



# CHELBI PARK

## B.A. PSYCHOLOGY '13

Few kids make it through grade school without being teased for something. Glasses. Braces. Acne. A shirt your mom made you wear. Gum on your shoe.

Chelbi (Olsen) Park had more than her share.

Born a congenital amputee (her left arm ends just past the elbow), Park endured the jeers of classmates and the stares and, occasional, odd looks of strangers.

"It took me a long time to be okay with being different," says Park. "It definitely makes me stand out. I got picked on a lot in elementary school."

Things started to turn around, though, when Park took up Tae Kwon Do at age 11. It helped her build confidence, and after word got out that she obtained her black belt, kids began treating her like an equal.

"I learned that by having confidence in myself it took longer for people to notice that I had only one hand, and that became such a powerful tool," she says. "Also, I wasn't happy until I realized that it's not my responsibility to make people comfortable with my difference. It's their job to adapt."

In addition to typing college papers with just her right hand, Park has held active jobs that involved data entry, interacting with preschoolers, working with developmentally disabled adults and assisting with wildlife rehabilitation.

However, her challenges haven't been limited to dealing with others' reactions or figuring out how to do things differently. She has struggled with migraines, and recent pain and mobility issues in her hand have forced frustrating periods of extended rest.

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Park, who moved to Colorado in 2015 with her husband, just started a new job as Sewing Instructor for the Youth Enrichment League in Longmont. She teaches children grades 1-4 how to hand sew and operate a sewing machine.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher, so finally being able to say that I am one is really rewarding," she says. "It's fulfilling, too, because I'm teaching them a life skill – something that they'll have for the rest of their lives."

Her students find her fascinating.

"People are constantly saying how amazed they are by me, especially when I do something they can't do even with two hands," says Park. "I've had to overcome a lot of obstacles, but I take solace in knowing that I'm constantly breaking down walls and misconceptions regarding those who have 'limitations.' We are only as limited as we let ourselves be."



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