**To See, or Not to See**

**By Arielle Silverman**

From the editor:

Arielle Silverman is an activist and social scientist who is passionate about improving public understandings of disability. She obtained a Ph.D. in social psychology, after which she went on to found Disability Wisdom Consulting, and publish several notable research articles relating to disability. Today, she works closely with students and parents to instill a positive philosophy of blindness, and disability as a whole.

In the following post, she wrestles with the difficult question many of us have spent sleepless nights considering: if we could have sight, would we choose to have it?

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[www.disabilitywisdom.com](http://www.disabilitywisdom.com)

I have been blind since the day I was born. When people first meet me, they often wonder if I would want a “cure” for my blindness. So, would my life be improved if I could see?

Sure, seeing sounds like fun, just like the ability to fly, an invisibility cloak, X-ray vision or the ability to read minds. All are things we might idly dream about during life’s pauses before we get back to its regularly scheduled programming. For me, sight is as exciting and mystical as any of these other superpowers, but having never had it before, it is something relegated to my imagination.  In the meantime, I have found that most activities that the average person does visually, I can participate quite ably using my other senses, sometimes with the help of assistive devices. And the few things in which I cannot participate, I never cared much for anyway.

There were times in my past when I fantasized about seeing for more than a few seconds. Usually the fantasy would go, “If I could see, I’d be friends with those popular girls at school” or “If I could see, that cute boy would invite me to the dance”. I wanted sight not for its own sake, but because I thought it was a means to inclusion and acceptance, or to an easier life.

A few years ago, as my husband and I prepared to move across the country for my new job, we were getting rid of some old linens. I decided to send an old comforter of ours to my best friend “KJ” who lived out of state. As I walked to the post office with the comforter tucked under one arm and my cane in the other, I struggled to locate the post office door. I knew I was near it, but could not find the entrance. I kept searching for the right sidewalk, readjusting the heavy comforter which was making my arm ache.

“I wish I could see,” I thought. “Then I’d be able to drive to the post office, or at least, I could find the damn door!”

And then, the next thought made me freeze in place for a moment, the comforter spilling out of my hand.

“If I could see,” I realized, “I wouldn’t be making this errand at all. Because I never would have met KJ.”

You see, I met KJ when we were both at a summer camp for blind kids back in Arizona, when we were 13. We went to different schools, and without blindness in common, it’s unlikely we would have met. I could have missed out on lots of hilarious teenage conversations conducted in our secret braille-speak (that’s  [B R L](http://www.brl.org/refdesk/conlookup.html), for the uninitiated). I might never have enjoyed nearly twenty years of mutual, unconditional friendship that was, at times, one of the only constants in an ever-changing young adult life.



Nor, if I could see, would I have marched through the streets of Atlanta one summer morning ten years ago with more than a thousand other members of the [National Federation of the Blind](http://www.nfb.org/). I wouldn’t have sat listening to Congressman John Lewis tell us to “get in good trouble, necessary trouble” to bring equal opportunity to the blind. I wouldn’t have had that infectious sense of being a part of something necessary and something big.

So you might say, “Well, if you could see, there would have been other best friends. And there would have been other chances to make a difference”. And you are probably right. But, this belies the fact that the speculation on a life without disability is an exercise in futility. We really cannot predict how our lives would have been shaped differently, for better or worse, if we had or didn’t have a disability, nor if we had been born a different gender or to a different family. We can only recognize the good we have, improve what we can change, and accept what we cannot.

Certainly, having a disability is a pain at times. Sometimes physically, and when it is used as a reason for exclusion, sometimes emotionally. But over the years I have discovered the value of being a part of the disability community, the friendships, the special cultural connections, the mentors, and the chance to be part of such a dynamic collective. I don’t think I would trade that in for super eyeballs.