**“How Do YOU Define Yourself”**

**[Elizabeth Ann “Lizzie” Velasquez (born 13 March 1989)]** Source: LYBIO.net

I’m really, really, really excited to be here. I kind of want to tell you little bit more of the – I don’t want to say basics, because we don’t really know anything about my syndrome.

I was born with this very, very rare syndrome that only two other people in the world, including myself thought we know of have. Basically, what this syndrome causes is that I cannot gain weight.

Yes, it does sound as good as it is. I can eat absolutely whatever I want, whenever I want and I won’t really gain any weight.
I’m going to be 25 in March and I’ve never weighed over about 64 pounds in my entire life.

When I was in college I hid, well I didn’t hide – it was – everyone knew I was there, but it was a giant tub of Twinkies, donuts, chips, skittles and my roommate would say, I could hear you at 12:30 reaching under your bed to get food.

But I’m like you know what, it’s all right, I can do these things, because there are benefits to this syndrome, there are benefits to not being able to gain weight, there are benefits to being visually impaired, there are benefits to being kind of really small.

A lot of people think Lizzie, how in world are you saying there is benefits when you can only see out of one eye? Well, let me tell you what the benefits are, because they are great.

I wear contacts, contact, half off contacts, when I wear my reading glasses half up prescription.

If somebody is annoying me, being rude, stand on my right side, it’s like you are not even there, I don’t even know you were standing there.

Right now, if I stand like this, I have no clue that there is this whole side of the room.

Also being small, I am very willing to volunteer myself to go to Weight Watchers, go to some gym and say, hi I’m Lizzie, I will be your poster child.

Put my face whenever you need and I will say, hi I used this program, look how well it worked.

Even though there are really amazing things that have come from this syndrome, there are also things that have been very, very difficult as you can imagine. Growing up I was raised 150% normally.

When – I was my parents’ first child and when I was born the doctors told my mom, your daughter has no amniotic fluid around her, at all. So when I was born, it was a miracle that I came out screaming. The doctors told my parents, we just want to warn you, expect your daughter to never be able to talk, walk, crawl, think or do anything by herself.

Now as first parents you could – first time parents you could think that my parents would say, oh no, why? Why – why are we getting our first child to have all these unknown problems? That’s not what they did. The first thing they told the doctor was, we want to see her and we are going to take her home and love her and raise her to the best of our abilities and that’s what they did.

I credit pretty much everything that I’ve done in my life to my parents. My dad is here with me today and my mom is at home watching, hi mom. She is recovering from a surgery and she has been the glue that’s held our family together and giving me the strength to see that she is going through so much, because she has this fighting spirit that she has instilled in me, that I have so proudly been able to stand in front of people and say “you know what, I’ve had a really difficult life but that’s okay” that’s okay.

Things have been scary, things have been tough, one of the biggest things that I had to deal with growing up was something that I’m pretty sure every single one of us in this room has dealt with before. Can you guess what that is? Starts with a “B”, can you guys guess it?

**[Female Speaker:]** Boys. Boys.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]** Boys.

**[Female Speaker:]** Bullying.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]** Boys.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]**

Boys? Bullying. I know what ya’ll are thinking. I should have come – why couldn’t I sit here with them?

I had to deal with bullying a lot, but as I said I was raised very normally, so when I started kindergarten, I had absolutely no idea that I looked different, no clue. I couldn’t see that I looked different from other kids. I think of it kind of as a big slap of reality for a five year old, because I went into school first day, decked out and Pocahontas gear, I was ready.

I went in with my backpack that looked like a turtle shell, because it was bigger than me and I walked up to a little girl, I smiled at her, she looked up at me like I was a monster, like I was the scariest thing she had ever seen in her life.

My first reaction was, she is really rude. I am a fun kid and she is the one missing out. So I’ll just go over here and play with blocks or boys. I thought the day was going to get better and unfortunately it didn’t, the day kind of got worse and worse and a lot of people just wanted to have absolutely nothing to do with me and I couldn’t understand why. Why? What did I do? I didn’t do anything to them. In my mind I was still a really cool kid. So I had to go home and ask my parents, what’s wrong with me, what did I do, why don’t they like me?

And they sat me down and they said, Lizzie the only thing that’s different about you, is that you are smaller than the other kids. You have this syndrome, but it’s not going to define who you are. They said, go to school, pick your head up, smile, continue to be yourself and people will see that you’re just like them. And so that’s what I did.

I want you think and ask yourself this in your head right now. What defines you? Who are you? Is it where you come from? Is it your background? Is it your friends? What is it? What defines who you are as a person? It’s taken me a very long time to figure out what defines me.

For so long, I thought what defined me was my outer appearance. I thought that my little tiny legs, and my little arms and my little face, was ugly, I thought I was disgusting. I hated when I would wake up in the morning when I was going to middle school and looking in the mirror getting ready and thinking can I just scrub this syndrome off. It would make my life so much easier if could just scrub it off. I could look like the other kids, I wouldn’t have to buy cloths that had Dora the Explorer on it. I wouldn’t have to buy stuff that was bedazzled when I was trying to be like the cool kids.

I would wish, and pray, and hope and do whatever I could to pray, that I would wake up in the morning and I would be different and I wouldn’t have to deal with these struggles, it’s what I wanted every single day and every single day I was disappointed.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]**

 I have an amazing, amazing support system around me, who never pitied me, who are there to pick me up if I’m sad, who are there to laugh with me during the good times and they taught me that even though, even though I have this syndrome, even though things are hard, I can’t let that define me.

My life was put into my hands just like your lives are put into yours. You are the person in the front seat of your car. You are the one who decides whether your car goes down a bad path or a good path. You are the one that decides what defines you. And let me tell you, it could be really easy to, I mean really hard to figure out what defines – you, because there are times where I would just get so annoyed and frustrated, I don’t care what defines me.

When I was in high school I found a video, unfortunately that somebody posted of me, labeling me the world’s ugliest woman. There were four million views to this video, eight seconds long, no sound, thousands of comments. People saying, Lizzie, please, please just a do the world of favor, put a gun to your head and kill yourself.

Think, think about that. If people did – if people told you that, strangers told you this. I cried in my eyes out of course and I was ready to kind of fight back and something kind of clicked in my head and I thought, I’m just going to leave it alone. I kind of started realizing that my life is in my hands. I could either choose to make this really good or I can choose to make this really bad. I could either be grateful and open my eyes and realize the things that I do have and make those the things that define me. I can’t see out of one eye, but I can see out of the other. I might get sick a lot, but I have really nice hair.

**[Audience:]** You do, you do.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]**

Thanks. You guys are like the best little section right here. [I lost my train of thought thought.] Okay, where was I?

**[Audience:]** Your hair.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]**

Hair, hair. Okay thank you, thank you, thank you. Okay, so I could either choose to be happier, I could choose to kind of be upset with what I have and still kind of complain about it. But then I started realizing, am I going to let the people who called me a monster, define me. Am I going to let the people who said, kill it with fire, define me. No. I’m going to let my goals and my success and my accomplishments be the things that define me, not my outer appearance, not the fact that I’m visually impaired, not the fact that have this syndrome that nobody knows what it is.

So I told myself I’m going work my butt off and do whatever I could to I make myself better, because in my mind, the best way that I could get back at all those people who made fun of me, who teased me, who called me ugly, who called me a monster, was to make myself better and to show them you know what, tell those negative things, I’m going to turn them around and I’m going to use them as a ladder to climb up to my goals. That’s what I did.

I told myself I wanted to be a motivational speaker, I want to write a book, graduate college, have my own family, my own career. Eight years later, I’m standing in front of you still doing motivational speaking. First thing, I accomplished it I wanted to write a book. In a couple of weeks I will be submitting the manuscript for my third book. [Applause]

I wanted to graduate college and I’ve just finished college. [Applause] I’m getting a degree – I’m getting a degree in communication studies from Texas State University in San Marcos. And I have a minor in English I really, really tried to use real life experience. While I was getting my degree and my professors were not having it. But I wanted to have lastly my own family and my own career. And family part is kind of down the line, and my career part, I feel like I’m really dealing well with it, considering the fact that when I decided I wanted to be a motivational speaker, I went home, I sat in front of my laptop, went to Google, typed in, how to be a motivational speaker. I’m not even joking.

**[Lizzie Velasquez]**

I worked my butt off. I used the people who were telling me that I couldn’t do this – to motivate me. I used their negativity to light my fire to keep going, use that, use that, use that negativity that you have in your life to make yourself better, because I guarantee you, guarantee you, you will win.

Now I want to end with asking you again, I want you leave here and ask yourself, what defines you? But remember brave starts here. Thank you.