

## **AF29703**

### **“I Could”**

Last Monday I was cleaning the bottom drawer of my dresser. I had been putting off this simple yet daunting task for the last five years or so and finally decided it was time. At the very last of the strata of stuff I found an old copy of a little yellow book that once meant the world to me. As I opened the well-worn cover and began reading, I was instantly young again. Every emotion and feeling came flooding back. I could smell the Crayolas and feel the itchy uniform shirts they made us wear in grade school. The strongest memories that I felt, as my eyes passed over the faded but still vibrant pages, were the memories of the euphoric joy of accomplishment. Not all the memories were good. There was much pain attached to that book, to that clown and to that “Little Engine That Could.”

The story of this significant book begins a few years prior to my first reading it. During my early childhood I was diagnosed with a learning disability called dyslexia, a reading disorder. In fact the doctors who examined me were intrigued by my case. They told my mother this was one of the purest and most severe cases they had ever seen. I began therapy right away to help me keep up with my class at school. It wasn't long until it was extremely apparent that I was different.

Try to see things as I saw them. Books were things other people could read. In my mind I was simply not capable. I couldn't retain the meaning of letters and words to save my life. While the other kids were being rewarded for their literary achievements, I was all but excluded. Too young to be angry with God or my parents

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for this incompetency, I was simply frustrated at my brain. Reading was really hard and reading aloud was, in my mind, an impossibility for me.

My parents decided to hold me back in the first grade hoping that round two might stick. This is where I was introduced to a little train engine with similar difficulties. When the book “The Little Engine That Could” by Watty Piper was read aloud by the teacher and I heard it for the first time, I fell in love. Here was a book that made sense. It was about struggle; it was about me!

For those of you who are not familiar with the story, the book is about a small train engine that is faced with a seemingly impossible task, but through hard work dedication and perseverance, he finds victory. The engine repeats the phrase “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can” until he accomplishes his mission and makes it over the mountain.

“Wow!” I thought to myself “This engine is like me. Maybe I can do this; maybe I can read like everybody else.” I got a hold of the book and didn’t let go. I studied the pages for weeks. I asked my parents, teachers and even friends about the words I couldn’t figure out. I probably even asked them about the same words over and over. They were patient with me. The pictures of the struggling engine gave me hope. This was my book that I was reading. I know that seems apparent but to a child who struggled with his reading abilities and books altogether, the possession and enjoyment of both was something huge.

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My mother tells me I took the book everywhere and she was surprised that it always came back with me. Some of this tale has been related to me by others but there is one day I remember as if it were yesterday.

After about three months of carrying the book around I felt that it was time. I remember sitting in the back seat of the family van, bound for Grandma's. The hour-long journey gave me enough time to go over it a few more time before my big performance. That is what it was. My family was going there for Easter dinner. I was going down to perform; read my book out loud to Grandma. That day I would complete my ascent to the top of the mountain. The feeling of accomplishment is one that I cannot say I have since experienced. Not like that. Not to that extent. Even though most of the book I had pretty much memorized by that point, the moment was wonderful. The view from the top of that mountain was amazing! I could, even at that age, see my future as being interesting and exciting rather than overwhelming and scary.

From the perch of my accomplishment many other mountains became visible. The road to literacy would be long and rough but that was okay. That Easter I realized I was able to face adversity and overcome.

It had been a long time since I thought about that younger me. I have come a long way since then I thought. I closed the book and placed it back at the bottom of the drawer. I am now a media director at a large church and operate my own small design firm. I am going to be graduating college here in a few weeks. This story is not over, I have much to achieve and I am still at the very beginning. I have hopes of

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attending UC Berkley to do my graduate work for my MBA. I know that this is possible and there is no mountain too large and there is nothing I can't do. It took a lot of time and energy from family, friends and a little train engine to help me realize that "I could."