

Message to Patrick

from Carla MacInnis Rockwell, a 44 year old woman with cerebral palsy,
to Patrick, and 8 year old boy with cerebral palsy

Hi Patrick,

My name is Carla and I was 8 once ... a long time ago. I also have cerebral palsy. Not the same type as you, though. I have spastic diplegic cerebral palsy. That affects the way my legs move.

Your mom is right. CP happens in the brain. It's sorta like a big bruise that didn't go away. But at least we can walk, right? The summer of 1963, when I was 8 I had an operation on my knees to help me walk better. I used to wear huge heavy metal braces up to my waist with lots of straps. And the ugliest boots you ever saw. That was from age about 2 to 8. From age 8 to age 12, I wore ugly below the knee braces, and even uglier boots! From 12 til 28, I wore no braces. Yea! And regular shoes!! For a brief time when I was an adult, I wore braces again, but they were so awkward, I kept tripping over my feet. Guess where those braces are? ... In my closet!!

When I was growing up, I had 1 younger brother, 4 older brothers, and 2 older sisters ... big family. I learned how climb trees, ride a two-wheeler. Heck, I was even on ice skates. What a sight that was! I used to ask my parents why I had cp, just like you're asking your Mom. You know and I know that cp happens when a baby is born too soon, or its brain doesn't get enough oxygen. Stuff like that. But you know what, I like to think I have cp for another reason. That's so I can show people what I can do without two typical legs.

As you get older, Patrick, you will realize that it's what sits on top of your shoulders that is the most important thing. Develop your mind as much as you can. But don't forget all those exercises and things to make your legs and the rest of your body strong. Having cerebral palsy doesn't make you who you are, or who you will become. It's just a tiny part of you. Being kind to others, and understanding and gentle are far more valuable than running marathons will ever be. But ... you can still work hard so you might one day run a marathon. Anything is possible!!

Never forget, Patrick, there are lots of things you can do that don't need legs. A president of your United States had polio and ran your country during a period of war. A woman who could not hear or speak became a great writer and scholar, using sign language to communicate.

I am 44 years old, and I am a writer. Perhaps your mother could read some of the stories my terriers, Mr. Jake and Mr. Alex wrote. I hope you like them. I use the voice of my dogs to explain about disability. Funny how animals know I'm "different" in the way I move. Bet they are with you, too.

Asking questions about cp is a good thing, Patrick. Learn all you can about it, so that when people ask you, you can tell them. And don't be worried if people stare at you when you walk. Let them know that having cp isn't really such a big thing after all. You can be sort of like a teacher, telling people about what cp is and all about what you can and can't do ... yet. Hope you and your family have a great summer. And if you know how to swim, get lots of that fun stuff in. It will make your legs and stomach very strong!

Cheers!

Carla MacInnis Rockwell