

The Thing about Jellyfish

By Ali Benjamin

During the first three weeks of seventh grade, I'd learned one thing above all else. A person can become invisible simply by staying quiet.

I'd always thought that being seen was about what people perceived with their eyes. But by the time Eugene Field Memorial Middle School made the fall trip to the aquarium, I, Suzy Swanson, had disappeared entirely. Being seen is more about the ears than the eyes, it turns out.

We had made tie-dye shirts in art class in preparation for this field trip. We'd stained our hands neon orange and blue, and now we wore the shirts like a psychedelic uniform. I guess the idea was that we'd be easy to spot if any of us got lost. A few pretty girls- girls like Aubrey LaValley and Molly Sampson and Jenna Van Hoose- had tied their t-shirts into knots at their hips. Mine hung over my jeans like an old art smock.

It was exactly one month since the Worst Thing had happened, and almost as long since I'd started *not-talking*. Which isn't refusing to talk, like everyone thinks it is. It's just deciding not to fill the world with words if you don't have to. It is the opposite of *constant-talking*, which is what I used to do, and it's better than *small talk*, which is what people wished I did.

If I made small talk, maybe my parents wouldn't insist that I see *the kind of doctor you can talk to*, which is what I would be doing this afternoon, after today's field trip. Frankly, their reasoning didn't make sense. I mean, if a person isn't talking- if that's the whole point- then

maybe *the kind of doctor you can talk to* is the very last person you should have to see.

Besides, I knew what *the kind of doctor you can talk to* meant. It meant my parents thought I had problems with my brain, and not the kind of problems that made it hard to do math or learn to read. It meant they thought I had mental problems, the kind that Franny would have called *cray cray*, which is short for *crazy*, which comes from the word *craze*, which means “to fill with cracks and flaws.”

It meant I had cracks and flaws.