

I am Superman. I am Clark Kent.

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Kids often see things in black and white. When I was young, I was definitely not an exception. Most kids hated fruits and veggies, but me? I hated Superman. Y'know, the most well known and well loved superhero in history, yeah, that one. I hated him to my core. Of course, I had a reason.

At that point, my life had been anything but stereotypical. As someone with a disability, alongside Little League and Cheer practice, I also went to Physical Therapy weekly. To be expected, I didn't like it. Being so young, I didn't see the benefit. I didn't see how the difficult exercises were strengthening my muscles. The worst of these exercises was called "Supermans". Simply put, I would hold my arms out straight, lift my chest up, and hold it for thirty seconds to a minute. Due to my lack of core strength, it tended to look more like I was flailing rather than flying. If the titular hero had looked anything like me, I'm sure that the citizens of Metropolis would have stripped that S from his chest themselves.

For this reason, I hated Superman with a passion Lex Luthor could only hope to have. That hatred would continue for years. Then, one night, I would come across the 1978 Superman movie. This would be the first time I would be introduced to the character of Clark Kent.

Instead of the invincible, infallible Man of Steel, he was nothing more than a well-meaning, mild mannered reporter. While still standing for truth and justice, he was also awkward and clumsy. In the third act of the film, we see Superman lose. Specifically, he loses his one true love, Lois Lane. It was then that I watched a god weep and Superman and Clark Kent became one in the same for me.

This movie would be part of the reason my love for superheroes spawned and, as time went on, I would begin to have a deeper understanding of why these stories meant so much to me.

You see, where Clark Kent crash landed in the middle of a cornfield in Kansas, I was born in a small town in Oklahoma. It's safe to assume that in places like these differences were mostly frowned upon. Of course, where the Kryptonian got superspeed, I got a wheelchair. Growing up, the wheelchair would be my own S. Within my bubble, I was well known and seen as an "inspiration." I was called it for playing sports, walking with crutches, riding a horse, and yes, even for going to college. It leads me to wonder: Does Superman ever want to just be known as Clark Kent?

I know that for myself, I want to be known as a nerd, a college student, a bowling enthusiast, rather than just someone in a wheelchair. Maybe the Last Son of Krypton wants to be known for his pieces in the Daily Planet.

It's not that I am ashamed of being disabled. I love being disabled. The same way that Clark loves being Superman. But, that's not all I am. For it to be seen as such can be exhausting. Clark Kent probably has a favorite color, favorite food, favorite holiday, a favorite childhood memory. Does he like to sleep in on Sunday mornings? I have answers to each of these questions, as I'm sure Mr. Kent would. But, it has often proved difficult to get around to these things as strangers and peers alike have tended to see my own S before anything else.

Being seen as an "inspiration" for the smallest of things proved to have quite a detriment on my mental health. For years, I believed I had to be invincible. I had to put on a mask that portrayed pure strength and optimism. Clark Kent was pushed aside in order to make those around me happy, to make them proud. Long forgotten were the things that I wanted, the things I

was comfortable with. There was Superman Bailey – the one who had their life together, was a good student, would have a safe job, and would do what was expected of them. Then, there was Clark Kent Bailey – the depressed and anxious mess, who hated school and loved Netflix, and who longed to be a writer.