

Hello! My name is Elana Regan and I am a freshman in high school. My Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Jane Rosen, nominated me for the Let's Go Attitude essay. I believe she has noticed that whether I am moving within my small school community or out in the world, I always have a "let's go" attitude.

At the age of 10, I was diagnosed with Stargardt's disease, a form of juvenile macular degeneration which has gradually taken a lot of my vision over the last five years. Now at age 15, I can reflect back on my life before vision loss. Frankly, I was a wimp! I would never want to go out and meet new people. I was very socially awkward, uncomfortable talking to others, and didn't know how to have my own voice and opinions. I sat alone at lunch watching others have fun, but I didn't take it upon myself to do anything about it. Although losing my vision was, and still is, hard to deal with, I feel that it toughened me up. It was a wakeup call and it set me in the right direction. I had to decide that it would not hold me back from what I wanted to do or stand in my way. As a result, I started making friends and became more social. Although certain tasks might be hard at times, I am a very independent person who does not ask for a lot of assistance.

When people ask me if I want to do something, even if it something I don't know anything about, I usually say yes. I have a genuine desire for information and new experiences and I always want to get the most out of every situation, so I push myself even if it makes me a little uncomfortable. Soon after I found out that I would never drive, I started Orientation and Mobility training (O&M) where I was thrown into the deep end! I have since learned how to take the train, travel fixed bus routes in Massachusetts, request paratransit rides, take Uber and cross the street safely using a white cane. On one lesson in particular, I was traveling in Worcester and my O&M instructor gave me the choice of doing bus routes (which I already had done), or street crossings in the pouring rain. I remember saying, "I'm fine with rain. Let's do the street crossings." In total Elana-fashion, I chose the harder thing because I'm always looking for the next thing to push me further. I don't want to repeat what I already know; I want to strive to accomplish more! Some of the things I do would be scary to the average teenager, like riding a train independently or taking an airplane by yourself. This summer, I will be flying to Phoenix, Arizona by myself to join a group of teenagers who are White Water Rafting and Hiking in the Grand Canyon. I signed up without knowing anyone else who is going. Five years ago, I would not have dreamed of having the confidence to do so many things I am doing now!

Many adults tell me that they admire my ability to take what was given to me and make the best of it. I know that I can't make my vision better, so why fret about something that I can't change! I am one of the most adaptable people you will ever meet and I make the best of all situations. I am determined to move forward and live my life to the fullest. Recently, I have been getting involved with more programs for visually impaired teens and others will comment that I always seem willing to go and do anything. A couple weeks ago, I ate Vegan food for the first time because one of the group members I was with was Vegan. I said, "I'll do it - I love to try new things".

Another challenge I accepted was learning braille. In 6th grade, I was told I would need to know a *little* braille for when my vision got worse. I knew the process would be long and tiring, but not only did I learn the basics, but I mastered braille in about two-and-half years, a very fast speed I am told. I accomplished this through lots of hard work and never giving up. Although my life is not easy, I know I will keep my “let’s go” attitude and will get through any struggle. I face challenges that normal teenagers do not have to face, but I take those challenges and use them so I can further myself. I do not know what the future will hold for me, but there are two things I know: 1) Being legally blind has made me a better and stronger person and 2) As I continue going through life, I will never stop saying “let's go” because if I “don't go”, I will never achieve all the wonderful things I know I can do.