



Ethan Zaichick has a tic while outside doing yard work with his family. Zaichick's tics vary from simply tugging on his clothing to involuntary muscular tics seen in the photograph where he blinks or stretches his neck.

## Living With Tourette's

By Zachary Shunock

All of us may have experienced some form of uncontrollability at some point, but not to the same extent as 15-year-old Ethan Zaichick, who suffers from Tourette's syndrome, Obsessive-compulsive disorder, asthma and a number of other minor disorders.

All of Zaichick's disorders affect one another, making them worse than they would be on their own. Tourette's syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary tics or involuntary muscular function and often the compulsive utterance of obscenities.

"Even just going to the mall is kind of awkward because people will look at you and say 'why is he blinking?' 'why is he stretching his neck?' and stuff like that. I just do my best and forget the rest. I don't listen to what anyone has to say because I know if I told them they would be like 'oh I'm sorry,'" said Zaichick, explaining the struggles of living with Tourette's syndrome.

Zaichick attends Centennial Secondary School and is currently in the tenth grade. Zaichick says that interacting and making friends is easy, once they understand what it is he is affected by.

"I don't think anybody will one hundred percent understand unless they go through it, but, they are understanding... they know that what I do is part of the Tourette's and they don't make fun of me or anything," said Zaichick.

Adjusting to new environments and meeting new people can be challenging for anyone, however, it is quite a bit more challenging for Zaichick.

"It's really weird going into new schools or new places where you have to explain to everyone after they say 'oh why are you doing this?' or 'why do you have that?' Being in new places can be stressful, which affects my OCD, which also affects my anxiety and so on," Zaichick said.

Zaichick's immediate family consists of his mother Tania, stepfather Oliver, sister Abby and newborn baby sister Liv.

"I love her a lot, she's awesome. I'm more excited for when she gets a little bit older though," said Zaichick.

Zaichick's extended family however is much larger, consisting of nine cousins and six aunts and uncles on his mother's side.

"We're all very close, our family. Everyone in our family really understands. Obviously my younger relatives are not as aware of my Tourette's. They might make some comments or make fun of me, but I know it's only because they might not have seen something like Tourette's before or be used to it like my older relatives are," explained Zaichick.

To Zaichick, family support is very important and provides a safe and comfortable environment, even when not at home. Zaichick's biological father, Rob, whose last name he shares, holds the Tourette's gene that was passed down to Zaichick.

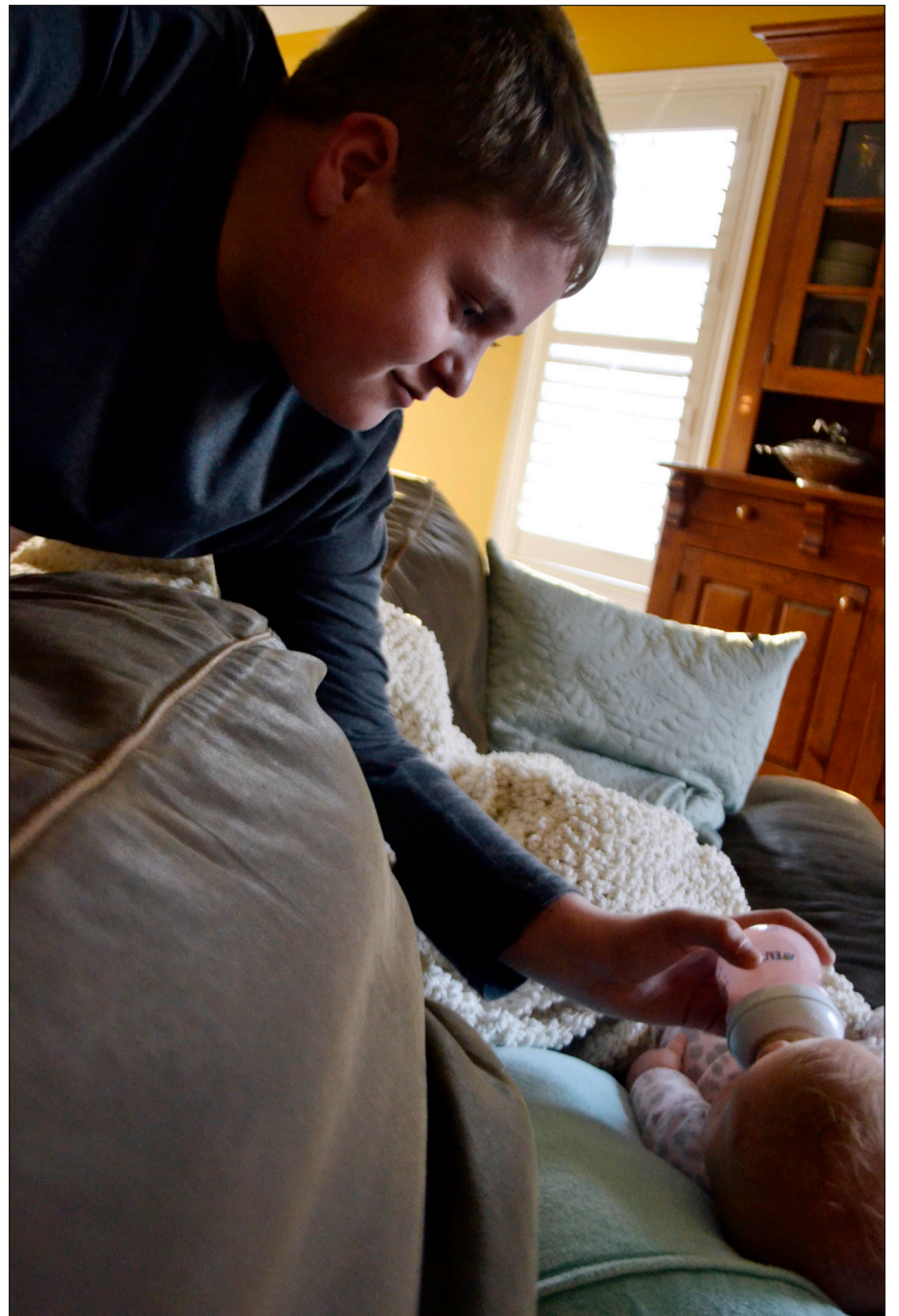
Since he was young, Zaichick has had an interest in gymnastics. He currently works at the Quinte Bay Gymnastics Centre as an instructor for children entering into gymnastics.

"Work really distracts me, I'm always running around finding someone or doing something so I don't really think about my Tourette's. Sometimes it's awkward because I'll notice some of the parents giving me a funny look or something," said Zaichick demonstrating one of his tics being that he pulls his shirt into his armpit.

"It's part of my Tourette's and my OCD, a lot of the time I don't even notice I'm doing it, but when I do it's really uncomfortable," he said.

Aside from taking his daily doses of medication for Tourette's and OCD, many of his coping methods are habitual.

"At home if I'm stressed a lot, I like to find something I like to do such as play keyboard. Sometimes I like to knit," he said laughing. "Just anything that can take my mind off of the tics."

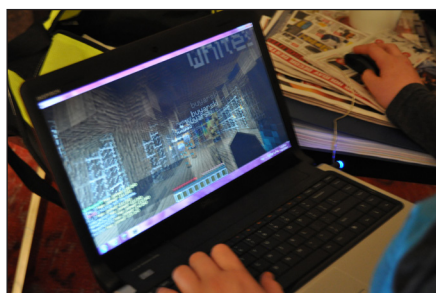


Zaichick feeds his newborn baby sister after arriving home from a long day at school. All day, he looks forward to returning home to see the people he loves.

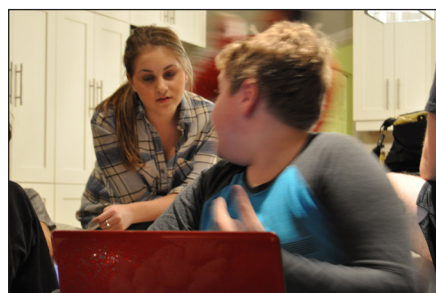
"I don't think anybody will one hundred percent understand unless they go through it. But they are understanding..."



Zaichick gets picked up from Centennial Secondary school after choir practice, excited to see his mom tania and new born baby sister Liv.



Zaichick bounces back and forth between his laptop and iphone playing the game Mine Craft with his friends from school in an online portal.



Zaichick explains an element of his game to his older sister Abby, who came to visit from attending school in Ottawa.



Zaichick gives his baby sister Liv a kiss on the nose making her laugh, as harsh fall sunset blares through the windows.

"I love her, she's awesome. I'm more excited for when she gets a little bit older though."