

The Key Between E and T Jonah H.

I had a speech impediment up until my teens. It wasn't easy twisting what I wanted to say so people could acknowledge me. My speaking was so bad that I sobbed to my mom and dad. Classmates in school would laugh when I spoke.

I attempted to adapt and laugh with them, but I hid pain about my speech deep down. I didn't like feeling like I wasted people's time when I spoke, as people constantly said, "Say that again." I would say what I needed to say again and again. They'd apologize, walk away and leave me with my own thoughts.

It was often lonely.

I went to speech pathologists in the hopes of change, but changing one's speech isn't as easy as changing a lightbulb. It felt impossible. They shoved popsicle sticks in my mouth and had me stick out my tongue as I spoke. Nothing seemed to change, and so I stopped going to speech pathology. I decided maybe it wasn't meant to be. I thought that I'd be stuck with this impediment and maybe it was just a piece of me.

Until I met a lady named Kate.

Kate was also a speech pathologist my mom found. She knew how I felt. She didn't assume I could change in a day. We took days.

I almost gave up, but I was advancing so didn't. I pushed myself until my tongue felt stiff. I kept going because I didn't want to be laughed at. I didn't want to have to say something eight times until people knew what I meant. I wanted to change, and I finally felt some when I said, "PYRAMID."

I could say the letter R.

I spent most of my life unable to pronounce R's. Much like this essay, up until I wrote "PYRAMID," I hadn't typed the letter R. I had to labor over word choice and hunt for synonyms, just as the younger me did.

I didn't need speech pathology anymore. I no longer felt alone.

My journey of not being able to say R's has meant a lot more to me than just working to fix a speech impediment. It made me wiser. As I go through life dealing with various struggles, I know that my effort, persistence and finding the right resources will bring me closer to where I want to be. I might feel a little damaged doing the work, but I'll be OK.

In my earlier years, I feared change. I thought it was out of reach or nearly impossible. Now, as I grow up and my whole life is changing in front of me, I realize that I'm ready for it. Even when life shoves me around and tests my strength, I know I can meet the challenges that await.

Climbing a pyramid in speech pathology helped with that.