

As a child in St. Louis, second-grade teacher Brad Cohen showed all the signs of Tourette's Syndrome — a neurological disorder that causes people to involuntarily twitch, to and make sounds.

The problem was that back in the 1980s, only a handful of people understood Tourette's Syndrome.

Doctors misdiagnosed him for six years. Cohen's family didn't understand his behavior. His peers and teachers were wary of him. Cohen says he didn't have any friends.

Finally, at the age of 13, he received a proper diagnosis. Finally, with a name for his disorder and a treatment plan, Cohen was able to adjust.

"I overcame a lot as a child," he says simply.

Today, he is thriving. The 27-year-old daily inspires a classroom of 22 seven- and eight-year-olds at Mountain View Elementary School in Marietta. He got the teaching job six years ago after inquiries from 24 other schools.

In 1996, Cohen was named both Cobb County First Year Teacher of the Year and Georgia First Year Teacher of the Year.

Cobb County struck gold by hiring Cohen, says Peggy Holtz, current principal of Mountain View.

"The thing that struck me about Brad that was so incredible was his determination," she says. "Often, we look for role models in someone famous. Maybe we should look for role models right around us."

And that Cohen is. At the start of each school year, he explains to his students about Tourette's Syndrome. He answers every question. Hubtully, he says, "Kids are inquisitive. They want to learn new things," he says. "I want to make a difference to kids, so they don't have to experience the things I had to go through."

For someone who didn't have friends as a kid, Cohen's friends today inundate him with support. For his 27th birthday, some friends rented out a movie theater so Cohen—who does not go to movies for fear he will disturb other viewers—could enjoy a flick.

Cohen says he was impressed and touched by his friends' initiative. "They came up with the idea months before, and I had no clue," he says. "It really showed me the support I have of my friends here, and it's a great feeling."

Cohen's former Mountain View principal Jim Dwyer and assistant principal Heide Ghosa also have championed the young teacher, giving him a private when others would not, he says. "I always knew I could teach," Cohen says privately. "There was no doubt in my mind."

When not in class, Cohen serves on the board of directors for the Tourette's Syndrome Association of Georgia and organizes a camp for children with the disorder. He also works during baseball season as a mascot for the Atlanta Braves.

"A lot of people have some sort of disability," he says. "You make a choice either you jump over it or continue living as you were." — **Michael Abramowitz**

For more information, call the Tourette's Syndrome Association of Georgia and South Carolina at (770) 989-9900.