

My Name is Derek Shane Mabe

By Derek Shane Mabe

Student – Grand Prize Winner

Volunteer High School

Hawkins County



My name is Derek Shane Mabe. I am going to tell you about the teacher who made a difference in my life. First of all my teacher's name is Mrs. Christy Thacker. She teaches Special Education at Volunteer High School and is the Area Director for Special Olympics. She has been an inspiration to me for many years. She helped me to become a responsible kid and learn self help skills. I am now able to take care of myself. I can go out on my own time and figure out daily life problems because she taught me how to go out to the grocery store and pick what I can and cannot buy with the amount of money I have. She has taught me how to fend for myself in everyday life. I thank her every day for being nice to me.

While being in her class I have got to experience many things that I would not have gotten to without her as my teacher. I did not even know what Special Olympics was until I met her. Now I participate in bowling, basketball, bocce, flag football, swimming, snowboarding, and track and field. I have learned sportsmanship and how to be a team player. Through Special Olympics I have traveled to places I may never get to go to compete in state and regional events. One time she even took us to a Tennessee football game where we got to meet Austin Johnson and Tauren Poole. I have experienced lots of recreational activities that I otherwise would not get to experience such as going to dances, games and Christmas shopping at the Kingsport Mall, Opry Mills Mall and the mall in Knoxville, TN.

When we go to Nashville for state flag football, basketball, and track and field we also get to experience other things. We have got to meet the Tennessee Titans Football Players and Cheerleaders. We have got to visit the Nashville Mall, eat at the Aquarium Restaurant, visit the Nashville Zoo, go to Nashville Shores Water Park, and many other things.

When we go to Chattanooga to participate in state bowling we have got to visit The Tennessee Aquarium and Zoo, Ruby Falls, The Chattanooga Choo-Choo, and eat at many different kinds of restaurants. This is always a lot of fun because I get to hang out with my friends and do things I can't do at home.

Mrs. Thacker gave us the opportunity to learn how to snowboard, ice skate, and ski. I am able to compete in Special Olympics Snowboarding. I am pretty good at snowboarding and it is one of my favorite sports. I have been snowboarding for four years. I have met a lot of new people

and made some wonderful friends through Special Olympics. I even got to go to the middle school and accept a check that was donated to Special Olympics. I was really proud to be picked to accept the check. This was the same middle school that I went to and it felt good to have the students see me with all my medals and to see how good I am doing. The teachers remembered me and were glad to see me too. The Superintendent of the schools was there and I got my picture taken with her. A lot of the kids at the middle school came up to me to shake my hand and tell me what a good job I was doing. It was a really great feeling to have them look up to me.

Mrs. Thacker taught me how to read and write. With the help of a peer tutor, I am able to write this paper and put my thoughts into words. I can read the newspaper and find the help wanted job ads, and I can fill out a job application with hardly any help. My favorite section in the newspaper is the sports section and thanks to Mrs. Thacker I can read it on my own and follow my favorite teams like the Tennessee Titans and Tennessee Volunteers.

Mrs. Thacker makes sure all of her students get a chance to celebrate birthdays with their friends and teachers. She also buys Christmas presents and has a huge Christmas dinner for all of us. She hosts dances for the special needs students. She teaches us all the popular line dances so that we are able to fit in with our peers on the dance floor. During Christmas she also takes us to Bristol Motor Speedway to see all the lights and to ice skate. We have also been to Ober Gatlinburg.

She takes us to Kingsport, Tennessee to go shopping, and to watch Christmas movies at Fort Henry Mall. We also go to Kingsport to go swimming at Dobyns Bennett High School. She even holds local and regional events at Volunteer High School such as, Track and Field, bocce ball, Basketball, and practices for flag football.

She takes her own personal time to do everything for us; she is the best Special Education Teacher I have ever had. She treats us like her own sons and daughters; she loves every one of us for who we are not because we have some disabilities. She lets us stay after school with her whenever we want to no matter what the occasion, for example we can stay for basketball games, football games or even track and field meets. Mrs. Thacker has even had lock ins at the school where we spend the night, tell stories and eat all kinds of food.

When we have State Special Olympics events a lot of the money we have to go is from Mrs. Thacker's own pocket. She pays for us to have those chances in life. Sometimes we have fundraisers such as we sell Special Olympics T-Shirts and hoodies we also sell Discount Cards and Doughnuts.

A lot of us do not get to go to our high school prom, so Mrs. Thacker hosts a prom just for us. We are able to invite the date of our choice and all of the peer tutors attend. We have even got to ride to the prom in a limo. We have a day that we get to go and pick out our tuxes and ties

to match our dates dress. We get to go out to dinner with our dates and eat before the prom. We also get to have pictures made that our parents can afford to purchase for us.

Mrs. Thacker showed me that I am just as important as anyone else and I have a lot to be proud of. I am disappointed in people for not giving credit to Mrs. Thacker. They should do it. Mrs. Thacker always makes sure she gives us credit for all that we do and won't let anyone take it away from us. I wish people would do the same thing for her. She doesn't do what she does just so people will thank her she does it because she cares for us and wants us to have the best in life.

I am now working on doing a rally for the Spread the Word to end the Word campaign. With Mrs. Thacker's help I am going to have it at the middle school that I used to go to. I am excited about helping people stop using the "R" word. Because Mrs. Thacker believes in me and what I can do I feel like I can do just about anything I want to do.

When I first came to Volunteer High School I would lose my temper really easy but Mrs. Thacker said it was not the right thing to do and she showed me how to control myself. She showed me that there are ways to handle my problems without yelling. She is always around for me to talk to even if I have to call her on the phone no matter what time it is. I am grateful to her for being there. She is like that for all of her students and I know she cares about us and it's not just a job for her. When we get in trouble she makes sure we understand what we did and what we need to do to fix it and to not let it happen again.

Without Mrs. Thacker in my life and in the lives of my friends we wouldn't have half of the chances we have now. I was ready to quit school but then I met Mrs. Thacker and she showed me how important it is to stay in school. I am really glad that I stayed and got my diploma. I even decided to come back to school after I graduated so I could help her with all the other kids. I am very proud that I have the chance to have Mrs. Thacker as a teacher and a friend. I think she is one of the best people that I know.