

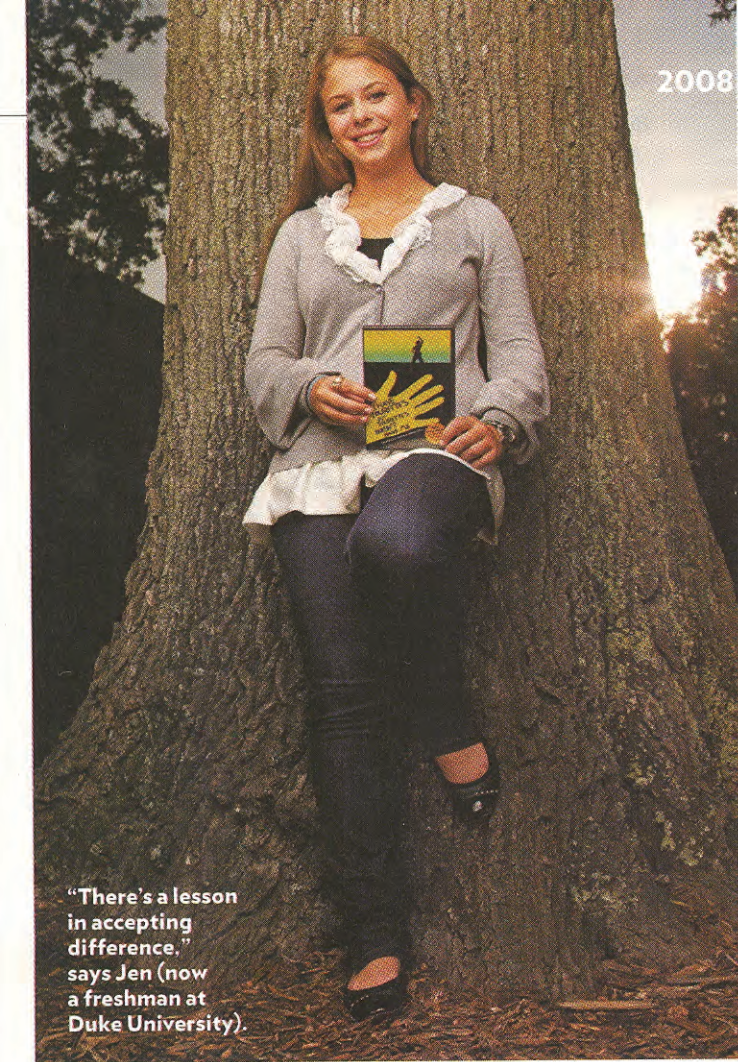
Jen Zwilling, 18

A GIRL WITH TOURETTE'S SPEAKS OUT

Misunderstood: As a child, Jen Zwilling would frequently sniff, blink and clear her throat. "Kids would offer me tissues and ask, 'Why do you do that?'" recalls Jen, who would pretend to have allergies.

In fact, she had a mild form of Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder marked by physical tics. By fourth grade, tired of the questions, the popular Long Island, N.Y., student one day stood before her class and read an entry from her journal about her Tourette's. "I realized, when you explain it, people don't make fun," says Jen, who manages her condition with medication. "I felt good."

Spreading the word: In 2003, as a seventh-grader, Jen began speaking about Tourette's at community schools, and helped found the National Tourette Syndrome Association's youth ambassador program. Since then she has trained some 96 kids in 15 states and five countries to make educational presentations about their condition. "I used to feel embarrassed. Now I feel much better about myself," says Lee Gochman, 16, of Long Island. "Jen's inspired me to be a leader. I look up to her."



"There's a lesson in accepting difference," says Jen (now a freshman at Duke University).