There’s a Chance

Narrative Essay by Nakita Schneider

I’ll never forget that day. It was in February that my father told me my older sister might not be coming home. I was home alone and had been since the very end of January. My dad called me from the Children’s Hospital in Denver, Colorado. It started out with what seemed to be a normal conversation.

“Hi, Dad! How’s Bridgette doing?”

“She’s still goin.’ Just had another seizure. We got some news today.”

“Oh, yeah? What is it?”

“Well, if your sister has surgery, there’s a chance she won’t make it.”

I was eleven at this time, and I remember sitting down in a moment of silence. Then I quickly said, “Goodbye.”

It all started when Bridgette was in her terrible two’s. She had been having problems sleeping during the night. She would wake up terrified, shaken, and crying for dear life. Everyone thought they were what my parents called “night terrors,” but after having these episodes for quite some time, she was diagnosed with a brain disorder called epilepsy. Soon afterwards, my parents began doing research on it. My aunt was helpful because she also had epilepsy as a child, but her case terminated when puberty began. We hoped for the same with Bridgette.

It wasn’t until she started puberty, though, that the seizures hit hard. The stress of my parents’ divorce added even more aggravation. She’d been on medications prior to this phase, which acted like a barrier, but they never stopped for an extended amount of time. The episodes became more frequent and uncontrollable. There were numerous times that she was taken to the hospital or rushed to the ER. She had also been flown out on Flight for Life to Denver, CO.

My family was being pushed to the limit. Dad had been off work for over a year, money was precious, and spending was to the point of restriction. We took turns staying up with Bridgette every night, holding her hand, and soothing her thoughts. Because Bridgette had a seizure every three-to-five minutes, rest was slight. We had to sit there in the darkness, holding her shaking hand, and listening to the short, rapid breaths, followed by sobbing and a weak sigh of relief – only to be repeated a few short minutes later. By morning, we were tired and able to recuperate, but she was always more than exhausted. She had zero energy and was almost considered handicapped. At this point, something had to be done. It had been over a year of constant seizing and restless nights. This was enough!

February was just around the corner and another hospital visit full of more testing was soon to come. The discussion of surgery had been brought about with Dr. Laprasurt, and he encouraged it. I was able to attend the “adult” meeting with the doctor since I was her sister. My father was discussing different issues with the doctor, as I was looking around fiddling with random items. When the word surgery was heard, I suddenly became alert, attending to the remaining conversation.

“So what is it exactly that you will be doing?” asked Dad.

“We will be having two surgeries. One will be to remove the scull to connect her brain to a machine, and one to remove the focus.”

“Okay, and she’ll be seizure free afterwards, right?” My father questioned.

“Well, yes. That is if she survives the surgery.”

My stomach twisted and my heart sank to the pierce of those wretched words. We were told her only options were to be crippled at 18 which would lead to death at 20, or surgery now with a chance of death. At this point my sister was tired of everything; she wanted the seizures to stop so badly. So, therefore, she, my mother, and my father agreed to the proposal of surgery. The big day arrived on February 20th. The consent papers had been signed by my mother and father, approving the final decision.

Surgery lasted for what seemed to be forever. The waiting room was gloomy and stuffy. Several people were coming and going, while doctors entered the room to look for that one specific family. Every doctor I saw led my heart to beat faster, only to linger back to normal pace when I didn’t recognize his face. Every hour went slower and every “tic tic tic” of the clock that my ears received seemed more voluble and chilling. The waiting room was a terrible place to loiter. The chairs were uncomfortable, grown men were snoring in the only two couches available, infants fussed, and my patience withered quickly. I made a few trips to the gift shop and rode the glass elevator several times to get my mind off of everything. My elevator excitement quickly tapered when I noticed a male janitor cleaning up vomit. I took the stairs from there and spent the remaining time in the unbearable waiting room. It had been two hours since I’d been back and hadn’t seen a single doctor enter the room. My sister was in surgery for a total of six long hours.

Then, finally, I saw our doctor's green pants and shoe covers walking down the hall, and soon enough his face appeared in the doorway. We automatically stood up, anxious to hear the results. The doctor proceeded to sit us back down and informed us, "Everything went smoothly in the surgery and we couldn't be happier." Even his overlapping, crooked toothed smile couldn't put a damper on my day. I was so ecstatic that my sister was finally going to lead a normal life.

After surgery, though, was a different story. She was completely sedated for almost an hour. We sat patiently next to her bedside in ICU, waiting for her to become conscious again. Finally, we heard her say something about having a bad hair day; she was obviously delusional. Once she began to regain consciousness, she seemed to be speaking normal again: complaining, whining, and aimlessly blathering about the pain she was in and how uncomfortable she was. But then, she and everybody around noticed that she was completely paralyzed on her entire right side. She had zero movement strictly in her right side for virtually a week.

She began physical therapy five days after surgery. Soon after, she had movement in her right side. That progressed quickly and everybody was very excited. She was like an infant taking its very first step, only we didn't video it.

Soon she had much of her regular movements back, but she still couldn't eat, write, or do anything she used to be able to do with her dominant hand. Nor could she walk. Bridgette's life had been completely stressful and discouraging up to the point of therapy.

She was released from the hospital one month and eleven days after the surgery. She was completely seizure free, stress free, and, most of all, hospital food free. It was a requirement to continue taking medication for a stated period of time, but to slowly decrease it until she was entirely off all medication.

This experience completely changed her life, but it changed mine as well. In the years of Bridgette's illness, I never completely understood the fact of how ill she actually was. It wasn't until after her chance of death that my eyes opened. I didn't realize how easily it would have been for her to be gone forever, and at that point, I'm not sure that I cared enough to understand. I learned that the date for death generally is not scheduled, so I needed to take advantage of friends and family and live life to the fullest.

In the years of her new life, Bridgette became a new person. She was all around different in my eyes. Her brown hair grew longer, her smile widened, and her blue eyes gleamed brighter every day. She wanted to do well in school, and she was very happy with her improved lifestyle.

Bridgette has put my family and I through a lot, but I will never feel what she went through and sacrificed. Her illness has helped me understand others differently and not judge or criticize because they're in a wheelchair. Bridgette was in that position, and for her, it was embarrassing. She felt belittled by people walking by or staring, and she didn't feel like anyone would give her a chance. Before then, I wouldn't give anybody a chance either. I never fathomed what pain a single person could actually go through. From that, I've learned not to voice an impolite judgment.

There was a chance, and my sister is still with us today. So try and look at life in a different perspective. Give everyone a chance, and it could change his/her life just for trying.