



# Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

## Outreach Programs – Texas Deafblind Project

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### **I Want You to Know: My Reflections on Publishing a Book**

*Amita Srinivasan, Author and Photographer, Dallas, Texas*

Abstract: Amita Srinivasan's book, *I want you to know...* was published in May 2015. Amita, who is 16 years old and has CHARGE Syndrome, wrote the book with the aim of giving voice to what she teachers and parents should know and understand about a child with special needs.

#### Tell me about yourself



Figure 1 Photograph of sunflower.

Sixteen years ago a doctor told my parents I cannot hear or see or even have a voice (I had paralyzed vocal chords at birth). I was diagnosed with Charge Syndrome. I am profoundly deaf, blind in one eye with central vision in the other eye, was fed by a g-tube for 9 years, have no sense of smell and had so many surgeries that I got sensory aversion. When I was born I faced a very bleak future but many people came together to help me. I have never let my poor vision and hearing stop me. I've had many surgeries but I am a fighter. I want to be a teacher when I grow up!

#### Any particular reason you want to be a teacher?

I am a rising junior today but so many teachers helped me reach here. From PE, mobility, vision, speech and communication to Stoichiometry, Conics and the French Revolution! All my teachers, my parents and others never gave up on me and helped me reach for the stars. I don't think I would be here if they hadn't helped me, taught me and encouraged me. I think it's kind of my turn now. I want to give back to my community and society and help kids learn.

#### What inspires you?

Nature, I love nature photography. I started photography when I was about five years old. My parents used the PECS (Picture Exchange System) to teach me communication when I was a baby. Later when I was about five years old, I would take a picture symbol and then enlarge it to see details and then glue it on the walls of my house. Now I focus on nature photography. I have a website "ami fine art photography" where I post my best pics.

My second passion is advocacy. I used to be really scared to speak up for myself and be worried that it would make me look different in class. But I kind of learned to speak up and ask my teacher or ask for help if I had trouble with something. Then my teachers in the ARD committee and my parents said I could lead my IEP. I slowly got the confidence to speak up in

the meeting. I want to speak to all kids now and tell them, “Don’t be scared; be yourself and speak up for yourself and others too”.

### Tell me about your book

I like to combine my photography with some of the things that I read and also with what I have learned about myself. I published a photography e-book on Kindle. It has some of my best nature photographs with captions. It is called I Want You to Know. It’s about things I want all parents and teachers to know.

### What made you write the book?

Many people like my teachers and my aunt saw my photographs and my website. Everyone kept saying that I should publish my photographs or have an exhibition. Sometimes I write articles like the one I wrote for Charge Accounts in 2014 called “Accommodations and IEP Goals for the Multisensory Impaired Student.” I thought I could combine both my passions. I thought about what I would want everyone who meets me to know. Things like why do I like structure and routine? I am blind and deaf, it is tiring and a lot of effort to listen and look all day long with what vision and hearing I have. I work really hard and it is not obvious. That is why I like structure and routine. I really don’t like things to be moved around too much and I get nervous and tired in new environments. These are things my new teachers or new friends don’t realize when they first meet me. I came up with a lot of things that I would like people to know about me or any other special needs kid like me. Then I matched them to my best photographs.

### Tell me your favorite thing about the book

My favorite part was actually reading the reviews on Amazon and also when my teachers emailed my mom after reading the book. I felt very happy because I had dedicated the book to all my teachers. My favorite photograph from the book is the one with the duck digging in the mud. The caption says “See what I can do, not what I cannot”. I think this is so important. Many times even my own parents forget this. They get really worried about the future and focus on what I cannot do. Then I get stressed too and don’t feel like working or just feel like quitting. I hope parents and teachers always remember to focus on what a kid is really good at and then use that to teach other things. I took chemistry in 10th grade and I totally failed in the first six weeks. My parents were ready to quit but my teacher, Ms. Lee, encouraged and praised me and told me how I was really good in the free responses and the math part. She told me how I could use my skills to improve in other areas. I was encouraged and really worked hard in her class because I wanted to make her proud of me. I aced that class. I may do things slower and differently from others but I want to be appreciated and encouraged for who I am. I think this is true for anyone.

**Editor’s note:** Amita has been selected to the District 67 Student Leadership Advisory Council by Texas Representative Jeff Leach. Here is the press release from the Texas House of Representatives. <http://www.house.state.tx.us/news/press-releases/?id=5727>

## A Dandelion

A dandelion seedhead with seeds blowing in the wind.

Do you really see me?

See, Hear, Smell and Taste

I don't do that

Fall leaves blowing in the wind

Airplanes piercing the clouds

Swirly Cinnabons baking in the oven

Rough barks of old gnarly trees

Caramel drenched apples sprinkled with nuts

Alien

Don't cry

Sad eyes salty tears

See who I am

Deaf Blind

Anomic

No

Accept me, see what I am

Cute, funny, quirky

HAPPY

Hold me

I feel your love

Hug me

I know your love

It makes me reach for stars



Figure 2 Photograph of a dandelion with seeds blowing away.

Amita's ebook can be purchased on Amazon.



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