



# First Person: VIRGINIA

## One Day at a Time

As early as the fourth grade, I became aware that I probably didn't see as well as others in the dark. But not being able to see at night just seemed like it should be normal.

However, in seventh grade, in anticipation of our Washington, DC, school trip, I was a little worried about the whole "not being able to see at night" thing, so my mom and I went to talk to the school nurse who was also going on the trip. She checked my eyes and said that I just needed glasses (not that that had anything to do with not being able to see in the dark). My mom made an appointment with the eye doctor, and he also said that I needed glasses. My dad told the doctor that the main reason for the appointment was to find out why I couldn't see in the dark. He examined my eyes again and said that I would have to take some additional tests at Emory University.

The summer before eighth grade, I discovered the real reason I couldn't see in the dark: I had Usher syndrome. I couldn't believe it, and I didn't want to believe it. I didn't want to lose a sense that was so very precious

to me. I used my sight not only to get around but also, because of my hearing loss, for lipreading. At such a young age, I was worried about being "normal." For the next two years, I was in a state of denial. I refused to talk about my condition, and if I was forced to talk about it, it only brought pain. How could I, a person who relied so heavily on sight to communicate, lose my vision? It just didn't seem fair, and I felt so alone. No one knew or understood what I was going through. Of course, I had my family and friends supporting me, but I still felt alone.

It wasn't until I was 15 that I began to accept my deaf-blindness. Now I'm OK with my disability. While I have learned to accept my vision as something that has shaped who I am today, I am in no way completely cured of all my emotional pain. No way! I still struggle with adjusting to the changes in my vision. I worry about completing college and what the future holds. There are some days when I get so frustrated that all I want to do is run away and scream. It's hard, but all I can do is take one day at a time and trust that God has an awesome plan for my life.

—Anonymous