

## The Girl with the Broken Brain

At six years old I wanted be Hannah Montana, a Walmart cashier, because I liked the sounds the cash register made, and a Sonic waitress, because they got to wear roller skates. 2007 was a great year. Unfortunately, I didn't have the best of both worlds like I had planned. In reality, where I wasn't Hannah Montana, I was diagnosed with epilepsy.

When I was six years old I was diagnosed with benign absence epilepsy. This means too many neurons transmit in my brain, causing me to have lots of seizures. At six years old I was a walking seizure. I didn't know what it meant to be epileptic. I didn't know what seizures were. I knew it meant I had to take medicine every day and I had to sit out laser tag while all my friends got to play. The one thing I did know, at such a young age, was that I wasn't like the other kids.

I never told anybody I was epileptic. I tried to pretend I didn't have seizures and whenever somebody would call me out on it I'd come up with some elementary school lie such as "No I wasn't having a seizure, I was just...sleep walking." That very rarely ever worked though. To my knowledge, none of my classmates understood what epilepsy was and neither did I. I lived it but I didn't understand what was actually happening inside my head. To them I was just oddly shaking, walking into oncoming traffic or for thirty seconds my brain had gone somewhere so far I was incapable of comprehending anything. Believe it or not, I was known as the weird kid.

The word epilepsy always made my heart drop to my feet. In the sixth grade when we were reading about epilepsy and a kid faked a seizure in the middle of English, I wanted to curl up into a ball and die. On T.V seizures and epilepsy are used as an insult. On T.V I was an insult,

in school I was the weird kid everyone chose to make fun of and in books I was a statistic and an example.

When I was twelve I had finally decided I was tired of everything I had dealt with for so many years. Nervously, I googled the Epilepsy Foundation. I had found a fundraiser walk coming up nearby and spent days contemplating whether or not to tell my mom about it. The fact that I was epileptic was never really mentioned in my household until I actually tried to make an initiative to talk about the fact that I had epilepsy. After a few days passed, I talked to my parents about going to the fundraiser walk and they agreed that my entire family would go.

I was terrified the entire car ride. I had spent the years since I was diagnosed convinced I was the only epileptic in the world. Nobody else in the world had epilepsy. Just me. Rare, freak of nature, me. I was going to be the only one to show up. Nobody else would show up. Why would they?

My dad parked the car. We got out and went to the event. To my surprise, people actually showed up. Hundreds of people showed up. Not just one person. I wasn't alone in the universe. I was more than a statistic. I was an actual person. I spent years hating and secluding myself for something I couldn't change. I was surrounded by people that were dealing with the same thing I had spent years dealing with but was never secure enough to admit I was. We were all there surrounded by our families and friends that loved us.

There were neurologists and ambassadors from the National Epilepsy Foundation educating the people about epilepsy. These people were dedicated to making epilepsy more than a word or a joke. Thanks to these wonderful people that weren't making jokes about epilepsy or using my brain as an exaggerated example or statistic I was finally able to feel like a human. I

felt like I belonged. I was given hope that I would grow up and live a normal life. I didn't need to feel shame. It helped me to know there were more people that were dealing with the same thing I was. Finally, I was more than a word I was taught was an insult.

At six years old I wanted to be Hannah Montana, a Walmart cashier that pressed too many buttons and a roller skate wearing Sonic waitress. At 15, after spending the last three years regularly reading about studies, possible cures and other latest news about epilepsy, I have decided that I want to be a pediatric neurologist. Neurology isn't as exciting as being Hannah Montana. The years of college I have ahead, trying to maintain my grades, medical school and internships will be a lot of work but I want to be what six year old me needed. I want to be a doctor that understands what my patients are going through.