**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.**

“Say sus, rus, bus.”

Words of encouragement linger inside my ears. As I attempt to articulate those words, I am met with a lisp. The smile my speech therapist gives me and the repeated words of ‘try again’ and ‘it’s alright’ are forever implanted in my memory. There were countless trips to her office which is just a couple of streets away from my elementary school.

Ever since I started talking, I made sure everyone heard me. I could talk about everything; everyone thought it was a delight to see a child speaking her mind. No one noticed the lisp; it was common for children to have them. It wasn’t until I was six that I realized the flaw in my voice. Words with ‘s’ in them don’t seem to roll out my tongue that easily. ‘Bus’ and ‘nervous’ became ‘buth’ and ‘nervouth’. My mom took me to a speech therapist who would take me through numerous exercises -- reciting tongue twisters, consonants and vowels.

I was too young to understand the impact this issue would have on my life. I never thought of my indifference in speech until a classmate of mine commented on my lisp. I was eight, and I could still remember the humiliation I felt. I slowly became the quiet kid at class; only listening to others talk, never speaking up. Presentations in class and meeting new people were nerve-wrecking. There was a time where I lied to my mom about being sick to skip a presentation.

I carried on with my speech therapy even though I felt a sense of uncertainty because I didn’t know if my lisp was going away. I realize that if I carry on with this mindset, the lisp would slowly destroy my self-worth. I was determined to get rid and come to terms with it. But I didn’t know how to do so.

In 9th grade, a friend told me that there were sign-ups for the debate club at school. I was fascinated by my upperclassmen who were able to travel the world by joining debate competitions. Debate definitely interested me but I was hesitant. What if I stutter? What if my lisp comes back? I ended up writing my name on the list as I felt drawn to this foreign activity.

During my first competition, I was petrified. Faces of other competitors intimidated me. They were prepared and experience; I wasn’t. My heart was beating fast, my lips were quivering and my feet were trembling. I could feel sweat trailing down my face. Even though I was nervous, I felt that I had to prove something. I wanted to redeem myself for all those years I wasn’t able to speak up. I didn’t win but as I sat down on my seat, I knew I wanted to give it another try. I realize that I was capable of using my voice, regardless of the fact that I had a lisp.

I continued on joining competitions in the next few years. I slowly started to get better through afternoons of practice and discussions with my friends. I became addicted to the euphoria of public speaking. Of course, my lisp was still evident and I wasn’t free of stutters. I was still the nervous girl I was years ago.

I am no longer the insecure girl I was years ago. With my lisp, I learned that my self-worth comes from myself– not what others say about me. My lisp started off to be a hindrance, but now it gave me the motivation to continually speak up. Now, I learn to use my voice for things other than debate. I am able to use my voice during my time at the student council and journalism club. More importantly, I am able to use my voice to advocate for my thoughts and beliefs.