

Hi, my name is Helon Dobbins and I'm currently a junior at Young Harris College up in the beautiful North Georgia mountains. I'm studying English and History and I plan to go on to grad school after graduating next year (wow!). Currently, I just turned 21 this past summer. I had a stroke on the right side of my brain while in utero two months before I was born and as a result I have hemiparesis that affects my left arm and leg (because the brain is confusing and likes to do things like that) and a visual impairment.

Like I mentioned, I'm a junior at YHC so obviously I survived the transition from high school and living at home with my parents to living by myself and going to college two hours from home and I promise you can survive it too, whether you're a parent or a student getting ready to head off to college. For me personally, the transition was smooth because from the time I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade my mom would have me sit in on my 504 coordination meetings and things so I would be aware of what sorts of accommodations I had and how to use them.

Of course, back then at the age of 13 I wasn't too keen on the idea of having attention drawn to myself because I needed special accommodations so I tried to avoid using them and I'm not going to lie and say I didn't struggle without them because the truth is I did. I was too proud back then to realize that the things put in place for me to help me out really would help and I didn't come to that realization until late high school.

When I discovered my accommodations, which include note takers and extra time on tests if I need, did help that was when I also realized in order for them to keep helping I needed to self-advocate. My mom and dad had always tried to teach me that self-advocating was the key to getting what I needed in a world catered to the able bodied populous. They also tried to get me to understand that when I got to college it would be my job to make sure I had everything I needed to succeed in this new chapter of my life, a challenge I was now ready to rise to.

Two years after I arrived in the "Enchanted Valley", I'm on track to graduate with a B.A. in English in May of 2018. To all the parents of special kids (because I personally loathe the term "special needs") I'd advise you to start preparing your child for this huge transition as soon as you feel like they're ready and do it in small steps to finally work up to a point where they feel comfortable handling things on their own with limited help. I'm nowhere near saying I never need help because I do, but it gives me immense satisfaction knowing I can get whatever I need on my own.

For teens making the transition as I have I'd say please pay attention in the 504 meetings no matter how boring they seem or how much you don't want to. I get thinking that having a 504 is uncool because it singles you out from your peers in high school but when you get to college it won't matter what others think. It only matters what you think is best for you and that's pretty amazing to be able to stand up and advocate for your own needs.