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# Dear Christopher

Abby Shelley  
*Providence College*

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Abby Shelley

Dear Christopher,

From day one we are told that we are special and unique, that our God-given talents and gifts make us one of a kind, and that our differences should be celebrated. Our differences are what make the world work – so why are we so obsessed with being “normal?” As humans, we experience the constant struggle of trying to blend uniqueness and normalcy. We tirelessly attempt to fit in and stand out at the same time. But for you, there is no blending. I admire that.

I have learned that your “normal” is your difference, and it should be celebrated. Your obsession with complicated calculus problems, your groaning, your dislike of the colors yellow and brown, and your very literal way of looking at the world are normal for you. In the story, and in real life, some people find others like you to be strange, and they do not understand that “normalcy” has a different definition for everyone. Although it sounds ironic, your differences make you a lot like me.

I was able to relate to your experience in the train and subway stations very well. You panicked at the endless exits, entrances, maps, noises, stairways, and people. I would panic as well. It is scary to not know exactly where you are going or how you will get there. I would probably handle the situation in a similar way that you did. I would think through each step of the process, ask for help, and give myself miniature goals to reach along the way. I would eventually reach my destination, just as you did.

I was also able to relate to your quirks. Although we do not have the same quirks, we both have them. You did not like yellow and brown, and seeing five red cars in a row meant it would be a “Super Good Day.” For me, I always eat cereal for breakfast and I need my iced coffee, or else it may just be a “Black Day” (24). While more people may be able to relate to my quirks than yours, the very existence of our special differences is what makes us the same.

I spend the better part of the summer working with a person similar to you. Actually, it is my job. I am paid to babysit an eight-year-old autistic boy, and to watch him at a summer camp. He has trouble communicating and taking social cues, but he is a very bright and special boy, like you. Reading your story gave me useful insight into how Brian’s brain works. It is a constant mystery trying to figure out what he is trying to tell me, what he is feeling, and what he is thinking about everything happening around him. I have a better understanding of Brian now. He truly interests me with the way he communicates, and there is nothing more rewarding than when he tells me something with his eyes locked into mine, or when he gives me a big hug and a kiss. It shows me that he really does understand everything that is happening around him, and that he loves others in the same way I do. You have shown me that Brian and I are very similar. We may react differently to situations, but our emotions are the same. We cry when we are sad, laugh when we are happy, and hug when we love.

I would like to thank you for showing me that there is really no such thing as “normalcy” because everyone’s normal is different. But the simple existence of our differences brings us together. We may not show them in the same ways, but our emotions are universal. Autism is not strange. In fact, it is very normal just because it is different. You have helped me to understand Brian’s quirks and relate them to my own. You and Brian are gifts and you should be celebrated. You both have something unique and priceless to offer the world. You show me that there is no need to blend uniqueness and “normalcy.”

You embrace your quirks, you are pure of heart, and you know that underneath our differences we are all the same. Through your written words, autism speaks. Both you and Brian deserve the best.

From, Abby.