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“Why are you doing that?” People comment. The instant I hear that question, I know that my tics have flared up. It may be a strange facial expression or an odd laugh, repeated over and over. These are some of the ways that my Tourette Syndrome expresses itself.

My tics are cyclical. For the first few months of the school year, I usually experience no tics, and the thought of Tourette Syndrome stays far from my mind. However, around December, my tics start to increase. At first they are almost imperceptibly small and infrequent, but they slowly worsen. Within a matter of weeks, people start to notice.

I try my best to to hide my facial tics, and make my vocal tics blend in with normal speech. It is difficult to explain what Tourettes is to my friends at school. Those who have heard of it think it causes uncontrolled swearing, which is the stereotype perpetuated by television shows.

My tics were especially bad during my freshman year of high school. I was desperate to find relief, and by pure chance I stumbled upon a coding tutorial. While programming, I discovered that my focus and concentration made my tics disappear. Suddenly, every minute of spare time was spent on creating my next program with the added motivation that I had found a way to overcome my tics.

Last summer, I applied for an internship with Clark County’s Department of Information Technology. In the days leading up to the interview, my tics flared up again. Again, focus and determination helped me gain some control over them. I was able to keep them under control and the interview went smoothly. Two weeks later, I received an email informing me that I had been chosen to be the next high school intern. I worked part time at the county my entire senior year, and learned how software is developed in a professional environment.

In my future career, I hope to use these skills to create a system for internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy. This is currently the leading treatment for Tourette Syndrome, but remains largely inaccessible for those outside of big cities. Additionally, the high cost of cognitive behavioral therapy can put it out of reach for many. Delivering this therapy remotely would bring cost down and make it accessible everywhere. In college, I hope to study computer science to obtain the knowledge to make this idea a reality.

My college education is forecasted to cost almost thirty thousand dollars per year. A scholarship would allow me to go to college in confidence and be able to stay focused on my studies rather than my parent’s financial situation.

After graduation, I hope to work in the software industry, and with that knowledge enter public service. I plan to create programs for students like me, afflicted with Tourettes, and provide internet cognitive behavioral therapy free of charge. Hopefully, I, too, can help others find ways to overcome their tics.