

Chasing Dreams, Breaking Barriers

By Isaac Crockett

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Interviewee: Becci Chase

“Just because something is difficult doesn’t mean you can’t do it. Because it’s difficult, that’s the reason to do it.” This inspirational quote is from Rebecca Chase, my middle school math teacher, who has experienced as many, if not more, obstacles than all of us. From being severely dyslexic to having struggles through college, she has quite a life story to tell. Has any of this stopped her? Not at all. Not only is she an amazing math teacher, but an amazing friend as well.

Growing up with dyslexia is hard by itself. Trying to pursue a passion and understand mathematics is even harder. As Becci put it: “I was really insecure and shy as a kid. And being in a class with other students who always knew the answer and always quickly got it did not help. I had always felt like the dumb one, the one that never knew the answer.” But what she said next surely surprised me. “Now that I am older, I see benefit in this. What, at the time, seemed like the least preferable thing in the world, looking back at it now, I see that it has made me what I am today; a problem solver.” As Dr. Seuss once said: “Sometimes you will never know the value of something, until it becomes a memory.”

Later in life is sometimes when the realization of the usefulness of a subject, such as math, occurs. For Becci, this was in high school. She told me: “The algebraic thinking was really powerful for me. That’s the moment where it’s like, wait a minute. I can do this. High school was the moment where things really clicked for me.” Once she had this realization, math was more than just a subject for her, it was a way of seeing the world. As she put it: “Math has made me see the world in such a different way. Math has given me more clarity. It lets me see. It actually lets me see emotional relationships more as a math problem to solve. Less about trying to back away from the feelings and more about dealing with it as a problem... So, for me, math has really taken a forefront in the way I look at the rest of everything in my life.” Though, at first, Becci hated math, once she developed appreciation for it, it had a profound impact on her life.

Once she graduated high school, Becci went on to college. It came as a shock to me that she didn’t go to college to become a math teacher originally. Her intent was to become an architect, but she ended up not enjoying college, and dropped out. She reflected that her insecurities about mathematics played a crucial role in her dropping out. She said: “I fear mathematics is a big part of the reason that I didn’t try for more challenging career opportunities. And looking back at my life, it broke my heart in a way, that insecurity about something that was one of my most liked things was the cause of me not pursuing it further. I didn’t want any other kids to have to go through that.” In a way, that regret inspired her to go back to school in later life to become, perhaps, something much better; a middle school math teacher.

At the end of our interview, I asked her one more question: How had she seen the world of mathematics change throughout her life? How she responded to this was not only inspirational, but quite thought provoking. “I think the challenges that women face in mathematics are lessening, but I don’t think they’re gone. When I was born and up until the time I was about five

or six years old, a woman couldn't even get a credit card without her husband's permission or signature. I think we've come a long way in a very short period of time, but I think we still have much further to go. It is a stigma that hasn't been erased and you see it all the time. I think it's the silent barrier that prevents women from getting a career in mathematics. So many barriers have been broken, but there are still many to go.”

My conversation with Mrs. Chase made me recognize even more that, no matter how we look, we are all the same on the inside. We are all of the same great worth. We are all humans with immense potential. Though it's taking us a while to realize this, it is, and always has been the truth. As she reflected: “We need to stop looking at the outside so much because it's what's on the inside that is so much more important.” We may still be at a point at which some struggle more than others, but we can all overcome our challenges. “Just because something is difficult doesn't mean you can't do it. Because it's difficult, that's the reason to do it.”

About The Author:

My name is Isaac Crockett, and I am a sixth grader at the Lyme School. I enjoy writing, reading, and especially math (with Mrs. Chase). Math is one of my favorite subjects because it stretches my mind in understanding new concepts and motivates me to keep working until I get the answer to challenging problems. (And because I have such an awesome teacher!) In my free time, I enjoy biking, skiing, and playing baseball.