

## Rise of Ability in Disability in Sharon Draper's *Out of My Mind*

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### Abstract

Rise of Ability in Disability deals with the story of a disabled girl Melody, affected by Cerebral Palsy who overcomes her life. Cerebral Palsy is a set of neurological conditions that affect movement of childhood disability. The paper focuses on how the girl tries to come up with her unhealthy life into successful like a normal life. The story of *Out of My Mind* has the potential to really move young readers. It help them to look at their life with more appreciative light.

**KEYWORDS:** Disability, life, Cerebral Palsy, Ability

*Out of My Mind* reveals the story of an eleven year old girl Melody, who was born with Cerebral Palsy. The story was written by an American novelist Sharon Millis Draper, who won The Margaret A. Edward's Award from American Library Association in 2015. Draper's daughter was affected with Cerebral Palsy, a disease in which the main character Melody Brooks in *Out of My Mind* lives with. The story was written from the views of Melody, the protagonist of the story.

Cerebral palsy is a term used to describe a set of neurological conditions that affect movement. It is the most common form of childhood disability. The cerebrum is also responsible for memory, ability to learn and communication skills. This is why some people with Cerebral Palsy have problems with communication and learning. Cerebrum damage can sometimes affect visions and hearing.

Melody Brooks is a girl who was born with Cerebral Palsy. She never utters a word in her life, but has much to say. Her parents are one of the best gifts in her life, who done all the possibilities to make her to lead a normal happy life. When she was five, her parents admit her in Spaulding Street Elementary school. In school, she was quite frustrated for learning the same things everyday. At the same time, her neighbour Mrs. V. a kind woman encourages and pushes Melody to do the best to become self-sufficient. In the meantime, Melody feels very happy when her mother delivered a healthy baby girl and she was happy that the baby was normal unlike her. When Melody enters fifth grade she got a device which can help her to communicate with others. In schools many believes that Melody cannot participate in any competition but she broke all their believes and started to walk through the light of success. She just broke "dis" in disability and proves her ability to the normal healthy people.

"The measures of a man, or woman, is not so much what they have accomplished, though that has weight. If often is much more though what that man or woman has overcome to accomplish what they have" (Leif Gregersen, Through the withering storm).

Draper created Melody not as a portrait of her daughter, but as a character who is truly her own being. Melody has spunk and determination and a great sense of humour. She has dreams and hopes like everyone has. The human race needs a mentor, a life

coach, someone to motivate on to success. Melody become so enthusiastic and so powerful in the hands of Mrs. V. Some parents hesitate to do something for their disabled kids in certain occasions but in the novel, Mrs. V. taken away the obstacles and the struggles which Melody supposed to face. She taught and guide melody to walk on the path of confident because Mrs. V. happened to see Melody's potential. Whenever Melody was avoided by her own classmates and her teachers she never allows her to lose her confidence and the energy of truth. Even though she was affected by Cerebral Palsy she found herself with good human quality throughout the novel. Her attitude towards the other kids in her school make harmony but the attitude of the other kids towards Melody made everyone to hate people, who are leading a happy normal life.

“When u focus on someone’s disability you'll overlook their abilities beauty and uniqueness. Once you learn to accept and love them for who they are you subconsciously learn to love yourself unconditionally” (Yvonne Preire, *The Day my Soul Cried: A Memoir*).

Kids with disabilities are just like their peer groups. They had to be accepted to have friends in the social life of the school. Melody understands the pain of being ignored and overlooks. Draper has given her a voice to show her humanity. Melody and the author Draper represent all those young people who have feelings as well as dreams.

The novel *Out of My Mind* addresses a number of issues, such as social bias against disabled individuals, medical difficulties as well as physical obstacles like stairs and bathrooms and eating. But Melody would not like to be the representative of any group. Melody earns to be recognized and appreciated as an individual.

Life is not an easy going one, it’s a mixture of joys and sorrows, friendship and enmity, success and failure. The way everyone look at the life is very very important. Many people never understand that there is a life after a great tragedy or failure. Everything depends upon the way everyone look at the life. In the novel, the main character Melody happened to meet a lot of struggles and failures, but she never let them attack her. She change all the obstacles and the challenges as a stepping stone of success. Draper was fiercely adamant that nobody feel sorry for Melody. Draper wanted her to be accepted as a character and as a person, not as a representative for the people with disabilities. Thus she proved herself a highly talented girl.

“Ooh, here's the part about you. Listen to this! ' One outstanding member of the Spaulding team is Melody Brooks, an eleven-year-old who has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. In spite of her physical challenges, Melody’s quick and capable mental abilities were able to shine as she led her team to victory” (*Out of My Mind*, 241).

The story of Melody is fictional, but is based on the reality of thousands of intelligent children and adults who are trapped inside the uncooperative bodies. When a fictional character is created the author has the power to allow any dreams to be achieved and allow triumphs as well as tragedies to occur. Melody's race is not given important here because her difficulties are superseded for any racial or cultural problems she might encounter. She is purposely made generic because Draper wanted her reader to see her as an unique individual that could be anyone’s child. Actually when Melody gifted a Medi – Talker the author discover that it comes in many languages so, she realizes that children like Melody exist all over the world.

Melody's character in *Out Of My Mind* is a survivor in spite of all serious difficulties and

challenges. Actually Melody's strength and the ability to do everything better comes from love. Even though she is frustrated, silenced and unable to do the things dreamt to do she has an unbelievably positive spirit. Love gave her the whole strength to make it tough each day and to look forward to the future with lots of hope.

Melody just needs a friend for her to speak and play like the remaining kids in her school. She was overwhelmed with happiness when she got a new and good friend called Rose. At the same time it was very painful to her, when the kids like Claire and Molly irritate and bully her. It devastate her when she realizes she'd been left behind on purpose. The attitude and the portrayal of the children and the teachers in the story gave a realistic portrayal. The reality of how people treat the disabled in social situations from the people in the mall to the doctors who should know better. Human beings are often unkind and sometimes rude.

Melody can 'hear' and 'taste' music. The artistic sense of her shows a good understanding of art and music to create her own ideas and pictures. Melody's love for music boost her when her life filled with pressure. Music gave her expressions in a world where she is unable to express almost everything.

Ordinary humans hate themselves when they happened to face any failure in their life. Some express their grieves through tears and some by anger and some by shouting at others . There are many ways to express and control our sadness. But in the novel, *Out of My Mind* Melody's mind broken into pieces for the unkind and rude attitude of the kids and the teachers in her school. When the management arranged a trip to Washington D.C for the national competition, they failed to take Melody with them. They purposely left Melody in the airport itself, this create a bad image on them. Thus Melody expresses her grieves as:

*Why didn't they call me?*

*Why didn't they tell me about breakfast?*

*Why can't I be like everybody else?*

I finally cry into my pillow. Butterscotch nudges me with her nose, but I ignore her.

*They left me on purpose! How could they do that? They left me on purpose! (Out of My Mind, 262)*

The cover page of the novel shows a goldfish jumping out of a glass bowl. The picture on the cover represents Melody trying to jump out of her mind in order to see the world without having any kind of trouble. She hated when her head was stuck so long. The cover of the book is a symbolical representation of Melody and her mind. Goldfish represent herself (Melody) and bowl represent her mind. There is also a scene in the book where Melody watches her pet goldfish jump out of the bowl for freedom. The cover of the book is both literal and a metaphor for how Melody feels trapped in her mind. It has been written in the novel as:

“But suddenly, for no reason I could figure, Ollie dove down to the bottom of his bowl, rushed to the top, and hurled himself right out of the bowl. He landed on the table. He gasped and flopped, and I'm sure he was surprised he couldn't breathe. His eyes bulged, and the gills on his side pulsed with effort” ( *Out of My Mind*, 62-63 ).

Throughout the novel the readers can identify that Melody used to call all the characters except her family members and friends with the first letter of their names. This

shows that though some of them hated her but she made all of them close to her mind. Thus the paper shows that being a disabled girl, Melody did her best although her life is filled with struggles and troubles. Finally she succeeded in her life too. Likewise normal humans have the full strength and ability to do everything. To achieve everything they need self motivation and positive spirit towards life. These elements helps the humans to shine all over the world. All are equal in the eyes of God so just treat everyone with good and kind heart. Benjamin Snow in his essay *Attitudes About People With Disabilities*, expressed his views as: “ Disability is natural. We must stop believing that disabilities keep a person from doing something. Because that’s not true . . . Having disability doesn’t stop me from doing anything.”

#### **References**

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‘Kirkus Starred Review: OUT OF MY MIND’ (<http://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/sharon-m-dreper/out-of-my-mind/>)