

Watercolors, wash-off glitter, model magic, and, my personal favorite... (drumroll, please)... Do-A-Dot Art markers. Kindergarten-me was *quite* the artist. A regular Monet, I'd say. With all of these tools in my art-supply toolbox, I was, not to exaggerate, on top of the world.

Of course, there was one menace who loved to ruin my art time— scissors. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get the stupid contraption to work for me. And, to my horror, my classmates were able to use the scissors all too easily. Mouth-gaping, I remember begging my fellow 5-year-olds to teach me their ways. I even tried to bribe them with some Little Bites Fudge Brownies.

My efforts were met with giggles. The little rascals (myself excluded, obviously) kept eyeing my hand, which, allegedly, was the *wrong* hand. They said I was using my left hand, instead of my right hand. They said I was a lefty. At this moment, I had to backtrack. Armed with scrunched-up eyebrows and my very best pouty-face, I marched off to ask my teacher to explain what the heck “left” and “right” meant and why it mattered. All in all, she said what you'd expect— most people naturally favor their right hands for practical activities, whereas a smaller group favors their left hands. I can now say with confidence that she didn't tell me I had a dominant hand because of my “jeans,” but because of my “genes.” And that's when I knew I was a lefty living in a righty's world.

You'd be surprised how much you notice something once you know to look for it. After learning about my condition, I saw how everything was geared towards righties. Even the English language, I found, is righty-favoring, as, when writing from left to right, we lefties are stuck smudging every syllable.

Around three birthday cakes and twenty-one birthday candles *after* learning my place in the world, my family and I moved northward from North Carolina to Massachusetts. It was kind

of like a typical, southern azalea being uprooted and transplanted to New England's acidic soil. I wondered whether the frosty Northeast would be like the righty world I had been immersed in my whole life. Surprise! It was not.

After moving, things began to shift, falling into place. As I matured and grew into my surroundings, as azaleas do in acidic soil, I began to develop a political radar. My comfortable blindfold of child-innocence thinned, exposing me to the world around me and its true political tint. The world was no longer split into right-handed and left-handed people, but rather right-leaning and left-leaning people. Politics replaced handedness. Same concept, different ideas. Still divided to me, the world just seemed to be divided in a more adult way.

Reaching the middle school rung of the educational ladder, I became increasingly aware of the left-leaning politics of Massachusetts, shared by most of my classmates. And at times, in that environment, I felt suffocated. I began to push back against the opinions voiced by my classmates and my teachers. First internally, and later externally— a small comment here, a raised hand during a class discussion there. My classmates eagerly labeled me as a Republican, which, of course, was not a part of my Sixth Grade vocabulary. One day, I went up to my teacher after class, asking him to explain to me what “right-wing” and “left-wing” meant and why it mattered. He told me these terms related to political ideologies and how some people subscribe to more conservative beliefs, whereas others follow more liberal beliefs. And that's when I realized I was a righty living in a lefty's world.

But as I began to solidify my own political beliefs, researching and questioning, I distanced myself from the way my community wanted to see me. I found that once we show a part of who we are to those around us, they label us, neatly box us, and sort us like we're an Amazon package en-route to delivery. This deeply concerned me. Labels are restrictive, caging

even. Labels create borders, create opposing camps. Even worse, when you're labeled, you, at least temporarily, lose your agency, your ability to be different from how you're seen. Why? Because society, ever-so armed with its labelling-machine, says so.

But this righty-in-a-lefty's-world lifestyle was actually a blessing in disguise— a very, very, very well-crafted disguise. I'll put it this way: the environment I lived in was a liberal garden, shaded by one viewpoint. As the sole, red azalea in a sea of blue petals, I was compelled to seek out alternative ideas to complement the blue I was exposed to each day. In reaching out to other viewpoints and other perspectives, I was able to move out of the shade and feel more hues of the political spectrum beat down on me than I ever could by staying planted where I was. I guess you could say I was transplanted once more (second time's the charm?).

Striking out on my own to discover who I was and what I believed in helped me stop seeing the world as left *or* right, but rather left *and* right. Because, yes, there are always multiple viewpoints. We all have different ideas, identities, and perspectives. We should all be allowed to believe what we choose to believe. We should all be able to coexist. But still, that shouldn't stop us from trying to find common ground or from trying to come together.

I think we as humans have a natural tendency to see the world in the extreme— this *or* that, black *or* white, righty *or* lefty. I sure did. But there's so much more in between; there's depth in between; there's life in between.

If I was going to explain to scissor-snubbed Kindergarten-me what the heck “left” and “right” mean and why it matters, it would go something like this: It doesn't matter. There's no point in splitting us up into left or right. Because when you throw away nonsense like pulling people apart and instead focus on bringing people together, you bring light into this world.

I mean literally, when you combine the words *left* and *right*, you create *light*. When you blend all of those colors in the spectrum, you create *light*. That's no coincidence. Light is what this world needs, in all of its tints. And, I mean come on, who couldn't use a little more light in their life? This azalea sure could; that's why it transplanted so well. And I have a strong suspicion we all could, too.