

I Like to Be Heard

Kristal L. Santos

BEFORE YOU READ: What do you think the author means by the title?

I Stayed in a Corner

As a child, I would not speak. I had some trauma in my life that affected my ability to say what I was feeling. I could not put my feelings into words. I stayed in a corner and played by myself.

When the adults in my life did not understand me, I got frustrated and angry and acted out. I communicated by pointing at pictures in books and magazines. Later, when I had a cell phone, I took pictures of myself in order to tell a story. That's how I expressed myself.

The World Judged Me

As a child, I had a learning disability and a speech impairment. It was very difficult for me to be heard. These difficulties affected my teen and young adult years. I became a single mother, and the world judged me. I received help from social services. But not for long. They said I was not competent to raise my children because of my education and my learning disability.

I tried to speak up for myself, but I felt that I was not being heard. I felt that other people were more educated than I was. I believed they were better than me. This was not helping my self-confidence.

Sometimes, the people in my life used my disability as a weapon to their advantage. Their information and guidance did not help me. I did not trust them. I was always angry and sad. I cried a lot, thinking that I was not being heard every time I spoke out loud.

I Found Faith and My Voice

Then one day in my young adult years, I was walking down the street with my mother. She was talking. I was talking. I turned and saw a church.



All of a sudden, I heard a voice. And that voice caught my attention. The voice was telling me that this will be the church that I will attend.

I was looking for a church at the time. I had prayed that God would point out a good church. This is how I found faith. This is how I started on the road to being the person I am today. My faith helped me conquer the things that I needed to conquer — like speaking out loud.

Now, people can hear me. I am learning to advocate for myself. Recently I had to demand that a false description of my abilities in an official job referral be corrected. It wasn't easy. I followed my inner voice.

AFTER YOU READ: What are some of the ways Kristal has not been heard in her life? Share some ways you have been heard or perhaps not heard in your life.

Kristal L. Santos attends the Bridge Program at the Community College of RI in Providence, RI. She loves making specialty salads for members and staff of the Hillsgrove Clubhouse, a member- and staff-run mental health recovery program. She sincerely wishes readers of this article will be inspired to speak out and be heard!