Personal Narrative

You know that feeling of invincibility where you think to yourself, “Oh, that would never happen to me,” so you just keep going and ignore all the signs telling you something is wrong? Yeah, me too. And this is the story about how I learned the hard way not to ignore those signs.

I was twelve years old, and it was just like any other day. I woke up and hopped in the shower, feeling perfectly fine. I was shampooing my hair and enjoying the relaxing hot water when, out of nowhere, I began to experience the strangest combination of feelings I’d ever felt in my life. It started with a strong sense of déjà vu and my heart beginning to race. I couldn’t breathe, and I got a funny taste in my mouth – like I was tasting metal. I started to see spots and became so weak and disoriented that I barely made it through my shower. When I stepped out, my vision went black and the next thing I remember was waking up an hour later face-down on the bathroom floor with a migraine and a bloody lip. My body was aching and my legs were paralyzed. My first thought was, “Did I have a seizure?” But I immediately dismissed that thought, thinking, “NO! That wouldn’t happen to me!” So, I laid on the floor for another hour or so until the paralysis in my legs wore off and I was able to leave the bathroom. Terrified and confused, I was too embarrassed to tell anyone. How do you explain hallucinations, tasting metal, and paralysis without being called crazy? So, I kept my mouth shut and just hoped it would never happen again.

A few months later, the morning of my 13th birthday, I woke up, feeling completely normal, hopped in the shower, and began to feel déjà vu, heart racing, metal taste, weakness. I woke up an hour later on the bathroom floor, paralyzed with a black eye and a migraine. I was even more terrified this time because I didn’t know what was happening and it was apparently not going away. But I still kept it a secret and covered the black eye with makeup. These “episodes,” as I called them, kept happening until finally, March 1, 2008, which is when my life truly changed forever.

Again, taking a shower…”Here it comes,” I thought to myself, as I began to feel déjà vu. I would just roll my eyes and let it happen. What else could I do? I was used to it at this point. The only difference? This time when I woke up, paramedics were carrying me down the stairs and my family and neighbors were crying. Apparently, my mother heard me fall this time, and when she came to check on me, I was unconscious underwater – when I fell, my foot hit the drain and the tub filled up, causing me to nearly drown. But my thoughts as I was being lifted into the ambulance? Relief. I wasn’t scared at all. “Finally, I’ll get this figured out,” I thought to myself as I was being taken to the hospital. When we arrived at the ER, the doctor asked if it had ever happened before, to which I abruptly replied, “Nope. Never!” I knew my family would be very unhappy if they knew I had been dealing with this for more than a year and never told them, so I felt that this was time for a fresh start. Because my legs were still paralyzed and my shoulder was twitching, the doctor said he believed I had suffered a grand mal seizure, but would require an EEG to be certain.

A week later, I had an EEG, confirming it was an epileptic seizure. When my mother got off the phone with the doctor, and told me, “Sweetie, it was a seizure. You do have epilepsy. We will need to make an appointment with the neurologist,” I had to act upset and shocked, when deep down I wasn’t – I was relieved. “Just put me on some medication and I can move on,” I thought. I had no idea what epilepsy truly entailed.

I had no idea how life-changing epilepsy truly is. I had no idea that I would never be considered “normal” again. I had no idea that I’d be labeled an “epileptic” rather than a person. I had no idea that it would take years to get my medication straightened out, only to end up suffering from other types of seizures, a weakened immune system, kidney problems, liver damage, and memory and comprehension issues. I had no idea that I would forever be facing a condition that controls my body and for which there is no cure.

Epilepsy is no joke. It kills more people than prostate cancer, breast cancer, skin cancer, drunk driving accidents, and accidental drug overdoses and is still the butt of so many jokes. It almost killed me, and has changed my life forever. It has stripped me of my dignity, and very few people - even doctors truly understand it.

March 1, 2008 is when I lost control of quite a lot, but learned some valuable lessons. I learned that you are not invincible. “That wouldn’t happen to me” is one of the dumbest, most arrogant thoughts a person can think. I learned that things don’t always turn out the way you planned, and you have to accept it. And I learned to be more empathetic; you never know what battles a person is fighting.

FACT
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Did you know…
Vincent Van Gogh,
Joan of Arc, Alfred Nobel,
Pythagoras, Lewis Carroll,
Michelangelo, Napoleon,
Florence Griffith Joyner,
Bud Abbott, Agatha Christie,
Hugo Weaving, Danny Glover
and many more
throughout history
have had epilepsy.

1888 Van Gogh self portrait