My mom encouraged me to read at an early age, because she needed me to help her. She was unable to see the words on the public busses, her primary mode of transportation. My mother began losing her central vision when she was 16 years old, and by the time she was 17, it was completely gone in both eyes. She had multiple surgeries, and had seen multiple doctors, but the impairment was there to stay. Her disability was similar to juvenile-onset macular degeneration, but was instead the result of a car accident as an infant.

When I was little, I had a hard time understanding why she was different from other people. I didn’t know why she wore thick glasses, or why she couldn’t drive. When she asked me to read things to her, I thought it was because she wanted me to get better at reading.

In high school she had to give up basketball, softball, driving, and reading small print. School work became increasingly difficult, she could no longer see the chalkboard or read the small print in textbooks, however, she worked hard to overcome her obstacles. Support teachers came to the school, she requested enlarged print on tests and assignments, and she used magnifying glasses and binoculars whenever and wherever she could. Audio books and talking computers assisted her and allowed her to become valedictorian of her graduating class.

As I got older I realized what kind of help she needed. I read to her, and rode the bus with her and now I can even drive her. I realized why she didn’t look directly at me when she spoke to me. Her sight is better towards the edge of her field of vision. By looking to the side of me, she was seeing my face more clearly.

In college she carried a cane for safety in the Los Angeles traffic. When she started having children, the stroller helped her identify obstacles and curbs. Her impairment made college difficult emotionally. She battled depression, but always remained strong.

Nowadays she works in Juneau as an occupational therapist. She runs her own business caring for children with special needs, helping them overcome their disabilities just as she constantly works to overcome hers. She is an expert on the autism spectrum, and is the kindest and best O.T. in town. She enjoys shopping with her daughters and traveling with me. She is kind, funny, quiet, and clever.

Reading and writing continues to be a challenge for her, as does transportation. A combination of audio books and close-circuit television allows her to enjoy literature and get work done. She can memorize calendars and has the greatest memory of anyone I know.

As for getting around, her strong legs carry her all over town, and the valley express gets her to her office and back every day.

I am extremely blessed to have a mom as passionate and committed to her family as her. She takes care of me and my two younger sisters alongside my supportive father.
She has taught me to persevere, and has shown me that there is a way around every obstacle. She has shown me the importance of patience, kindness, and empathy. Her success in school inspires me, as does her work ethic and her determination. She is a quiet person, but I never underestimate the superhero inside.