

When I was diagnosed with epilepsy at the end of my junior year, I thought I would have to stop my dreams, put them on hold. I am stubborn and giving up my goals...that's not part of the plan. I have been through too much and I know that it took an amazing toll on my life, a good one. My hardships have made me stronger. From the attempted murder of my mother and I by a family member, to the sickness of my grandmother.

When I was about fourteen my grandmother had a stroke. I wasn't there when it happened but I knew it happened because she told me before she picked me up. My mom pulled me out of school and took me to the hospital with my brother. Now, I've been to the hospital before but this was different. I went into the rooms next to the ER where people wait to be seen or wait to go home.

All the doctors ran back and forth to each of the rooms. Families sat around the beds, reassuring the patients that everything was going to be alright. I could smell the strong medicine and sometimes, if I were close enough, the sickness. The sounds of the patients crying or laughing, depending on the doctor's news. They were talking with their families. I walked closer to my grandmother's room. The cold linoleum floor, hard beneath my feet, was stretching into the distance, endless and echoing in the dark hallway. The stairwell's cold, metal bar handle sliding silently in my hands.

The trip to the hospital room was the longest walk I had ever taken. I was so afraid to find my grandmother in the bed, the sheet pulled over her head. Everyone would be standing over her, as if in mourning. When I walked in to see her sitting there, looking around curiously, I was so relieved.

The effect that the incident took on me was serious. I couldn't help but believe that if it could happen to my grandma, if it could happen to my great-grandma, it could happen to me. When my grandmother did come home finally, she had, to other people, a sense of being

a little brain dead. After a while she healed, except she had a little speech problem, a lisp that she can't get rid of.

My entire life has been like moving lava. Fast but steady at the same time. My father was in the Navy and my mother was in the Air Force. But we did not lead a typical military life, nor did we live in military environments. I was born in a small town on the south-east side of California. Just behind the Sierra Nevada Mountains. When I moved after ten years, I felt like any other kid who didn't want to leave their friends and people that they knew. It felt like the world was going to end.

It's a weekday morning, we were going to get some new clothes before school started again. I wake up to find my mom in my room, taking my clothes out of the dresser and closet. I was getting new clothes! Or that's what I thought. I see the boxes in the corner, closed with that sticky stuff that I was told I couldn't play with. What was that called? Oh yeah! TAPE!

Mom asks me what is wrong. I don't know what to say. She tells me that we are moving, I am devastated. Everyone is calm, except me. I run into the living room, it's empty, no TV, no radio, not even the coffee table. I see my dad carrying the big black box with the glass cover that somehow made pictures move and talk.

What's with the big white truck in the driveway, blocking my bike path? It says something on the side, U-Haul? What does that mean? I run to my friend's house two doors down. Do you want to play? I ask. Before she can answer, my name is called. I have to help them put things in boxes. I don't want to so I refuse.

Right now, the only safe place is my backyard. The playground where my brother and I played war and tag with our friends. Where my sister would chase me around with a wet towel

just after she got done swimming at the park. The only place where I have good memories. I don't want to move. My last year of elementary school is coming up. I have friends that I need to see every day. They'll wonder where I've gone. I can't leave them.

My stupid brother and sister are helping them carry boxes to the big truck. Don't they realize what we are leaving behind? Friends, family, people that we've known all our lives. I am told that we will be moving to Colorado. Where is that? I was never really into geography at school. It sounds like a disease to me. I hope it's in Australia, I have always wanted to live there.

We're leaving now. I didn't get to say goodbye to my friends, so my mom let me do it really quick. The first thing I am going to do is see Rick, the gardener for the people next door. Maybe I can talk him into changing my parent's minds. I beg him, pleading while on my knees, but he refuses. He doesn't want to see us go, but he knows the reason that I can't seem to understand.

We start driving to my unknown future. Through the snow-capped mountains and into the long, godforsaken desert. I was stuck in the back seat of my mom's car while my brother got to ride in the U-Haul. It is so not fair. We finally made it to Colorado. Funny, I thought it would be further away.

I moved to Colorado in 2000. That was when I was officially named the map of the family. For some reason, I could always remember where I was going and how to get there if I needed to. It was like I had a virtual photographic memory. My parents always turned to me for directions.

I lived in Colorado for about one year when we moved to Arkansas. I understood the reason for this sudden change. At that time we were one family member more than

before. My sister had given birth to her first child. It definitely made the trip seem a lot longer and harder.

My niece was a beautiful little girl. She was vibrant and quiet at the same time. She is the main reason why I am who I am today. If I can show at least my nieces that one of their family members can make it through a real high school and a four year college, then they can do it too.

I remember the first time I ever held my niece. She was warm and fragile. Sometimes when she would move in my arms I was afraid I would drop her. I was eleven, what do you expect? She was just so small. I would look at her with her little tuft of hair just popping over the soft, warm blanket. She would cuddle and lean into me like she was taking me all in, getting used to me like she would with her mother, learning about who I am and trusting me with her small, fragile body.

We moved to Arkansas in the summer of 2001. It was then that I realized what I wanted to do with my life. While my brother and sister were getting into trouble every other day, I set out to make the difference. To prove that my mom wasn't a bad mother. Not being influenced or affected by their actions would have to be the best thing I have ever done.

When I started school in junior high, everyone expected me to be exactly like my older brother, getting into trouble and being suspended every two weeks. Boy, did I prove them wrong! In eighth grade I was known as my brother's little sister. By the beginning of tenth grade...he was **MY** older brother. Everyone looked to me when something bad happened. Not because they thought I did it. But because they knew I could handle it if my brother were the troublemaker. It felt good to be thought of like that.

I moved back to Colorado in the summer of 2005. We ended up living up with my stepdad

in this 2-bedroom apartment but had to move.