to do that."

Editor-in-chief Phylicia Foster said she always considered Chandler, a sophomore, one of the best writers on staff. She has a new respect for him now.

When classmates said they felt bad for Chandler, Phylicia told them not to feel sorry for him, but to treat him like an individual.

That's all he's ever wanted.

Positive attitude

Chandler was born prematurely with a disease that affects the messages the brain sends to the legs.

Still, he moves through Chancellor's hallways at a good clip without a cane or walker.

He had a key to the school elevator but gave it back. He doesn't ask to leave class a few minutes early to beat the rush, and he won't ride the handicapped bus.

"I want to be like everybody else," Chandler said. "That's extremely important."

When the bell rings for a class change, Chandler waits for the rush to die down before he ventures into the hallways. He usually



Chandler Pascale plays chess with freshman Maria Valentin during lunch at their Spotsylvania school. Chandler, who moves slower than others because he has cerebral palsy, wrote a column in his school paper about his disability.

packs lunch because school food doesn't appeal to him and to avoid cafeteria lines.

On a recent day, he barely spoke to anyone during or between classes.

He's a hard worker, said Mary Ann Lopez, who taught Chandler Spanish last year.

Uphill battle

He also has faced more than his share of hardships. He's had several painful operations.

His father abandoned him when he was a baby, and his mother died of a brain aneurysm when he was 7.

Chandler lives with his grandparents, Joe and Alice Pascale, in Salem Fields.

Since the column, he believes things have gotten better and people have become more understanding.

"They don't ignore me," Chandler said. "They just leave me be."

That's the way he likes it.

English teacher Lisa McCrary read Chandler's column to her classes and said her students connected to him—for an instant.

"But it's faded," she said, sadly. "I think it did touch them for a moment, a high-school moment."

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