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Creative Nonfiction Thesis -"Becoming Normal"

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Becoming Normal

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English
Concentration in Literary Studies

by

Kaitlin Goetchius

BA Rutgers University, 2013

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Abstract

The following Creative Nonfiction Thesis delves into the suppressed past of a girl who experienced brief episodes of adolescent epilepsy. She was diagnosed with Rolandic seizures when she was eight years old and eventually “grew out” of them when she hit puberty. Since that time, the author had not spoken of these events with her family. The topic of her epilepsy remained, somewhat, the elephant in the room until the epilepsy discontinued. She interviewed her mother and her sister to see the perspectives of those people who were closest to her throughout this era. Through these interviews, the author learns of what her family truly experienced and their opinions of these events. These events largely effected the past and future relationship between her mother, her sister, and the relationship the author has with herself.

Keywords: grand mal; epilepsy; seizures; adolescents; middle school; nonfiction

Becoming Normal

I was eight years old when I had my first seizure.

I woke up one typical Saturday morning to the same thing I always saw. Two of my three brothers, Danny and Sean, were in the living room watching Saturday morning cartoons and sneaking Flavor-Ice ice pops from the freezer. My mother was sleeping in, on the rare occasion that one of her five kids didn't have a Saturday morning soccer game or dance recital scheduled. This was her time to rest, after a week of sending us all off to school and running a day care and after-school care business from our home. Having a quiet house for a few hours on Saturday mornings, free of ten or more kids who needed attention, was something we understood was necessary for her, even at our young age.

The house was peaceful and the cereal bowls were set out for us. My mother would leave them on the counter, encouraging her kids to feed themselves before she woke up. Instead, Sean would scheme to sneak our favorite summertime ice pops for breakfast. He would hide the evidence of the clipped-off plastic tops deep in the garbage can so our mother wouldn't notice that he had ice pops for breakfast instead of cereal. The ice pops came in boxes of 100, so Sean thought she wouldn't notice a few missing.

Joey, my oldest brother, and Jessie, my sister, were already roaming our neighborhood of Barry Lakes with their friends, riding bikes and building ramps in the street or playing house in the neighbor's oversized jungle gym. They were down the block, far out of eye and ear length, wandering our lake community. I envied that freedom of my older siblings. My mother knew they were somewhere off in the neighborhood, but at their older preteen age, she trusted their adventures — as long as they came home for lunch. I couldn't wait to grow up like them.

My dad, who worked six days a week most weeks, was already at work. He was a blue-collar man working in plumbing and construction. My father was a family man. Being the primary provider for our family, he spent most of his time working for two weeks of time off that he could spend in Ocean City, Maryland, for our summer vacation. If he had the Saturday off, he'd usually rest with Mom, unless it was springtime and he had yardwork to attend to. Time spent with my father was always treasured since he worked so much when we were kids.

The television volume was on low, so we wouldn't wake our mother. I never agreed on the cartoon choices Saturday mornings. I was always a heavy sleeper and I enjoyed sleeping in on Saturdays, like my mother. Since the boys always got up first, they had first choice at which cartoons we would watch. Danny liked Cartoon Network so he could watch "Courage the Cowardly Dog" and "Ed, Edd, and Eddie." Sean preferred Nickelodeon so he could watch "CatDog" and "Rugrats." At the time, Sean and Danny shared a bedroom in our tiny bi-level home that didn't offer them space of their own. They were more than six years apart in age. Even so, they shared a secret battle every Saturday morning to see who could wake up first and own the television selection. They agreed with my mother to keep the television on the lowest notch, though they would raise the volume slowly as the morning went on. Sean and Danny would sit two feet from the television with their eyes peeled and necks stretched and raised vertically, arching their backs to try and sit comfortably close to the speaker of the television. They would sit so close to the television, it's no wonder they both later needed glasses.

That morning I woke up much earlier than I usually did. My brothers were only on their first ice pop and the television was set to the lowest notch, indicating it was still early enough to go back to sleep. Instead, I crept toward the couch, laying down, facing inward. I couldn't look at the television. It wasn't the usual grogginess of the morning, but a different kind of restlessness

that caused me to walk into the living room instead of back into my bedroom. I felt uncomfortable, no matter which way I adjusted myself. It was more than waking up on the wrong side of the bed. I could tell something was off inside of me, beyond the physical feelings. I couldn't seem to think straight.

The television was too bright and too much to look at for some reason. When I lay on the couch, I decided to face grey-and-black striped cushions. The couch was a hand-me-down from my grandmother. It had places where the cushions were more worn down than others. The places that were sat in most were worn down to the plastic-felt polyester of the couch's stitching. However, if you lay down and faced the cushions that support your back, you would face the part of the couch that still had some fuzz on it. The couch still felt brand new there.

I traced the vertical lines against the striped, fuzzy grain, something that I felt entranced by. When I was overly tired or ready for bed, I would like to lie on the couch lightly hovering my hand over the short stubs of the couch's softness, slightly moving my hand back and forth. It almost felt like a fresh buzz cut that my Dad or brothers would get every few weeks. Their hair still stood straight up and you could push it back and forth if you hovered your hand over it slightly. That morning, I continued to caress the fuzz from the couch, against its grain and with it, in a meditative state.

I wasn't tired, though. It was morning, after all. I had slept a full night's sleep. I don't remember waking up to use the bathroom or tossing and turning. I couldn't figure out why I still felt so tired. I heard Sean offer me an ice pop for breakfast, hurriedly, before Mom woke up. I refused my favorite flavor, the green ice pop. He rushed to eat it and suck the end juices as quietly as he could. I could hear him in the kitchen burying the plastic remains within the garbage.

Food felt like the last thing I could ever imagine going into my body. I wasn't nauseous; I just couldn't react to the basic desires the morning usually brought me of hunger and thirst.

I felt like something was terribly wrong and that I just needed to be by someone to feel safe. Even so, I couldn't look at my brothers. I couldn't explain how my body felt beyond that. It was just a feeling I had, an intuition, that something was about to happen — but I was the only one aware of it. It was almost as if you knew you would be minutes from throwing up and you suddenly had to rush to find a toilet. Instead of nausea, something else was happening to me. I didn't know until later in life what anxiety felt like, but this was it: anxiety. The feeling of solitary waves of emotion. Being alone, in that moment, was scary for my eight year-old self. While I felt a need to be with my brothers, I still felt like the room was empty and being around them didn't comfort me anymore. I needed to find my mother.

Rapidly, a metallic taste rushed forward from the back of my teeth to the front of my mouth like a tsunami crashing into the inside of my lips. Once the taste hit my lips, they instantly went numb. The anesthetized feeling spread to the bottom of my left eyelid. It was a quick and intense sensation that was unfamiliar to me. I needed my mom, immediately. I wanted to run to her but I could barely feel myself moving. I must have found a way to jump up and dash toward my parents' bedroom door, because the next thing I remember is embracing my mom, with my face buried in the stomach of her heather gray T-shirt.

I clenched her with everything inside of me. "*Why can't I speak?*" I tried to ask my mother. I repeated myself over and over with hopes that each time I spoke words would actually come together. Like a nightmare where you can feel yourself struggling to move, I tried screaming for her to help me but no words would leave my mouth. It was as if all my vocal cords were ripped from my throat. I was living in a nightmare where all I needed to do was yell "Help!" and

I would be saved, but the words never came. My mind was screaming and translated to mumbled cries. When I pulled away from my mother, her heather gray T-shirt was soaked and drenched with tears. I didn't even realize that I had been crying until I pulled away from her. I could only feel the scream that remained tense in my chest, unreleased. Even after many deep breaths that followed I could still feel the tightness in my lungs.

I don't know if my mother woke up because my brothers were calling for her or if she had the motherly instinct to wake up a little early that morning, but she greeted me in the hall at the exact moment I began to have my first seizure. I wanted to know why my brain couldn't put myself together, and I couldn't remember the moment it fell apart. My mother didn't have those answers either.

My mother and I didn't know it was my first seizure, at first. We were both confused as to why I couldn't express how I was feeling for a few minutes and how, afterwards, I couldn't articulate what just happened. She kept asking what was wrong. When I finally answered, "I don't know," she reassured me that everything was going to be OK. She hugged me again and held me until I calmed myself down and stopped crying. I was crying long after the seizure ended. I was so confused and unaware of myself and my surroundings. I was conscious. I was there. I was present, but I was also somewhere hovering over myself too, before, during and after it happened. My mother continued to rub my head and whisper kind words to calm me down. She held my face and talked me through my deep breaths. She used her thumbs to caress my cheeks while she repeated, "It's okay, honey. You're okay. I'm here. I love you. Just breathe, honey."

I held her for a while, standing in the hallway, terrified and suddenly exhausted. This drowsiness too came in a tidal wave.

“It was probably just a bad dream,” she claimed.

I don’t know why I didn’t tell her I wasn’t dreaming.

“Whatever, girls between eight and ten, boys between ten and twelve,” my mother dug to remember the most precise details for me.

I had just asked her if she could explain what it was like for her when I had my first seizure. It was vivid memory that’s been with me for years and I shared most of it with my mother, yet, we’ve never discussed it out loud. Instead of just starting from the beginning, my mother scrambled through her memories spitting blurbs of information out at me. It had been seventeen years since I had my first seizure and it seemed that my mother was more reluctant than ever to discuss it with me.

I decided it was time to write about my seizures. Maybe writing about it would help me work through my own unfelt and confused feelings of this time of my life. I figured that I could work through my issues while simultaneously reaching other readers who felt lost and unsure of themselves during their childhood, as I did. My epilepsy only lasted a few years, and I was the lucky few who were able to grow out of my condition through puberty.

My mother was the one who primarily cared for me during these years. Since my father worked, my mother was the one who was exposed to my seizures the most. The problem I had with this, however, was that while she physically was close with me during this time, there was no sense of intimacy between us when it came to my condition. One might assume that because of this condition a mother might grow closer to her child and want to protect her and help her

work through this confusing time. Instead, I had always felt that she was avoiding the issue and the conversation. While she constantly assured me I was going to be okay and I was a normal little girl, I felt that the only one she was trying to convince was herself. I didn't feel that way. I didn't feel normal. I felt like the only person who had to deal with having seizures. I wasn't aware of other kids who had them which made me feel alone as if no one could possibly understand me. My mother brushing the topic off with simple, repeated phrases made me frustrated and angry with her. My mother didn't want to hear that. It made her uncomfortable to see her child upset with herself and her body, the same body she created.

When I made my decision to interview my mother I hoped of getting a perspective from her that she seemingly refused to share with me throughout my childhood. While we had this special bond with each other because of my epilepsy, somehow it went unspoken and began to act as a wedge between us, pushing us apart instead of a glue that one might think would hold us together. Perhaps I was the only one aware of this wedge.

I've begun to resent myself for having such negative and resentful feelings towards my mother. In the times leading up to our interview, I had set an intention to start building a better relationship with her. I knew this had to start with talking about the place I felt this wedge was first placed, where it all started, when I began having seizures.

The perception I had of my mother had also changed a lot throughout the years. I couldn't help but wonder if that is because as a person gets older they start to notice the things about their parents that they would in a friend. Perhaps we start to see these people in a less idealized view. I have had countless conversations with friends and family as I have gotten older about people you want to cut from your life because they are toxic or self-serving. You can't cut your family from your life, though.

I looked at my mother recently and realized she is nothing like she used to be. My mother now seems to feel she is a victim of the world. She worries herself and is constantly upsetting herself over the minute details of life. For example, though almost all of her kids have moved out of her house she would still get angry when someone doesn't help her clean it. She would leave bathroom sinks half wiped down with the Lysol wipe still sitting on the counter. It wouldn't be until one of her children visit that the Lysol wipe will be removed from the sink counter and the sink will finish being cleaned. She would leave it there hoping to hint to someone else to finish cleaning it. As kids, we had chores and when our mother asked us to help clean around the house, we were expected to abide. It's as if my mother expects her children to still maintain these duties long after they move out of her house. She dwells on these facts and let them eat her days up, change her mood, and create unnecessary stress in her life. I feel bad for her.

Back when I was young, she would brush things off and if it wasn't important in that moment, it was something she could let go. I have looked at her recently and seen her relive things she could have let go. She relives misery in a way that forces herself to feel pain over and over. She'll let a disagreement with my grandmother linger in her mind for days calling each one of her daughters, her sister and her friends re-telling the story over and over until she has gotten over it. If someone is rude to her at the store that day she will rush to snap at this person, cursing them up and down under her breath altering her mood for the remainder of the day. I have begun to worry whether she is going to give herself a heart attack one day soon. I've loved this woman my whole life, and somehow she lost sight of the power she used to have in this world. I have begun thinking about how I could see a person in one light, as a strong and fearless woman then see her in an opposite light that casts shadows on issues to make it easier for her to deal with them.

She's grown to avoid the more important issues in life and I've wondered if this began when she started avoiding any discussion with her daughter who had seizures.

I looked at the relationship she had with my sister and envied the way they could relate to one another. Ironically, I have been told I am more like my mother than anyone else in the family. I hated this fact and appreciated it, all at once. I wanted to take my mother's strength that was present in our childhood and leave the self-pity she seems to feel recently. As I've gotten older, I've seen her weaken, and this upsets me. The hero in my life is defeating herself every day. I have come to admit that I have inherited these same traits from my mother.

Selflessly, my mother characterized herself as nothing more than a mother. I admire this about her too. She has never sought out a purpose or set a voyage to find herself. Even as a child, she would tell me, she cared for her younger brother and sister after her parents got divorced and my grandmother started working again. She never felt compelled to know anything more about herself than this. She is an eccentric woman with a bold tone in her voice and crackled laugh that bursts with a scream of emotion when she feels it. She is a woman who gives more than she takes. I've noticed, as we get older, that her refusal to take anything from anyone leaves her complaining about how little she has.

While she would do anything for us, as we grew into adulthood, she sometimes struggles to communicate with us. It's as if she only knows how to communicate with her babies, her schoolyard children, not with her adult children who have careers, college educations, homes and their own families. She can be authoritative, demanding and desensitized in how she responds to us. Because she is our mother, it seems she doesn't have to take into consideration that we are also adults.

She has also kept her past a secret to me for many years. As a child, I don't think we realize that our parents once had a childhood and history of their own. It feels as if they are the closest people in your life and when you come to find you don't know barely anything about their life before you, it can be disappointing. I was fourteen when my mother and older brother, Joey, confessed that he was my half-brother and my father wasn't his biological father. I sometimes forget that my mother had a life before her children. She met my father, Joe (ironic, I know), and they got married and had four kids despite the challenge it was to live by those means. I never even noticed that my half-brother, Joey, didn't look anything like my father.

While my mother was the runner of the household, my father still was the provider that held us all together. He has gone to work every day for over thirty-five years, destroying his body for his family. Most literally, he is falling apart and working himself to death, still, five to six days a week. It was always a treat when he was home on Sundays and even more cherished when he didn't have to work a Saturday morning and could come to my soccer games. I always preferred him instead of my mother on these occasions.

My father and I would have a short time to spend together driving home and reflecting on my soccer games. He knew I wasn't the most athletic of his children, but he never pressured me to be the best. He'd talk to me calmly about my game and where I could improve but he never let me feel like I was the worst. He had a way of encouraging me to be better without making me feel worse about my many weaknesses. As the years go on, I see my father grow closer to his children. I see that my relationship with my father has grown stronger than with any of my other siblings. My father can empathize with me without making the situation about himself. He can lighten my heart when it's feeling heavy. Though I inherited his red hair (when he had hair), I'd like to think I've inherited his ability to love my mother regardless of these changes in her that I

worry have become permanent. I must admit, though, that it is easy to see the good in a person when you spend less time with them. I've tried to remind myself that my father is not the perfect version of a parent either and I can't allow myself to compare the two with one another.

I was twenty six years-old and it was seventeen years after I had my first seizure. I had not spoken to my mother about it since I was young. I was an adult at this point and I didn't remember her ever discussing what was happening to me and what doctors thought of my situation. I only remember how unspoken this topic was in my family. It was never brought up in front of my sister or brothers. I didn't think I ever talked about it with my father, either. It always seemed like a sensitive subject in our household, and if I was to bring it up, I might have been shot down. I needed to be brave. I was an adult now and I shouldn't be afraid to talk to my family about this. I had to muster up the courage to ask my mother to explain what she remembered, and it was clear she was uncomfortable sharing her memories. I wondered whether it was because it was painful for her. I also wondered if she was trying to avoid discussing anything that could be reflected as a weakness to her. It seemed as if my seizures were somehow a reflection of something she did wrong. I never wanted her to feel this way; after all, it was not her fault I had seizures.

I had just begun teaching middle school reading and writing. While chaperoning the school dance, I met one of my student's mothers who confided in me about her daughter and how she was worried there was something wrong with her. My student's mother would catch her daughter zoning out. Her daughter would explain that she feels like she is there, but that her body cannot move or would freeze. Her thoughts would keep moving through her brain but her body would just halt for a few moments. She explained that she almost felt like she had to shake herself and wake herself up again. Something about this seemed familiar to me. Not completely, but

close enough that I was vaguely remembering my own experiences with this similar kind of dis-association in middle school. Her mother researched this and wondered whether her daughter was experiencing some form of a seizure. She couldn't catch her daughter in the act, so it was difficult for doctors to diagnose her with anything. Although this was a different feeling for my student, I wondered if she had Rolandic seizures, like myself. I encouraged her mother to be persistent and continue following up with the doctors.

I never expected to teach middle school. I always thought I would teach high school English, instead. Middle school was when things began to turn quite dark for me. It revolved around memories of my epilepsy and a long period where I was lost in my own brain. Ironically, I found myself working with kids that were this age, when in my own life I had tried to block these years from my memory. Being in the new middle school position started to bring up past memories I seemed to have suppressed for many years. Talking with my student's mother about her own concerns with her daughter's epilepsy made me wonder if my mother had done the same thing or if she kept it all to herself, as it always seemed to me. I wasn't sure if she kept it all a secret from the world, like she was ashamed of it. I was determined to find out through my interviews with her to somehow determine if my epilepsy was a secret to her just the way her past marriage had been to me.

It was time for me to ask the questions I needed the answers to. I wanted to know what she wouldn't tell me as a child. I wanted to know if she was angry at me for being such a burden, as it seemed or felt to me. I wanted to know if she was ashamed of me. I assumed that she didn't want to talk about it with me because for some reason she was irritated with my condition.

Knowing how irrational this sounded, I still felt it somehow, and by talking to her, I felt I could

find comfort in her words to ease my troubled memories and self-defeat I couldn't seem to get rid of.

It was a typical Sunday morning and my mother and I were sitting on the couch drinking coffee. I asked her, outright, if she could share with me what she remembered about the time in my life that I had dealt with epilepsy. It was clear my mother was uncomfortable with the conversation when she jumped in and started spitting out information out of order, semi-aggressively.

“I pushed to try and get you off the meds because that's just the person I am. The doctor was like, well has she been seizure-free? And I'm like yeah, I haven't had any issues. I mean, then I told her an issue that you were having.” She mimics herself speaking to the doctor, “Well, except for the other morning when she got up and she said she had this funny taste in her mouth.”

As usual, my mother seemed to jump the gun and was talking all over the place again. Sometimes this can be quite comical, but I was nervous to talk to her about this already. Her scattered memories seemed to be a way of avoiding talking about what really mattered to me. I was worried this might happen and was hoping she realize this was something we shouldn't continue to brush off anymore.

My mother mimicked my doctor's voice in a high-pitched, whining tone: “Well, maybe we should just wait another year.” She rolled her eyes. “A whole year, why would you wait a whole year?”

It was clear that I was going to have to guide her through this. A million questions were flooding to the front of my mind. She was skipping around and even confusing me. I was quickly realizing this was a scab I had decided to scratch and reopen leaving my wound stinging and

burning with every moment this conversation continued. It felt more like a hangnail that irritated me more and more my mother talked. I tried to control myself and try not to get frustrated with her. I tried to remind myself this might be painful for her to remember, too.

“Mom, how old was I when I had my first seizure? Why don’t you just take me through it from the beginning?” I started with the most simple of questions, I thought.

“Well, what do you want? Your seizures? The doctors? I don’t know.”

It appeared to not be a big deal to her because of the dismissive tone in her voice.

“Everything, Mom. Why don’t you just start from the beginning and tell me everything you know about it.”

It has always been a big deal to me, my seizures. I never let my mother know this before. Her disengagement from the conversation was throwing salt into my wound. I didn’t want this to turn into an argument, as many of our conversations did recently. This conversation was sensitive enough for me.

“Hold on, one second.” My mother was on her phone, seemingly avoiding me. “Is this the one you got on Snapchat?”

She was watching a video that my sister, Jessie, sent me earlier on Snapchat of my niece with some animal filter transforming her voice to a high-pitched, mousy tone. My mother smiled and giggled, as we were before when I showed her this video twenty minutes ago. *Now is not the time to ignore me, Mom*, I thought. At the same time, I couldn’t blame her, it was a cute video.

“Mom, come on.”

I waited for the mousy voice to turn off indicating the video was over. *I know her, she was probably hoping that if we were to get off track I’d forget what we were talking about and she could press play on the recording of last week’s “General Hospital.”*

“Oh my God, she is a little stinker!” My mom smiled and replayed the ten second video a few more times, still ignoring my impatience.

“Mom, you’re recording.”

I held up my phone to show her that my phone was recording her.

“Sorry.” She sighed and tossed down her phone and rubbed her eyes as if to appear suddenly exhausted. “From the first time it happened?”

“Yes, tell me everything from the beginning.”

Since my mother continued to stall, I started with the condensed version of my memory for my mother. I thought this might encourage her. I didn’t want to get into details; I just wanted to jumpstart her memory and give her a place to begin. I finished my story with the time I had my face in her shirt and the image in my mind of my tears and spit soaking her heather-gray pajama top.

“It was all light blue, actually.”

She was referring to the couch. The same couch I distinctly remember lying on every Saturday morning, meditatively rubbing my hand on the short, soft parts of the cushion when I had my first seizure.

“See?”

I spoke to her earlier about why I wanted to interview her. I explained how I didn’t know if I remembered everything about that time in my life, and I thought that maybe she could put a few things together for me by talking to me about it. She still didn’t get how important, even the smallest of details, could be to my memory. In her defense, I didn’t want to get too intimate with my reasoning for asking her. I was afraid if I jumped at her too quickly with all the self-loathing and self-conscious feelings I have had towards myself because of it, she might get upset with

such a raw conversation. It can't be easy to hear her daughter is unhappy with her childhood, the same person she brought into this world and raised.

"It was a striped blue, dark blue, and gray couch."

She interrupted my recollection a second time, nonchalantly.

"We were in the hallway in front of my bedroom, and I was crying and crying and I don't know why I am about to cry right now." Already I was choking up. I tried to continue my recollection with a well of tears in my eyes. For some reason, finding out about this small detail of my memory was upsetting me. I thought, *who cares about this couch? Why am I crying?* I don't know why I was beginning to get emotional, but my mother was quick to respond and stop my crying.

"No, you ran to me."

My mother was persistent to move past my tears. She seemed shocked to see me cry over some minute detail. I don't blame her for pushing past this; I didn't expect myself to get so emotional. It was just a stupid couch. Even so, I stayed frustrated with her.

"No." A quick "no," she stuttered to continue in order to keep me from crying anymore. "No, you ran from the living room into my room and I was in bed. I got up and sat on the end of the bed because you were not talking to me. You were just crying, hysterical, and just looking at me and I kept looking at you. I kept trying to get you to say something and you wouldn't ... speak. And I noticed there was something wrong because you wouldn't talk and your face was drooping a little."

It wasn't what you think. I didn't drop to the floor, convulsing, eyes rolled in the back of my head. My brothers didn't have to shove a wallet in my mouth to keep me from biting or swallowing my tongue. I remember seeing that in a film we watched in school when I was in health

class and we learned what epilepsy was. The video, I remember, showed a reenactment of a grand mal seizure in the classroom. This poor student was attempting to put on an Oscar-winning performance. The students circled the kid and backed away from him while the teacher ripped out his wallet and shoved it between the child's teeth. This was the way they were teaching kids in school to react to a seizure. Back away, be afraid. Also, keep them from biting their tongue off.

Whatever seizure horror story you are picturing, forget it — because that didn't happen to me.

When I had a seizure, I would feel it coming. I usually had this strange, indescribable feeling to find my mom as soon as possible. The metallic taste would rush through my mouth and my lips and left cheek would feel numb, almost instantly. The left side of my face drooped down and I suddenly couldn't talk. Then it happened and I was stuck waiting it out. I was completely conscious, standing or sitting. I never met another person who had seizures this way. For the most part, I would hear of someone having the most common kind of seizure, a grand mal seizure, where they would fall unconscious. I was the only person I knew who would have a seizure and be completely conscious throughout it.

I would also always have a seizure in the early morning, usually after a restless or short night of sleep. My body knew I should be near someone, someone who could help me, even if they couldn't really do anything. I would usually cry, uncontrollably, until it passed, usually after about forty-five seconds or less. I would feel trapped in the moment, which made me more upset. I would desperately try to fight it, trying to get the moment to end quicker.

“Then, there was drool coming out. You were awake. You were talking, but not actually talking. You know what I mean?” my mother continued, casually. “I just picked you up, and I

was holding you. *It's OK, it's OK! What's the matter?! What's the matter!?* But I didn't know, so I was just, like, holding you and holding you while you were crying, until finally you stopped, took a breath, calmed down."

I realized that I didn't remember being in my parents' bedroom at all. I remembered it all happening in the hallway between the living room and my bedroom. I remember standing in the hallway while my mother remembered holding me in her bedroom. Even these minute details seemed so important to me. How could my memory skew these details? They weren't essential to my story, and yet they were the accurate form in my memory, and that in itself made me question if I remembered any of this correctly.

"Then I started yelling, *JOE!* Because it must have been a weekend. I don't remember if I was yelling for him or. . ."

"Dad wasn't home," I interrupted.

Wait, he was home? Dad was there?

She ignored me and continued, "I wasn't sure if I was yelling to Dad to come in the room and see what was happening or if I was yelling at Dad because he was in bed and didn't frikin move or get up the whole time I was doing this."

My dad was a heavy sleeper, like me.

"But I remember he showed up right away and came down the hall. Maybe he was outside in the garage, the kitchen, I don't know. Maybe he was lying in bed, then got out of bed and came to the bottom of the bed. I don't know, but I don't remember that part as much. All I know is I'm sitting at the edge of the bed and yelling to him, 'There's something wrong!' and he's like, 'What?' and I'm yelling, 'There's something wrong with her!' 'What do you mean there's something wrong with her?'

“I put you down and made him look at you and you were fine. It stopped and you were crying. I turned to you for answers and asked, ‘I don’t know, Honey, what’s the matter?’ and you just said, ‘I don’t know!’ I asked, ‘What did you do?’ I didn’t know if maybe you ate something and were having some kind of an allergic reaction. I had no frikin clue! You’re running in my room going. . .”

Her way of imitating a child with epilepsy was not one that would win an Oscar or a Tony.

“When I tried to look at you, I could just see in your eyes that you were scared and you were crying and you wouldn’t talk. Which. . . frightened me so much that. . . well, a little girl who is crying for their mommy, so I just held you. You looked right at me as if you were saying ‘Mom! What’s going on! I can’t talk!’ You tried to talk, but nothing was coming out. I think I might have been pacing. I was carrying you thinking, ‘What do I do?! Where do I go?! Should I call the doctors!?’ Then, when I put you down, you were fine.”

“What do you mean my face was drooping?”

“Well, palsy, do you know palsy? So that’s what they thought it was, the doctor, that I brought you to that day.”

The day after my seizure was a blur, I’ll admit.

What I do remember is very little, but it was nothing like what my mother told me. It felt like I should remember all of the smallest details since it was all happening to me. I had a hard time reminding myself that she was an adult and her memory, perhaps, was better than mine.

What I thought I did remember most was the remainder of the morning. My brothers sat and watched television with me. My mother pulled them into the kitchen, separately. I always thought she might be reprimanding them for eating ice pops for breakfast instead of oatmeal. Come to think of it, she might have been interrogating them about whether they saw anything unusual from me. She probably questioned them to see if they witnessed what might have happened before I ran to her. They were so glued to the television, they didn't even notice me rush to her bedroom.

Later, I remember playing in the backyard with my brothers. My mother usually sent us outside, especially when the weather was nice. She would force us to get out of the house and away from the television. Mostly this gave her some time to cook, do laundry, and all other motherly duties without interruption or obligation of her five children.

The house I lived in throughout my childhood was a bi-level home. Out the back- sliding door of the first floor, off the kitchen, was a large deck overlooking our yard. Below our deck was another sliding door that entered into our bottom floor, our refinished basement. In our yard there was much to explore. The woods next door held enough trees for my older brother, Joey, to build a treehouse. It was his secret getaway only 20 yards, or so, from our home. On the other corner of our yard was an old shed with a bed of massive rocks bulging from the earth. My brother and I would take small, dark pebbles from the driveway and use them as chalk to write over the rocks. Since the rocks were covered by tall foliage, much of our art would remain and little would be washed away from rain. Closer to the back door was a large, circular indentation in our yard from when we had a pool. The pool was an aboveground pool. It didn't last long in our home in the Appalachian Mountains. It was destroyed when a black bear, midsummer, thought he'd take a dip. The bear tore down the entire side of the pool trying to climb inside.

Next to the remains of the pool was an old red-and-silver swing set. The swing set had two solo swings, one slide, and a carriage swing that held four passengers. My brothers and I would have contests to see who could jump highest off the swings. We'd swing as high as we could, until the swing nearly flipped all the way around, and jump off into the ditch that used to be our swimming pool. The ditch was still dirt and sand from the foundation, so it was softer than the grass that covered the rest of the yard.

My mother pulled me aside that day before I went out to play with my brothers.

“Honey, take it easy today, OK? You didn't feel well this morning. Nothing crazy, all right?”

Often, my mother would have us stay outside until dinner. She wanted us to be outside and be kids. She didn't want us all cooped up in the house, especially when we had this whole yard to be free in. On this day, however, she was constantly opening up the kitchen sliding door and calling out for us.

“Are you OK?”

“Are you hungry yet?”

“Time to come in?”

My mother was anxious, I could tell even then. She hovered a bit more than usual that day.

When I asked my mother about her recollection of that day, her story didn't match up with mine, at all. The first time I had a seizure ended up being the most eventful of my experience with epilepsy and I didn't even know it.

“We immediately got in the car and went to the hospital because I knew there was something wrong.” My mother seemed proud to admit this.

“We didn’t go to the hospital. . .”

Hospital, what hospital?

My mother looked at me as though I was joking with her, “Jess. . .” she stuttered. She’s always calling me Jess by accident. “Kaitlin.” She corrected herself and continued, ignoring my confusion about going to the hospital that day. “We went to the hospital. I got all this work done, waiting to see what was going on.”

“Mom, I don’t remember this. . .”

I began crying again and I couldn’t stop. I didn’t expect myself to get so emotional about this. After all, it was seventeen years ago. I looked away from her, trying hard to remember the hospital, the doctors, the tests. *Why can’t I remember this? This happened to me, didn’t it? She must be remembering it wrong.*

She brushed this off, like she does sometimes, when she doesn’t want to make a big deal out of something. I looked at her with what felt like the same desperation for answers that I had during my episodes, but she ignored my eyes. She seemed even more shocked that I didn’t remember going to the hospital. Even so, she continued to refresh my forgotten memory.

“So, we went to Newton Hospital and I don’t know what was going on that day, but someone had a soccer game and I thought, ‘We’ve got to go now, because the game’s at two— if we get to the emergency room, talk to the doctor, and see if there something going on.’”

It was as if she was simply listing off her plans for that upcoming afternoon.

“I mean, I’m not going to wait. I’m not going to wait ‘til Monday. And Daddy thought I was off my rocker because he doesn’t know what’s going on. So I went to the hospital, took all you kids, went to the emergency room in Newton and saw some doctor there: The biggest quack

ever at this point. He don't know nothin'. So, I'm explaining what I see to him and he says, 'Well that sounds like Bell's palsy.'"

Bell's palsy is a condition in which one side of your face weakens or becomes paralyzed. The facial nerves then become damaged, causing one side of your face to droop. In some cases, this condition can come on overnight and usually can get better within a few weeks, my mother told me.

"Point I'm getting at is, I questioned the doctor, 'Oh really? That's what you think it is? Then why is her face back to normal already?' It's been only an hour or two and this quack of a doctor thinks your Bell's palsy cured that fast? Yeah right, buddy."

She paused for dramatic emphasis.

She was proud of herself. She was proud of being smarter than the doctor.

"Her face goes back to normal, in time. She only had it happen for a few seconds and she's normal again. That's not Bell's palsy, Doc-tor! Hello! I don't have a degree, and you do?' So, I had a little issue with the doctors that day."

I laughed and wiped my tears. This was the best part, and sometimes worst part, of my mother. She had a sassy and challenging attitude. She was right, though. She had more common sense than this particular doctor did. A mother's instinct triumphs, once again. I had to admit, I was proud to find that she stuck up for me so aggressively towards this doctor who clearly didn't put much effort in examining me.

She put on a dopey voiceover to mimic the doctor, "'Yeah, it is kind of strange...'" She rolled her eyes again, "Yea, well you're a quack! So, I leave, and we get nowhere."

My mother's story continued with a brief summary of how she asked the doctor what further tests they could run on me. She continued to explain how this "quack" of a doctor didn't

seem to think there was anything wrong with me. First, he thought it might be Bell's palsy. Next, he thought there was nothing wrong and there was no need for any further testing to make sure of it.

I was wondering where my father was at this time. I was assuming he was there with her, but I didn't get a chance to ask because she was in a middle of this story and there was no room for me to interrupt her. All I know, or all I remember, is I didn't go to the hospital or the doctors office; at least she never mentioned this to me. It bothered me that my father was not a part of her story, especially because I have such a nice relationship with my father in comparison to my mother. While he most likely was working, I guess I assumed he would be there. I also began to think about my relationship with my father and how I would have thought that it had gotten this strong because of experiences like this. I was beginning to realize that my friendship with my father was probably because it was never complicated by these more difficult events.

Certainly the panic my mother and father experienced that morning was something they were very good at hiding from me. I didn't remember any worry or panic from either of them. It wasn't until that following night, after my first seizure, that I really saw the fear and worry in my parents' eyes.

"Well, she looks fine. Don't worry about it. Keep an eye on her but I'm sure she's fine."

She mimics the doctor again, in a mocking tone.

The following night was also a blur. I don't remember anything but waking up to a flashlight in my face. This was the second seizure I had. This seizure was unlike any of the other seizures I experienced before or after. This was the only time I was unconscious during a seizure and the only time I experienced a grand mal seizure.

My sister and I had bunk beds pushed up against the newly painted, green walls of our room. When I became conscious that night, I found myself sitting up in my bottom bunk with my back against the wall. I was facing this light at the end of the tunnel, or so it seemed. It was the EMT flashlight. There were questions being asked of me, but I don't remember what. It was hard to focus on anything but the light.

My sister and I shared a room since we were kids. We shared bunk beds for almost thirteen years. Jessie got the top bunk while I got the bottom bunk. She was five years older than me so, naturally, she called most of the shots. My sister would have to step onto one of our bedside dressers to climb onto the top bunk because there was not a ladder built in. The two side dressers were painted white with pink knobs. The bunk bed was also white, with thin, pink trim, and there were two matching wardrobes. Each wardrobe was as tall as the bunk bed. It had four drawers and a cabinet that had two hidden shelves inside. It was a lot of furniture for our 10-by-11-foot room.

Being five years apart really kept my sister and me from ever building a relationship worth remembering as kids. We danced together at the same dance studio since we were toddlers, but never in the same class or competition group. While I was younger, I definitely didn't follow in her skill set as a dancer. The skinny, short, flexible Jessie was able to master point, lyrical, ballet and jazz. She won gold medals and blue ribbons that hung from her bedpost, braided

down the length of our bunk bed, while mine hung with a long line of pink participation ribbons. Still, I hung them down the other bedpost, like my sister.

Oblivious to my body type during those younger years, I tried to mirror my sister. She was petite with long, dirty-blonde hair, sea-blue eyes and gracefulness in her step. I took the same dance classes and wore the same leotards and dance shorts as my sister. However, my classes were at a lower skill level. While my mother explained it was because of my age, I wasn't oblivious to the fact that there were girls my age who took classes with my sister and nearly each girl in my class was younger than me.

I didn't have a petite build like my sister. I had curves on me since I was a girl. My legs weren't slender and I always had a bit of a pudge in my belly, baby fat that never went away. My curly, bright red hair was almost always knotty while my sister's locks were styled in waves that seemed to blow behind her when wind wasn't even present. She had a grace I still haven't been able to find. I was also taller than my sister, which somehow didn't work to my benefit as a dancer. It didn't make my legs long and lean, but instead, lanky and wobbly.

My dance teacher, Kimberly, was equally as graceful as my sister. She wore purple, velvet leotards and pale pink, chiffon skirts wrapped around her waist. Back in these days, it was trendy for girls to attend dance class wearing flannel shorts with labels on the thigh of our recent competition win. All the girls wore them over their leotards with the waist folded over and over until it was short enough to just cover their cheeks. Like the other girls, I'd wear my flannel shorts with pride. Within minutes of stretching in the beginning of class one day, Kimberly called on me.

“Kaitlin, you know flannel shorts are not appropriate for dance class. Take them off.”

Kimberly spoke directly, in a monotone voice. Like a mother, there were no words to respond, you just listened to her.

“Remember, you needed to practice sucking in.”

It took me more than one dance class to realize I was the only girl who had to “practice sucking in,” while the other twiggies were able to dress comfortably.

Kimberly had a theory, she explained to me, that if her students practiced sucking in, it helped build their abdominal muscles and eventually the stomach would stay that way. She was not afraid to backhandedly tell me I was chunkier than the other girls and needed to work on my weight.

Most sisters have some kind of resemblance to each other. People can tell they are sisters. They share similar traits that make them unique to one another. Not us. Not Jessie and Kaitlin. If anything, we shared little to nothing in common. I came up short in almost every sport I tried, instrument I attempted to learn, project I participated in, or class I took. I was always second best. She excelled in dance and was always considered my mother’s ballerina. She received gifts of sentimental value each Christmas. Jessie had a collection of porcelain, blonde ballerinas that sat on the top shelf, right under our pink, flowery wallpaper border. She got along with my mother while I butted heads with her, constantly. It was one of those things where we couldn’t meet eye to eye, and most likely never would, it seemed. We simply had nothing in common.

Sure, we all have those awkward years. Years where your siblings don’t get along. Those dreaded preteen years when you’re not really aware of the changes your body is going through. Girls get their periods and they crush on boys. They wonder how they can feel pretty, how they can look pretty. Boys bodies change too and they become embarrassed with their voices, afraid to speak, and crack and squeal into manhood. We all struggle to find out what to do with this

newfound awareness. There are plenty of moments and memories we never want to relive again. I am no different in these ways, I'm told. My sister and I shared this moment together, something she didn't feel comfortable reliving. She was with me when I had my first grand mal seizure and the second seizure in my life. Like my mother, my sister and I never spoke about it. Even after experiencing this unforgettable scene in both of our childhoods, we never grew closer. Instead, we seemed to grow apart for a long time afterward.

That night when I experienced my second seizure and first grand mal seizure, I came to consciousness with the image of my sister. She was sitting in her pajamas on the bedside table in tears repeating "Is she OK? Is she OK?" over and over, and nobody seemed to respond. The top pink knob on the bedside table had a loose screw and she was spinning the knob nervously waiting for an answer. I saw her shortly after my eyes adjusted from the EMT's flashlight.

I don't remember much else from this night, so I decided to ask my sister what she remembered, too. I interviewed her the same way I did my mother. Except with my sister, I spent most of the day at the Warwick Winery, a local winery and restaurant in our town, and had a few drinks in hopes of getting her to open up to me more easily. Although we've finally grown closer over the past few years, spending free weekends together more like friends than distant sisters, my sister and I still have a cork that has been wedged there for so long it feels like we need someone else's help uncorking our emotions and sharing things with one another. In a lot of ways, we are still so very different from one another.

Jessie began her recollection of this night very intellectually. She seemed to be pulling these memories from a very uncomfortable place and was afraid of how to word things correctly. Also, when my sister talks about something serious, she tends to put on a voice that has a more sophisticated tone. She majored in psychology in college; therefore, anything that involves her

talking about the mind and psychological or neurological disorders brings on the same tone of voice.

“What I witnessed, I truly believe, textbook, is what a seizure would look like. It was the typical kind,” she recalled as if reading to a classroom of students, then admitted, “. . .but I don’t have anything to compare it to.”

My sister and I had a long day at the winery. We discussed her marriage and her life as the parent of two toddlers. We discussed my struggles in the dating world and my upcoming travels to Europe for the summer for graduate school. At this point, we’d grown closer than we ever had before. We had come to realize that there was no better or more loyal friend in this world than a sister. For that, we had come to realize how valuable we were to one another, despite our many differences. It took us a few glasses of wine to open up to one another. Even so, my sister was very secretive about her personal life. I, too, struggle to share things with her — but I felt it was time to really talk to her about what she witnessed since she was the one who found me.

“However, at that point in your life, you were having a lot of nightmares. You were always having nightmares about. . .” She giggled as I anticipated her answer with fear and anxiety. “I know it sounds stupid, but you were having nightmares about spiders . . . a lot. A couple times you would fall out of bed. We had a little dresser by the bunk beds . . .”

“Yeah, I remember I hit my head on it pretty bad, twice or something.” I recalled, though, hitting my head while rolling over in my sleep.

“Yeah, you would get very upset in the middle of the night because you were having nightmares about bugs crawling on you, a lot. It happened often. You would have nightmares about ants, or bugs, or spiders crawling on you.”

My mind must have made it a point to erase these memories because, again, I didn't remember any of this. I didn't get as upset as I had before, maybe because I was a little tipsy and I loosened up a bit.

To this day, I'm terrified of bugs.

"You'd get very upset and fall out of bed. A mini-production, in a way."

My sister has often expressed to me that she thinks I'm overdramatic.

"When I first woke up to the bed shaking, I assumed it was another bad dream, so I kind of brushed it off. I specifically remember waking up. But then I heard noises, and when you're dead asleep you can't differentiate when the beds are shaking and you hear noises whether it's a dream or not. You would get very worked up about the bug dreams, so I felt like when I felt the bed shaking, I was just trying to push it out of my mind and be like, 'oh, she's fine, she's fine, she's fine.' It wouldn't stop. It was just shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking. And then it got to the point where the banister, the corner of the bed was just . . ." She began banging her hand against the passenger door of my car. "It began hitting the wall and I was just like 'all right, we're reaching a new level now.' That's when I started screaming for Mom and Dad."

"Did you see me at all?" I asked, quickly.

"Oh yeah. Once the little round bed posts began hitting the wall, that's when I was like ahhh!" She let out a goofy, anxious yelp. "So, I did the little dip under, and looked under, and saw you ... I don't vividly remember that point but I did see you."

I wondered whether she was avoiding telling me what she saw from me that night and considered that she might be just as uncomfortable with this conversation as my mother was. I was anxiously waiting for her to describe what she saw, but she didn't. It was as if she didn't

want to remember it or that she was trying to protect me from getting upset. I think she could tell I was anxious for more details by the look on my face.

“So, I looked under and thought, ‘this is different.’ I just remember being so scared because it was like . . .” she paused, “obviously something very scary to see at that age. So, honestly, it was the last thing I remember. I was just screaming hysterically for them to come into the room.”

I hadn’t even considered this being a difficult memory for my sister. If anything, I’ve been so self-absorbed in my own feelings about these memories I forgot that she was still a kid when she found me seizing in the same bunkbed she had also slept in. She was only thirteen years old when she woke up to find her little sister foaming from the mouth and uncontrollably shaking.

Jessie rushed to this conclusive ending of her version of the night. I decided to express part of what I remembered, hoping to encourage her to go on. This worked like it did with my mother. My sister seemed absentminded for a moment, until she continued her story in a more casual tone.

“And you know Mom was hovering, as she usually does.” She laughed. “And Dad’s just standing off in the back. I don’t remember her saying, ‘We gotta call 911!’ or anything like that. I think I got more upset at that point . . .” Jessie paused. “Come to think of it, Mom asked me a few times whether I ever noticed you shaking before. I guess I had, but I never thought it was anything but you dreaming of spiders.”

Jessie seemed to reflect on this idea, and pushed it out of her mind all at once. It’s as if the thought of me having seizures before this night, which she may have been ignoring, was something she didn’t want to remember.

My sister laughed at this memory. “You were like, ‘get them off of me, Get Them Off Of Me, GET THEM OFF OF ME!’”

Living in Barry Lakes, we were at least a twenty-five minute drive to the closest hospital, which led me to believe it was quite some time before the EMT arrived. When the episode was over, my body and mind were exhausted. I guess my body couldn’t handle having this grand mal seizure, because I fell into a deep sleep afterward. I woke up and had to look around and ask myself, “where am I,” until my vision focused and I realized where I was.

“So, I’m a wreck all day because now we’re out and you are all playful. Then we come home that night and everything seems fine. Everybody’s normal and I’m still shaken up from the day because no one saw what I saw. The only people who knew what happened was you and me. No one else.”

My mother seemed frustrated at my lack of recollection of these events. She proceeded to point out how she was the only person who thought it was worth bringing to the attention of a doctor, unlike my father. She loves my father dearly, but she also loves pointing out when she was right and he was wrong.

“Your father thinks I’m crazy because you’re acting fine all day long. I was all shook up by it. Something’s definitely wrong. I never saw that before. I can’t believe she’s... fine. I’m worried,” she stuttered. “I don’t want you to know that. I don’t want it to scare you, so I won’t let

you know that I'm worried. I told you, 'See, everything's fine, the doctor said! We're good!' Until we went to bed that night. And that was the night that you had a grand mal seizure and I had to call the ambulance to the house because you had a full-blown seizure."

My mother explained the night of my first, and only, grand mal seizure. It was quite similar to the story Jessie told. She and I didn't know it was a seizure that I was experiencing the morning before because this one looked so much different. She wasn't sure that I had experienced a seizure at all, until that night. Since this was something familiar to her, she was able to finally understand what was going on with me. She saw my oldest brother, Joey, have a seizure once before.

"If you're sick, you have a high fever you can have a seizure. I watched him have a slight seizure from a fever when he was two years old. I remember I had to take his clothes off and put cold wash cloth on his head and give him Tylenol and try to keep him really cool. I was ready to give him a cold ice bath and he was fine. His temperature came down. So, I immediately know what a seizure is. I've seen them."

"Well, what did you do?" I asked.

It is as if the fact that her daughter was struggling to breathe during a seizure was just another fact from her textbook.

"With people who are having seizures they're trying to catch their breath."

She breathed deeply through her nose and mouth, with her jaw clamped down tight. She was imitating the way in which a person may suck in breaths during a seizure, desperately seeking oxygen.

"You know . . ."

No, I didn't know. Again, I didn't remember this.

“So, you know, that was making me upset. But, I kept making sure you were OK, and what am I going to do? You’re not supposed to move anyone. Just leave them, as long as they’re not biting their tongue. Leave them alone, lay them on their side. You’re not banging your head, you’re on a nice, soft pillow, so I just sat by you.”

She paused and a hard swallow followed.

“It was weird, because by the time that happened, I just kept rubbing your head, kissing you. ‘Are you okay, baby?’ I just kept talking to you. I was wiping your face and the guy comes in the door with the bag immediately, like, immediately. He lived a block away, maybe two. He said he heard the call come in and he’s one of those EMS guys. He happened to be listening to his radio. I was so nervous and stuff, and he was talking to you — ‘What’s up, kiddo?’ and you’re like, ‘Hey, who’s he?’”

She seemed charmed by my innocence in these moments.

“‘It’s OK, he’s just checking on you!’ You had no clue what had happened, you went back to bed. I was nervous about you going back to sleep, because I talked to him a little bit. I didn’t know what to do. He’s like, ‘What are you going to do? Put her in an ambulance? She had a seizure; you don’t want to go through that whole thing, scare her. Go through the expense of getting charged \$500 for an ambulance ride?’”

The EMT suggested taking me to a doctor in the morning. He calmed my mother’s nerves, briefly. He discussed the event as something that wasn’t as uncommon as she might think. He confirmed her plans as she worked through an idea on her own to take me to another doctor in the morning.

“He told me people have them all the time. He made me feel really calm. Then he started filling me in about things, things I may not know. But, it came back to me, because of my ex.”

My mom rarely mentioned her ex-husband. He was my brother, Joey's, father. In this case, she referred to the fact that Joey's father had epilepsy, too. He didn't have the same form of epilepsy as I did. He started having seizures as an adult. I learned that his seizures were grand mal seizures. My mother had frequently been present when they would occur. This is why she was so familiar with the state I was in that night and so calmly reacted. While most people would panic, my mom knew that remaining calm was the best way to help a person who was having a seizure like that.

"It could be a million reasons. People have them all the time. It's early morning. This can happen in the morning when they wake up, or when they're going to sleep. It sometimes happens more when they're really tired. More likely, you were waking up to get up to go to the bathroom or something but you were half asleep and half awake. So, it started happening, something, maybe."

"I didn't pee myself or anything, right?"

Please say no. Not having control of your body like that made me assume that might be a side effect.

"That night ... no."

"Wait, did I do that ever?"

"Ever? I — no, no! Because, I was looking for stuff like that."

Phew.

My mother returned to her story.

“We laid with you that night. The EMT told me you might be tired and that you would need to sleep now, for a while. He told me that if I noticed anything else, or started to have another one... and I was like ‘Oh my God, that could happen?’”

I could hear the exhaustion in my mother’s voice. Exhausted from thinking about this, but seemingly imitating the exhaustion she felt in that moment. It made sense for me why I didn’t remember some of these details. When a person goes through an episode, their body goes through intense exhaustion and recovery. It was entirely possible that I didn’t remember specific details because of this. Instead of feeling confused, I felt comforted by my sister and my mother for remembering it as vividly as they had. I wanted to feel this way after talking to them. However, it bothered me, slightly, that my mind could take control and keep me from remembering these things, but I tried not to let myself think of that.

“I wanted to know what to do. We’re not just going to ignore it. Some people say they don’t do anything and they don’t medicate, and they can live with that. They can have seizures, they can have epilepsy and it just happens. You never know when the next one will be. A year later, six months, three days. Just don’t get them overtired. I just wanted to make sure nothing was wrong.”

I shared with my mother a few stories of people I know who had seizures. They usually had them once, or twice, but never again. All for different reasons, and all were grand mal seizures. I shared with them the anxieties I had that one day I’d wake up and have another seizure, out of nowhere. Would I be the person at a bar, at a party, at a public event who falls to the ground and has a seizure?

I told her about two friends from high school who had seizures after smoking pot with their friends. I thought about all the attention that was drawn to them. One of the boys was smoking salvia, which was a manmade version of marijuana. It apparently would get a person high for only a minute or two but it had a more intense effect on the person. The person could slightly hallucinate, depending on the way their body reacted. It was made from all-natural ingredients, people say; however, I doubted something that could make you hallucinate was a healthier option. This person ended up having a seizure after one hit.

The other boy was smoking marijuana with friends. He was smoking a lot and was kind of known for being a pothead. From what I hear about this event, he was lacking oxygen to the brain, which caused the seizure. Smoking sometimes made people feel foggy. Perhaps, this was the aftermath of the swelling that sometimes happens in the brain. For this boy, it caused him to have a seizure. He ended up telling his parents about the event, and they took him to the doctors. They determined that everything was fine; however, this boy still lost his license for almost a year. The law mandates this for people who experience epilepsy as a precaution to avoid the person suddenly having a seizure while driving.

I thought about how, even in adulthood, this attention could still be brought to me. I thought about these boys, and the fear returned that I would one day be driving, have a seizure again — of any kind — and meet my demise.

I also told her about a story my roommate had recently shared with me. She explained to me that both her sisters started randomly having grand mal seizures in their early adulthood. Her one sister had just one and her youngest sister had been having them quite often. They were only twenty-four and twenty-two. That scared me. They went their whole childhoods completely fine,

and now they have to deal with this fear of wondering if they were going to have another seizure someday.

The one sister was in Vermont with her friends. She was getting ready in the bathroom when she fell to the ground having a seizure. Her friends heard her fall and tried to help her, but the door was locked behind her. They ended up having to break down the door. This poor girl had not had one since, but her younger sister started having them a few months before. This sister begun having seizures around her senior year in college. They happened at the most random times. No one knows why, not even the doctors. She just had them here and there.

Their seizures weren't like my seizures, where I was absent physically, frozen in my body. Their seizures were a captivating moment where their body disassociates from their brain and the girls were not in control of themselves anymore. There was no warning, no taste in their mouths or numbness in their cheeks that helped indicate it may happen again.

Even so, these stories scared me. It terrified me. What if they were driving the next time it happened? What if they were in the subway station on the way to work and no one was around to make sure they didn't hit their head on the concrete? What if I had seizures again? What if this happened to me? Am I more likely to have seizures, since I've have had them before? I thought my mother might understand why I was so closed off with these feelings and why I felt the need to deal with them now. These questions are questions I found myself thinking about quite often.

What if I have seizures again?

“Do you think you're more likely or prone to it? No.”

I had trouble believing this. Somehow, the comfort of a mother could only go so far. I started to remind myself that I needed to be more sensitive to her feelings, too. She was just trying to make me feel better. Just because I felt self-conscious about my past, doesn't mean my

mother had to. I had begun to consider, too, that these questions might also be questions that were haunting my mother, as well. Maybe she needed some reassurance for herself that I wasn't going to have this condition for the rest of my life.

“The pediatric neurologist I saw — there are, I don't know how many different epilepsies there are in the world. A lot of them.”

I reversed the cross of my feet, adjusted my positioning and my mother's tone changed to the scholar she could have been. As the conversation continued, I began to shed my usual annoyed demeanor. I was becoming more interested in my mother's words, trusting her instead of challenging her intentions.

“I called to look and see who was the best doctor at St. Joseph's Children's Hospital. Dr. Woo happened to have an office not just in Paterson, but one closer to our house in Wayne. Why? Because I went to the nearest pediatric neurologist first, since you were aware something was wrong and something was going on. You were scared, but I kept telling you that you were fine, so we went.”

“I lay with you that morning after and let you sleep. I did everything I could do to make it normal for you. I didn't want you to be upset. But, you caught on. We went to the first doctor right near Newton/Sparta road. He did all these tests to you. He looked at you, put these little wires on your head, scanned you and he just says, 'I don't see anything.' He knew you had a seizure, because obviously, that is what the EMT confirmed. He just rambled about how it could be a grand mal, could be a petit mal, it could be this, it could be that. I tell him about the doctor at Newton Hospital and how he kind of diagnosed you with Bell's palsy. He laughed and said your face would still be that way if it was Bell's palsy. I was like, 'I know!'”

“This is what we’re going to do,” he said. “We’re going to put her on a low dosage of Dilantin. It is a seizure medication to keep her brain levels accurate. It’s probably misfiring. That should help keep her from having them anymore, if she’s having these seizures. OK?”

She finished with a look on her face as if to say, “Get this!” and some scandalous moments were to follow. Again, I adjusted my seating to hear what was next. After all, he was not the doctor I remembered.

“We get the medication, it’s one day, and I don’t even know if I gave it to you. I go home and look up the medication. I’m pissed, I’m not happy with him. I have to be totally convinced, and I’m not. I’m pissed. I look up Dilantin, and I’m mad. I remember my ex was on Dilantin.” She mentions two more medications I’m unfamiliar with. “Dilantin was for men. Well, it isn’t just for men. I looked it up and the side effects, and it says side effects are: dark growths, dark black hairs, facial hair. I thought, ‘A man, a pediatric neurologist, who knows of these side effects, is going to prescribe this medication to my eight year-old, fair, redhead, freckle-face daughter?’ Fucking asshole. Right there, it bugged me. I’m getting a second opinion, I’m getting a third opinion. I’m not going back to Newton Hospital; he’s a quack. This guy is prescribing my daughter this medication. I’m going to this other woman in Wayne.

“I absolutely loved this little woman. Everything I asked her, she’d give me detailed information. She did a whole other analysis on you. She did another EKG on you and explained everything to me about seizures at this age. He didn’t explain anything to me. He basically brushed it off and told me what he thought it was, with an added prescription, and that’s it. He didn’t think you’d have another one. If he wasn’t seeing anything at the time with you, asking you questions, prompting you, then he figured there was nothing wrong with you.

“I told Dr. Woo everything. I told her I wasn’t happy. I wanted to know what exactly was wrong. I don’t want to give my daughter medication, unnecessarily. She’s only eight years old. I don’t want her to have side effects. She looked at the medication he gave me and she immediately responds: ‘No, no, no.’ that’s when she switched you to Tegretol. She agreed with me and couldn’t believe he prescribed you Dilantin with those side effects. She said if you were a little Italian boy, then maybe I would give her Dilantin. But she’s a fair-skinned, light-haired girl and you don’t want her to grow up with dark hair all over her arms.”

“I was so mad,” my mother continued. “I was happy at the same time. I was so happy that I’m such a ... such a bitch! I’m happy that I look into things because other people would just think, ‘This is what I have to do,’ and not question it. She was very agreeable and very informative.

“But she kept asking if there was ever anything that happened before. I thought about it. You know what, actually, you know what’s really weird, just days before this happened I heard a banging on the wall. I wake up for everything. I’d get up and check on everybody and everybody was sleeping. That’s when she said that you might have been having seizures and you just didn’t even know it.”

Dr. Woo was my doctor for the next few years. She was a tiny, middle-aged Asian woman. She was soft-spoken, and it surprised me that she worked with children. She was quiet and reserved, not the typical children’s doctor-type usually chosen to make kids feel comfortable. She wasn’t the kind of woman who would laugh or play in an attempt to lighten the mood for the scared, little kids who come into their office. I can’t remember many conversations with Dr. Woo. Most of the time, my mother was in the room with me. She knew I felt uncomfortable with Dr. Woo because she wasn’t overly friendly or comforting. She actually scared me quite a

bit. It wasn't that I was afraid of her; I was more so intimidated by this tiny woman who was as short as I was, even at eight years old. She was kind, nonetheless, and while our relationship was nonexistent, I knew she was the best doctor for me because she helped me.

I had numerous MRIs at Dr. Woo's office. When I would have an MRI, I remember listening to New York City's Z100 morning show with Elvis Duran and the Z-morning-Zoo. Normally, I wouldn't be able to listen to the morning show because I would be at school. I only got to listen to their radio show in the summertime. There were many days where I'd miss school over the next few years. It took the doctors a while to finish the MRI, because I couldn't seem to sit still. Internally, I'd laugh at Elvis's jokes and squirm from claustrophobia inside the strange tunnel they slid me into.

Dr. Woo and my mother discussed what happened that morning, in front of me, before asking what I remembered happening. After I did, my mother eventually asked me to wait outside for a few minutes to let her and Dr. Woo talk alone.

As I listened to my mother tell her story, I started to see her differently than I had before. It was as if her recollection of these events were being put into focus for her, as well. She was seemingly working through her recollections and refreshing her own memory. My mother told me that I may have been having seizures at night and we didn't even know it as if it was the first time she ever considered this. I was clear to me that I wasn't the only one in my family who took these memories and buried them so I'd never have to see them again. My mother seemed to have done the same thing. I never considered how this could have been just as painful for her as it was for me. After all, my mother is good at putting up walls to keep anyone from seeing her when she is vulnerable.

Thankfully, that was the one and only time I had a typical drop-on-your-face, body-shaking seizure. Every other time after this was like the first seizure. I would have a 45-second daze of drool and gibberish. In the grand scheme of things, I was luckier than most people to have found that these seizures were something I would grow out of with puberty. At least, this is what my mother would tell me. None of my other siblings had seizures or any health issues. Joey had a seizure from a fever once but it wasn't genetic. It was a one-time occurrence. Having seizures consistently was just me. No one could explain why this was something that had happened to me only. No one could explain why none of my siblings had to deal with epilepsy.

The doctors explained that, basically, my body was growing faster than my brain, which caused my brain to have trouble catching up. Therefore, I had seizures. My body developed much quicker than my sister's did at the same age, which is why she was so skinny and fit the "dancer body" stereotype much better than I did. I was growing curves at a younger age than most kids.

I had breasts before every girl in my grade. I needed a training bra in fourth grade and had to deal with my period; meanwhile, we weren't scheduled to even take sex-ed until sixth grade. My sister and I started wearing bras around the same time and I had only gotten my period shortly after her. I may have resented my sister for ignoring me so much as kids, but she was probably angry at the fact that her sister, five years younger than her, was becoming a woman at the same time as her, if not quicker.

The first time I got my period, I was ten years old. I "spotted" once when I was nine and didn't get it again until later that year. I remember my mom let me stay home from school that

day. She explained why women get their periods and how to use a pad. I cried on the second day I had my period when I realized how much we really bleed and asked my mom how I could get it to stop.

She laughed and said, “Baby, you’ll be older than me when you stop having your period; this is life as a woman.”

Moments like these were some of the fondest I have of my mother. I felt distant with her when it came to my seizures but this was something she could relate to. I’ve come to learn, throughout the years, that my mother tends to struggle with sympathy. If she can empathize with a situation, she will be at the forefront, comforting you; however, if she was unfamiliar with the emotions you’re having she is unable to hide her confusion and throws a wall up between you and her.

The second time I got my period was the day before sixth-grade camp. Sixth-grade camp was a three-day weekend bunking with my classmates, exploring the wilderness and, from what my sister explained, was the best time of her middle school life. I begged my mom to let me stay home. My mother refused to let me miss out on this monumental time of my childhood. She probably figured it would be worse if all my friends came back talking about how much fun it was and I’d regret not going.

When I arrived at sixth-grade camp, I was already nervous. I wore black stretch pants that looked like jeans. I wore the same heather-gray, monkey sweatshirt from Aeropostale that I wore almost every single day to school that year. Luckily, my bunkmate was my locker partner, Ryan, who was one of my best friends at the time. Ryan didn’t know I got my period yet. She wouldn’t understand. She was one of the most petite girls in school and didn’t even understand what it was to have a period, which made it obvious to me she couldn’t understand life as a woman yet.

My bunk leader was my language arts teacher. While it was comforting to have a teacher I knew, I never really felt comfortable around Mrs. Holderith. She, too, was very petite and rarely broke a smile. She was strict and gave a lot of homework at the time. Without saying anything, she was the teacher who would escort me back to our bunks so I could change my pad. She would just grab my shoulder and say, “Come on, Kaitlin. Let’s go for a quick walk.” I was the only girl at sixth-grade camp who needed to be escorted back to the cabin every hour and a half to change my pad.

I wasn’t sure how to take care of myself at this time. I only remember what my mother instructed me. I didn’t have much practice. Even though I wore black pants, Mrs. Holderith confronted me after my first full day at camp. It was clear my mother had probably informed someone that I had gotten my period, but it was the first time she addressed me.

“Kaitlin, sweetheart, do you have another pair of pants with you? I think you leaked.”

I was mortified. I knew my mother packed my jeans, but I was too afraid to change and leak again, in a more noticeable pair. I kept thinking it would happen again, and without dark pants, people would notice. I ended up washing my pants in the sink and wearing wet jeans the entire three-day weekend.

Things only got more awkward and confusing for the next year or so. I didn’t want anyone to know that I took medicine every night before bed. I didn’t want anyone to know why, either.

The medicine was meant to be crushed and mixed with food, but it tasted radioactive to me. Its bitter taste overwhelmed my taste buds and upset my stomach. It was probably just my

sensitivity to the taste that had me so queasy, though. The only way I could stomach it was swallowing them whole with a glass of juice to try and mask the taste of it dissolving in my mouth. Not recommended, but I was stubborn.

At sleepovers and birthday parties with my friends, my mom would usually pull the parent aside and explain to them my situation, my medicine, and that I needed to make sure I went to bed earlier than the other girls. My brain needed more rest than the normal girl my age. Without the proper amount of sleep, I ran the risk of having another seizure. My mother was on a mission to avoid this. She was determined to make this problem go away.

Most of my friends' parents made me feel uncomfortable, like I was some mutant that would get the other girls sick. They were worse, sometimes, than ignorant adolescents. Some were too nervous and strict and afraid that if I did have a seizure, my mother would be upset with them. So, parents would be overly protective and force me to go to bed even earlier than my mother suggested. I don't blame a parent for being afraid of the unknown that I held as my baggage. I was not their child, therefore, they didn't know what was best for me.

Stephanie Brock made fun of me endlessly for always being "too tired" to stay up. Outside my best friend Jordan's room was a small living room with a futon and coffee table. When Jordan's mother would come downstairs and announce it was time for me to go to bed, I would feel forced to explain to everyone the reason why. I know I didn't have to, but I did anyway. I didn't want to tell them, but I felt like keeping it a secret left the girls too much room to fill in their own blanks.

"It's not like the seizures we learned about in health class. It's not a big deal. I don't have them if I sleep enough, I think. It's stupid because I haven't had one in years," I lied.

Most of the time, the girls would look at me blankly. I didn't get many questions. I think they were mostly afraid of saying anything. Despite how much my parents claimed I was fine, I couldn't convince other people that I was.

I would lay in bed in the next room, envious of the girls allowed to stay up late, giggling the night away, gossiping, talking to boys on AOL — all the best things to do when your parents fall asleep.

Sometimes I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. I'd listen to them talk about why I was so weird at sleepovers and why I had to take the medicine. Stephanie was usually the ringleader of these conversations. This happened on more than one occasion. There was always one girl who wasn't afraid to say something about my seizures behind closed doors. Thinking about it now, I realize these girls were probably just curious, but they were too afraid to ask me themselves. Instead, they showed off acting like they knew something about it.

One time, at Jordan's birthday party, I heard her cousin ask if I was retarded. Jordan said she didn't think so, I didn't seem retarded to her.

The naïve questions of middle-schoolers stung.

Now, one might blame it on immaturity. When there were people thinking I had some weird disease they could catch or something, it was hard to convince them otherwise.

It was worse when people would question whether I was mentally incapable.

I couldn't explain to a bunch of middle schoolers what really happens.

They wouldn't understand.

“There is no reason why you suddenly had this problem. Believe it or not, there is a 45% chance, or something, that a child could have a seizure. Though, with this kind, it was more likely in boys. But anyone who had Rolandic seizures would eventually grow out of it.”

My mother continued with her formal recollection of her visits with Dr. Woo. She reassured me how much of what Dr. Woo reassured her during those years; this issue wouldn't last forever.

“R-O-L-A-N-D-I-C.” She spells it proudly, happy to inform me about all I was already informed about. “It's a prepuberty thing. The children's bodies are changing, and she's probably growing really fast right now. Her brain and her body aren't in sync. Her brain is probably just misfiring.’ She made me feel so good, and so confident that everything was going to be OK with you.

“I'm so big about not giving you drugs, but she assured me that it's such a short amount of time. I wasn't sure about it because we'd have to go see her and check on you often. Blood tests, and liver testing to make sure the medicine wasn't destroying your liver. She explains that if you were going to be on it for years and years, she would be worried about that — but she was sure you were going to be fine. By doing these tests, we would just make sure you were fine. If we see something, we'll take her off or put her on a lower dosage. Damaging your liver was the only side effect. I didn't want you on it. I wasn't sure about it. Then, she said, ‘Well, she doesn't have to be on it.

“There are people who totally refuse taking the medicine. She might have it periodically. She might wake up, have a seizure, similar to the one she had the first time. She'll be really tired and probably can't go to school that morning. Let her stay home and sleep. You disrupt her day, you disrupt her life. Wouldn't it be easier to keep them under control so she doesn't have to deal

with it? There are parents who don't agree. I totally understand if you don't want to give her drugs. Due to religious or personal reasons, there are parents who just don't. I just don't agree.”

At this point, it was clear that my mother was making sure she didn't leave out a single detail. As she continued, I noticed her watching me while she talked. At first, she wasn't looking at me when she was telling me her story. She was talking to the television, apparently trying to remember and appeared to be careful with her words. As the conversation progressed, she was engaged with me, not leaving a single detail out of everything Dr. Woo told her.

“I just wanted to understand why you are having them. She told me that ‘your daughter is one of the lucky ones. There are kids born with epilepsy. This condition is just temporary.’”

“She's definitely going to grow out of it?” my mother asked Dr. Woo.

“She said she was 99 percent sure of it.”

“Listen, I went through some of the darkest moments of my life and I was eight or nine years old.”

I confided in my sister and started telling her what I told my mother when I talked about the night I had my first grand mal seizure. Jessie paused as if to know that her next words should be chosen wisely.

“I believe it.”

I interrupted, “I hated myself so much. I was so mad at myself for being what I was. I hated myself.”

Then she interrupted me, “I think there is such a huge unknown . . . entity, or something, of what was going on with you.”

I was listening more closely than I had the entire conversation. I suppose I was waiting for something new from my sister. Some new information that gave me an insight or enlightenment to this experience. Instead, she only told me what I already knew. Even so, I felt pleased that she was willing to agree with me. For some reason, I was worried that she would accuse me of being dramatic, or something, so my feelings would become less valid to her, and to me. Instead, I listened to her support my feelings of self-hatred and I began feeling consoled by her.

“I remember Mom saying that the doctors thought it was because you were going through puberty or something. Like I said before, I think people really underestimate the power of hormonal imbalances. Everyone just brushes it off. ‘Hormones, we all have them, bleh, PMS, bleh!’ No! They control your brain. They come from your brain. They control your personality.”

Before I brought up my seizures, my sister just got finished talking to me about her own hormonal issues after having her children. Somehow, I was speaking to her own issues with these imbalances. We were finding common ground, something we seemed to have issues with our entire life.

“Hormones are the reason why you’re happy or sad. I think people brush it off so easily.”

“Yeah, everyone PMSs. No big deal.” I mimicked how it felt everyone seemed to responded to this fact of our lives.

“Exactly! People are always saying, ‘It’s just puberty, everyone goes through it. It’s just pregnancy, everyone goes through it. All women go through it.’ That’s not right! Everyone may go through puberty, but everybody definitely doesn’t go through it the same way. Because everybody’s fucking brain is not the same. Everybody’s hormone releases and imbalances are not the

same. And that slightest, little imbalance can mean a world of fucking difference. Whether it means seizures or postpartum depression. Or whether it means ... I don't know, happy or sad! I just think people brush it off way more than they should."

Is she talking about the universal "people?" Or is she referring to my mother?

As my sister was speaking, I didn't realize how surprising it was that she seemed to be the one person who understands my whole purpose for this. My whole purpose to understand this time in my life that was triggered by, well, hormones. It was only after re-listening to this conversation that I heard myself dismiss her opinions, although she was actually understanding me the most than anyone had in such a long time.

"I always believed that ... I ... I didn't go to the doctors' appointments. I just remember what Mom used to tell me and what I learned in school. I always remember thinking that the reason you had them was because of a puberty-induced type of epilepsy. You were going to grow out of it, and you did. That just reaffirmed the reason why you had them. Because puberty is a powerful fucking thing that people just brush off. You had them and you grew out of it and you were fine. History proves why that had to happen."

My sister seemed to be talking in her "big sister voice"; I begin to wonder whether she was also feeling some kind of doubt about this condition I had. As if history wasn't proof enough for her, either. I was tired of feeling like a victim of my own circumstance. I don't want to be a victim but I felt myself becoming that every time I began to put myself down. Just having my sister recognize my feelings was enough to help me sort through them and come to a more restful, calmed place.

I read more books than anyone I knew at my age. I quit dance, eventually, and found soccer, basketball and softball to be more fun and encouraging for me. It seemed to fit. Yet, once people found out I took medicine — since it was required for my coaches to know — I was no longer their teammate, but that girl on the basketball team who took medicine because she had some weird problem. I wonder why there was no discretion given this kind of information. Still, sports were an outlet for me. I was tired of feeling like I was competing with my sister in a competition she didn't know I had started. Participating in these sports made me feel more welcomed, most likely because they were team sports and they were far from a parallel to what my sister did.

In the midst of going through puberty earlier than my friends, I struggled between embracing my femininity and hiding it from everyone around me. I already wasn't a girly girl, so coming into a body that was fit for a curvy, confident woman didn't necessarily mesh with my personality.

For the first time, my sister seemed jealous of me instead of the other way around. Suddenly, she was a high school student who would complain to my mom that her nine year-old sister has bigger boobs than her. She was confused why I got my period and she had only just gotten hers and she was fifteen.

I felt embarrassed.

It was too soon.

The only other girl in school who carried a purse filled with pads and tampons was Karly Fisher. She was probably the most confident sixth grader cheerleading her way through the halls

of Loundsberry Hollow Middle School. We were friends, but very different friends. She eventually gained a horrible, easy reputation in high school, but at the time, I needed her. She was the only other girl I knew wearing a bra to school and carrying a purse.

While Karly wore Abercrombie and Fitch and sundresses, I started wearing my brothers' and sister's hand-me-down sweatshirts every day to cover myself up. I'd wear sports bras to make my boobs look smaller. I didn't feel pretty like her, or my sister, though I clung to her, regardless. I now laugh with my friend Jordan at how I used to dress for school. She reminisces about her own slicked-back ponytails and white eyeshadow. My typical attire was black stretchy jeggings, my Aeropostale gray monkey sweatshirt, and a white pair of Etnies skater shoes. It's frustrating to think that I may have felt an outcast to my peers but all the while barely anyone noticed because they were all so absorbed in their own awkward bodies and fashion trends.

“You know what's fucked up?”

I stalled after asking my sister this, mainly because I was not sure what I wanted to say next.

“I don't want to write this as if I'm writing some kind of sob story. That's not the point. I'm doing it for me and to learn about it a little bit more. I want to see if from a different perspective. The way I see it ... Remember Jordan when we were kids? How awkward we were? In sixth, seventh, eighth grade?”

“Everyone was weird then.”

“Except I was going through puberty when I was eight years old. I was in fourth grade. I was really young. I’m not trying to get some pity party started from this, it’s just ... I was eight, nine and ten years old and I was having thoughts of a thirteen or fourteen year-old. It was more than just my body changing, but my mind, too.”

“I definitely didn’t go through puberty until I was thirteen. Actually, probably a few years after that. I do think about that. I went through something pretty traumatic when I was thirteen years old, and to think you were going through it much younger than that, almost around the same time as me, just younger, is scary. Whether it was too young for your brain to handle or not, I don’t know.”

My sister was recognizing something I felt no one around me could understand. I wondered why I hadn’t just shared my feelings with her before. I wondered why I waited so long to get this all off my chest.

Something in me changed over these years. I am aware that middle school is usually a common time where we all go through these changes, but my changes began much earlier than middle school. I began hating myself, deeply. My hair was nappy and frizzy. My freckles continued to multiply. SPF 50 didn’t cut it at the beach in the summers. I couldn’t feel myself within my own body. It was as if my mind was completely detached from it altogether. What went through my brain and how I saw myself was not what was looking back at me in the mirror. Something was different for me, and it was deeper than what was on the surface. I allowed myself to get absorbed in self-hatred and pity that having seizures was not my only problem anymore. I allowed my anxieties reach to the surface, resonate there and seep into every pore. If I could peel back my skin, maybe I could reveal this inner layer that reflects what I believed I deserved to look like and feel like. There might be a chance for people to really see me.

I avoided eating lunch with my classmates for a while. I wouldn't do my history homework for Mrs. Bookholt's class because I knew she gave away lunch detentions every time you missed a homework assignment. When she called home and told my mom, I would let her punish me for falling behind in school, even though I always did my homework — I just wouldn't hand it in to get a lunch detention and escape the lunchroom of potential witnesses. Looking back, it was insecure and irrational of me, but I didn't know what else to feel. I was scared all the time, it seemed.

I was one of three redheads in my school. I had always had long hair to avoid the Annie look that would inevitably characterize me if I ever cut my hair shorter than elbow length. I hated sticking out. I didn't want people noticing me. I used to be a social butterfly, but for these couple of years, I put myself in a socially awkward bubble and wouldn't let anyone pop it. I would fasten a tight, low ponytail and use the other hair band to make a messy bun. I might not have wanted to be noticed, but I still didn't want to look like a total loser, either.

One day, getting ready for a shower, my mother saw me take my bun out and noticed the rat's nest of a knot that was slowly forming at the back of my neck. She yelled at me, asking when the last time I brushed my hair was, and I really couldn't remember. I noticed in the shower the day before that I was having a hard time running my fingers through it, but ignored it and threw it back in a bun. She grabbed me from the hair and began crying, "Kaitlin, what did you do to your hair!? Get your ass in the shower and I want you to put as much conditioner in your hair as possible. I'm grabbing the Infusium."

Of course, I battled with her, throwing "It looks fine!" or "I'll do it myself," which I usually did when she tried to braid my hair for school.

She countered with, "Clearly you cannot brush your own God damn hair, Kaitlin."

My mom spent the next hour screaming at me. She was upset that she didn't notice my hair, but kept throwing Jessie's long, beautiful, blonde hair in my face. "Jessie always lets me braid her hair, or put it in nice ponytails and buns. You won't even let me touch your hair! Now look at it! I can't believe it got this way! Why won't you just let me do your hair like your sister? Hers always looks so nice, and now look at yours!"

She yanked and cried and threatened cutting it off. I bit down my tears while she yanked and brushed over and over, working through the knot. We spent the rest of the evening, what felt like hours (and it probably was), brushing over and over until finally she got my softball-sized knot to release from the back of my neck. When I slammed the door and locked myself in my room, I cried in front of the mirror. My sister just watched me. I noted that I didn't realize how long my hair got, probably because it had been fastened tight into a bun for so long. When I pushed it to the front of my shoulders, it was almost to my belly button.

"I love your hair, Katie, don't do that again," Jessie said casually as if I was doing something intentionally to my own hair. I didn't even notice the knot until my mother pointed it out. Looking back, I don't know how I could have missed it.

I couldn't understand that through the midst of all these confusing times, my sister couldn't do anything but compliment me. She stopped fighting with me and started sympathizing with me. She started lending me her white V-neck T-shirts. She usually complained I would always stain them whenever I borrowed them. She gave me her favorite baby blue and white Abercrombie and Fitch long-sleeved shirt, which I soon replaced with my monkey sweatshirt. It's sad to think that there have been so many wasted years I could have loved my sister and instead I let my jealousy interfere with our relationship.

It was strange to think that one of the only times I ever felt reminded of these years again was in my college years. I was getting really good at forgetting everything.

It was when I decided to try Molly before I went to a huge concert with my friends.

Molly was the slang name of a new form of Ecstasy. Instead of a pill, Molly was this powdered that was more intense. People would stick the powder on their tongues and let it dissolve. It makes me cringe to think about how I experimented with a drug that resembled the taste of the medication that helped alter my brain.

While Tegretol helped to keep my brain from malfunctioning, Molly was rapidly altering it the few times that I tried it. It took me some time to realize what the taste of Molly reminded me of.

“You would sometimes say to me that your mouth tastes weird or be afraid to get onto the bus those mornings.”

“Those were the worst days of my life,” I told my mother, dramatically.

“But when that would happen, you wouldn’t really have one because you were on the medication and it controlled them. Dr. Woo basically explained that if you didn’t take the medication that morning, that would be a day you would have one.”

“I remember having more than those two, in the beginning. I remember having a seizure one morning on vacation in Ocean City, Maryland. I remember having a few more at home,” I protested.

My memory of my seizures was something that repeated over a dozen times. I remembered the feeling of numbness in my cheek and the metallic taste in my mouth. That was my experience, and my mother was telling me that those mornings were days that I didn't actually have a seizure. How could she have known that?

“When I talked about you to Dr. Woo, I couldn't understand why you had a seizure where you felt the numbness and could taste the metallic in your mouth when most people couldn't remember the seizures you had. She explained they were partial seizures. You were partially affected. You were not full-blown having a seizure, half of your body is misfiring and the other half is fine. It was your right side that was misfiring. My left, your right. Right, is that what you remember?”

That was the first time my mother addressed me and parted from her story. I confirmed that it was my right cheek. While I nodded in confirmation, I touched my right cheek with phantom numbness in the back of my mouth. I reminded myself that I'm probably imagining this feeling.

My mother began to mimic Dr. Woo, “Aww, that's terrible. Sometimes it's best when kids are knocked out and they don't know what's going on. When you're awake, you're aware and it's almost worse. Because you're a kid, it's scary, and you know what's happening.”

I was stuck on what she mentioned earlier, that the feelings I would have when I woke up were days where I could have had a seizure. I realized that these mornings were frequent and some were more intense than others. It was hard for me to determine what was, and what wasn't, a seizure at all. It could be possible that my mother would write off many of these mornings, assuming it was just phantom feeling symptoms, or passing feelings.

“It was fourth grade, Mrs. King's class. Do you remember this, Mom?”

I didn't wait for her to respond. "I remember being on the bus on the way to school and I felt weird. I felt scared and that I wanted to go home, but I was already on the bus and only half-way to school. So, I waited. I remember you always telling me, 'Don't think about it.' as if you were telling me not to get upset about it. So, I tried not to think about it, but I couldn't help it. I got to school and, well, that was the best class ever. I had such a huge crush on Tyler McClure and he sat next to me in class. I had all my friends in that class and it was just one of those years where I was really happy to go to school. I was always so afraid of something happening to me in this class because it would be in front of everyone."

"Think about it, Kaitlin. It was probably only one time out of those two or three years where I sent you to school that morning." Mom interrupted me as if she was anticipating where I was going with this story. "I always told you that if you ever feel weird, just go to the teacher in the morning, go sit down, you want to be alone. You don't want to sit there scared and nervous."

"I know, Mom, and that is what I did. I know I liked to be alone, or with you, but . . ."

Mom interrupted again, but I talked over her, she needed to hear me.

"I went up to Mrs. King, right when I got to class, and explained to her that I sometimes have seizures and that I didn't have bad ones or big ones or anything, but I really just didn't feel good right now. I wanted to go to the nurse's office. She asked me if I needed someone to bring me to the nurse's office and I said, 'I-I don't know.' I was scared and didn't know how to answer because I never felt like that in school before. She panicked. 'OK, s-sit right h-here.' She called to the class to all take a seat and get silent. All the attention was on me. The chair she had me sit in was pulled out, dead center, in the middle of the classroom. Not outside the door or anything, but the middle of the classroom. The intercoms in the classroom were speaker systems so when she called to the office, or to the nurse, the whole class could hear the conversation. When she

called to the nurse's office, the whole class could hear her voice urgently requesting the nurse to come right away. Meanwhile, all the kids are staring at me, whispering and watching it all happen."

"So, make them think you were about to puke or something." My mom giggled at the thought, brushing off how upset I'm starting to look. This annoyed me.

"Yeah, I wish my fourth-grade mind thought of that," I replied, sarcastically.

I rolled my eyes. I didn't feel like continuing my thought on the matter. It didn't seem like she remembered or even was trying to understand why I was telling her this. "I just remember being really mad at her and . . . I don't know."

"Well, I did have a conversation with them after that. I got pissed."

"What?"

I was suddenly ashamed with myself for getting defensive and snotty towards her when all she was doing was engaging in a conversation I thought she would avoid.

My mother's voice turned into a mama bear as she proudly stated her own recollection of the day. "I said listen, the only thing she had to do was be walked out of the classroom, sit down, be left alone — then you can call the nurse. We had a little blowout at the school."

I did find it strange that my teacher never checked on me again. My mother began having a one-way conversation as if she was sitting at the school face-to-face with the nurse, teacher and principal, once again.

"They didn't have to make such a big frikin' deal about it. It makes it worse. You need to just keep her calm, I told them, and everything would be fine. It just needs to pass. She's nervous, she's a little nine year-old asking you what to do. You should tell her not to worry, put her in the hallway, away from all the other kids, and leave her alone. No, I cannot 100 percent tell

you that she won't fall down and have a seizure. I'm not a doctor. My doctor assured me she won't, but how do you know that? I'm telling you she never had another seizure. She just has partial seizures and is awake. She never goes out of it."

My mother was reliving the moments she had to stick up for me when I had little remembrance of her ever discussing my condition. I was surprised, at first, to discover that all along she was sticking up for me. All this time, I felt that I was an outcast and a freak for being an epileptic all the while she was throwing verbal fists at anyone who made me feel anything other than normal.

"And that sucked for you, because you had to remember it."

I had an EKG done a few times. It was the grossest thing I ever experienced, at least I thought so back then. I started to get quite close with my Mom during these doctor visits. She rarely let me or my siblings stay home from school unless we were deathly ill, so when she had to take me out of school for my tests, it was a special time that my brothers or sister didn't get to have with her.

They glopped sticky gel all over my head and chest and attached a string of cords to those gooped-on spots. Dr. Woo wanted to monitor whether I was affected by flashing lights or outside influences while I slept. I had already been awake for a few hours, so it was difficult to fall asleep. I felt like I was only asleep for a few minutes before Dr. Woo woke me up.

I remember her calling me Medusa with all the wires glued to my head, except I wasn't sure who she was at the time. When my mother explained, I cried — thinking how she joked about me looking like a deformed monster when I already felt as if I was one.

As I entered seventh grade, Dr. Woo bid me farewell. I can't say we had the greatest relationship. It was the kind of relationship with a doctor where you might say, "Thank God for Dr. Woo's support," or something like that, but there was no real relationship there. We sort of just parted ways. She informed me that I might never have a seizure again and began weaning me off my medication. I wish I could say this was a difficult goodbye, or even a celebration, but it ended casually and unfulfilled.

I swear I blacked out some of those moments through puberty, and when I make that very comment to my friends while we are reminiscing over something, they usually laugh and agree that they did too. What most of them remember is awkward trends or strange crushes. None of them remembered people calling me retarded, the knot in my hair or the purse I carried.

I recently thought about a speech the writer Tim O'Brien's gave when I was in college and I wondered how it is that those silly little details that consumed me so much as a kid were not remembered by anyone else but me. I wondered if any of those things were even real. I don't trust my memory anymore, thinking I was blowing the whole thing out of proportion.

Not everyone remembers things the same way.

O'Brien gave a reading my junior year at Rutgers University. There wasn't a dripping faucet or cricket in earshot that didn't silence the moment his voice came through the microphone. I was twenty years old, twelve years after my first seizure, and sitting in a crowd among scholars discussing the element of nonfiction writing with little knowledge of the art itself. I thought, *'What am I even doing here?'* I knew the author speaking. I'd studied his novel before.

He's not my favorite author or anything, but it felt like something I should go to, just to say I attended.

Tim O'Brien stepped onto the stage and approached the podium wearing a baseball cap and jeans. As I listen, for the first time during my tenure at Rutgers University, it felt like I was finally part of things. The peers around me were overdressed. They were dressed nicer than when Obama gave his speech at Rutgers' graduation the following year. They were the only ones I ever seemed to notice. Then there was me, sitting in the left aisle seat in jeans and a T-shirt, and I finally felt welcome.

"I get asked, often, whether my stories are fiction or nonfiction."

These stories of tropical battlefields and war tragedies were questioned on their truthfulness, and some thought they were fabricated for public appeasing. The question was often asked of him, since his work teeters between stories recorded from memory and enhanced events.

I was curious, too. I was always intrigued at how nonfiction literature can be just as, or even more, compelling than fiction and fantasy.

"Any memory, from any person, is fiction," he says. "Not every person remembers things the same way."

Most moments, I'm convinced, O'Brien told the truth, wholeheartedly. I mostly believe that he thinks memories can only be identified as fiction.

In the typical argument with my mother, we battle solely on who is wrong and who is right, who hurts each other more and who deserves the last word because of it. I had to think there is no way anything is completely true, that our memories are the perfect form of the truth. Our minds interpret the world through a lens no other person can possibly see the same.

Perhaps the way I remembered his response was misconstrued.

Perhaps that is not the way he said it.

Ever wonder why certain words resonate with another so deeply? Because sometimes these words are remembered for a reason. Some actions are remembered for a reason and some events are remembered for other reasons. Your mind spends all its life playing tricks on you.

Far before my epileptic days, I was a kid whose biggest fear was dogs.

Can you believe anyone could be afraid of a cute little puppy? Believe it, because I was that kid. I had a few events in my earlier years that caused me to be terrified of these usually innocent animals. Needless to say, I never thought I'd beat this fear of dogs — but I did.

Toward the end of my time dealing with epilepsy, I was happy to not have to take any more medication. I was excited to be able to go to birthday parties and sleepovers without worrying about taking medicine or explaining my condition. However, my fear of dogs still existed.

I was in fifth grade when they began weaning me off my medication. My birthday was coming up and so were my friends' Ashlee and Jordan. They both had dogs, Casino and Sammy. I knew I wouldn't be able to go and really have fun if I was so afraid of their dogs.

It came as a shock when my I asked for a dog the following Christmas. They really couldn't understand why I would ever want a dog after eight years of my manic responses to these animals. I explained that maybe if the dog was a puppy, it was our dog, and I watched it grow up, the animal would seem less scary to me.

This rationalization surprised my parents. It shocks me now thinking I had that kind of rationalization when I was not even 11 years old yet.

Christmas passed and there was no dog waiting for us on Christmas morning. Two months later, right before my birthday, Cody arrived.

My parents brought him home just in time for my birthday party. I was hesitant but I wasn't afraid. Actually, he kind of got on my nerves after a while. Cody was a collie-Australian shepherd mix and turned out to be the saving grace of my childhood.

A few weeks after Cody arrived, I had my 11th birthday party sleepover. Courtney, from my math class, was the center of attention the whole night. She was annoying and ruining my party. Cody seemed to sense this. He walked up to Courtney with his puppy eyes and hopped up on her lap. He proceeded to pee all over her pajamas.

He won my heart.

He was a dog that would cry during thunderstorms. He'd wake me up in the middle of the night, crying and scared, until I got out of bed, sat on the floor next to him and let him curl up in my lap until the storm passed. After blowing my nose, Cody would sift through the garbage can and push each tissue aside until he found the exact tissue I blew my nose into. He'd either bring it to me, almost as a gift, or eat it. Coming home from days at school, Cody would meet me at the front door and wait for me to put my backpack down, patiently. If I sat myself on the floor of the foyer, Cody would crawl on my lap, laying his nose on my shoulder, as if to hug me hello. He was comforting and loving. He was the exact opposite I ever expected a dog to be when I was hiding myself in bathrooms and closets, terrified of these animals.

While there were endless stories to be told about Cody's influence on my childhood, there was one that really stuck out. It was the day I saw him have his first seizure.

By this time, we moved out of Barry Lakes and into the valley, as it was called, in our town. We were no longer in the mountains but living in a development community on a cul de

sac. Cody ran laps around our yard, which was twice as big as our old house. He'd spend most days outdoors hanging on the hill that looked over the yard where my brothers and I would play soccer. Sometimes we'd call down for him to play with us. He'd use his long snout to push the ball back to us, and wait for us to kick it so he could fetch the ball. On this day, however, Cody wasn't responding to us.

We called for him, over and over. He sat where he was, but he was sitting up now. He wasn't panting, but staring at us blankly. You could tell he was breathing heavily because his chest was moving rapidly. His mouth was partially open and we could see drool foaming from his mouth. When I got close to him, his eyes seemed to be asking me, "Mom, what is happening?"

My brother and I petted him and sat with him until it seemed to pass. At first, it was like he couldn't move, but eventually he was able to lay himself down again. My brother and I were scared, but for me, it all seemed too familiar.

Cody was only maybe four or five when he started having seizures. He hated his medicine, too. We'd try to hide it in a kernel of his food, but he was always able to sniff it out, leaving it as the only kernel he didn't eat in his food bowl. Eventually I started wrapping his medication in cheese so he'd eat it. I didn't want him to have another seizure. I knew how scary they were.

It surprised me how relaxed he was. He slept most of the day afterwards, and like me, he only had one or two more in his lifetime. When he got older, his back legs were weak. We'd keep him in our downstairs living room when we'd leave the house to avoid him getting into any more booger tissues in the bathroom garbage. There was a gate midway up the steps. Cody would sit right up against the gate, waiting for us to get home. It was as if he thought sitting six or seven steps higher on the stairs brought him closer to seeing us again.

One day, while I was in high school, I came home and immediately heard him barking to greet me from downstairs. I took a moment to put my bags down and use the bathroom before letting him upstairs. I heard a tumble and seven loud bangs coming from the staircase.

When I opened the door, Cody was lying at the bottom of the steps, legs tangled and limp, looking at me again as if asking me, “Mom, what is happening?”

I thought he might have broken his legs by how tangled they appeared. Maybe he tripped. When I got closer, I realized he was having a seizure again. He hadn’t had another seizure for years. I held his head under my lap, afraid it might have banged the floor on his tumble down. I checked for bumps through his thick fur while the seizure passed. I talked to him, told him it was OK and tried not to cry since I know dogs can sense fear. This time I wasn’t afraid of him, but afraid of what may have happened to him.

It took longer for Cody to recover this time. He took a few moments to get back up. It was clear this fall was rough on him. When he eventually came to, he wasn’t eager to crawl on my lap. He remained still, waiting for me to hold him myself. I sat there with him for an hour before he got up again, confirming his legs were OK and he was feeling better. I helped him up the stairs and demanded that he never stay in the basement again. He was allowed to rummage through the garbage if he pleased, but he wasn’t going to have that happen again.

Seeing Cody experience epilepsy was both terrifying and comforting. It was something that brought us together in a different way than the rest of my family. We didn’t know Cody was an epileptic when we got him as a puppy, and we didn’t know why he started having seizures.

We loved him all the same. It wasn’t a big deal that he had epilepsy. He still was our favorite animal on this earth. He was more than that — he was a part of our family. However, I felt

I had the strongest relationship with this dog. It was ironic to see that one person in our family had grown out of her seizures and another, Cody, came into our life with the same episodes.

I may have been envious of my sister, Jessie, but since we've grown up I think we realized how lonely the world could be when we didn't have each other. Friendships seemed to come and go, as we tend to hear happens over time. Both my sister and I have lost a few close friends over the years, and it seems to have helped us come together and find one another. I used to envy her life and the apparent privilege she had over me. Now, I see her in a different light. She is a mother of two and wife who doesn't have a solid career. I admire her commitment to her family, similar to my mother's commitment to ours; however, I've come to admire my own commitment to myself.

I've spent years suppressing my feelings about my epilepsy. I spent more years worried about what people would think of me if they found out I had seizures. I was angry at the world for what I was given. I stopped believing in God, since God would have been the man responsible for these issues. I refused to believe that some higher power would allow a middle school girl, already struggling to find herself and fit in, have to then be given this burden.

"Mom says I should be lucky that I was not the kind of kid who had grand mal seizures. She says I should just be grateful I grew out of them."

"You don't have to feel lucky or grateful. That's bullshit. You can feel pissed off."

"Jess, I can't help but think . . . When I think emotionally where I am in life, beyond what we talked about today, there are so many ways I loved myself and yet so many ways I

equally hated myself. I think that I wouldn't be the 'me' I am today unless I went through my epilepsy, but I also blame it at the same time. I wish, developmentally, I had a normal life. I hated myself, and I was not even ten years old. It's scary to think like that. Mom said to me that she never understood why I hated myself. It just upsets me because I don't see why she couldn't just understand. Couldn't she just recognize that it was a difficult situation for me? She didn't have to understand how I was feeling, she just had to sympathize."

"Turn that thing off for a second."

I turned off the recording quickly, eager to hear what was so secretive that Jessie couldn't say it on the recording.

"Jessie, this is just for me. I might not even write it all."

"I know, you're right. I just have to say this."

I thought back on the recording of my discussion between my mom and I. I felt satisfied with our conversation, despite the many years that passed where it seemed she would never engage in such a conversation. I reflected on all the moments in those years where I felt my mother was covering up my condition and brushing it to the side to the same extent she would minimize the drama of my younger brother, Daniel, pouting and complaining that he couldn't play his video games because my older brother, Sean, was hogging the television.

Selfishly, I thought, I wanted to feel special and not special at the same time. I think about how I wanted my mother to recognize the rarity of my condition and see that the issues I was having were real. I wanted her to also assure me that I was normal all the same. Instead, what my mother did was avoid the conversation, it seems. I was neither special nor normal, just the same as all the rest. All the while, I thought about my selfishness and how I felt lost in the space between.

“I felt lost. It just felt like my seizures changed me. I felt different from myself and different from everyone else, too.”

“OK, if I’m being honest, Mom did talk to me about this.”

“Wait, what? I thought you said she never really discussed it with you or our brothers?”

“She told me once that she thinks your seizures changed you. You became a different version of yourself after you began having seizures. It really worried her.”

For the first time, my sister told me the truth of things. I could tell she was struggling to say these words and was waiting for my reaction. I sat shocked at her response. I considered that I was being melodramatic about my situation and that I was allowing my emotions to get the best of me. Hearing that my mother, a woman who avoided discussing my seizures up until now, felt I had changed was a surprise. My mother saw me differently, just as I saw myself differently than other people. This was both comforting and disappointing all at once.

I am alive now and I am seventeen years from my childhood seizures. I no longer am a person who deals with epilepsy. I may have times where I thought I would have one, but then I reminded myself that it’s all in the past. Ironically, working in a setting where middle-school children are my priority is what has both comforted me the most and brought up rusty feelings as well. I saw myself in certain students who are lost and confused, both socially and physically. There are times when I hurt for these students because I can see how lost they are. I try to love them even more because of this.

If there is any way I can keep a child from feeling as alone as I felt then, somehow I can come to peace with this.

My mother and I have always had a complicated relationship. We've never really seen eye to eye. She's been a mom since she was seventeen years old, and ended up having four more kids after. She's given up her whole life for us, as she wouldn't have preferred it any other way. Often times you hear people talking about having kids, and many people say things like "I'm not ready to sacrifice my free time" or "I still want to travel and I can't do that when I have kids" or, perhaps, "I can barely take care of myself, let alone another living, breathing human being." These words never even crossed my mother's mind when she got pregnant. She's one hell of a woman.

However, I didn't see life the same way. I don't know if I ever did. I think this confused my mother. It was something she cannot relate to, just like how she couldn't relate to my seizures. Not being able to relate to her own daughter must kill her. The fact that one of her five children had to see a neurologist regularly and experienced seizures that she was conscious for was a conversation that definitely seemed to be avoided.

I began writing so I could create something that readers can relate to in their awkward youth. As I had continued to discuss this with my mother and my sister, I realized that what I wanted was much more than a story. I wanted to come to terms with my past, selfishly. As I explored my past with my sister and mother, I found that all this built up resentment was still lingering between us. The problem was not them and how they treated me, but my perception of these moments.

My sister cannot help who she was when she was a kid. She had a talent and the universe touched her with natural beauty. She had become her own version of my mother; she had become a mother herself. I never felt that we saw things eye to eye, but how could we? We were

five years apart. I feel ashamed that it took me seventeen years to realize that what is important in our sisterhood and our friendship is not the past, but the here and now. We have each other, and we're lucky enough to have each other forever.

My mother didn't deserve my resentment. While I saw her hiding this issue from her family and from each other, I didn't even notice how much she had stuck up for me. She isn't responsible for this happening to me. I was still able to do sports and grow up normally. My epilepsy didn't affect my brain and my ability to learn. I was able to get my Bachelors and continue onto my Masters. I played varsity soccer and played basketball all through high school. I developed a great group of friends that welcomed me all through the remaining parts of my childhood. I've allowed myself to forget that things could have been worse. While I can still feel angry for being given this burden in my childhood, I shouldn't have taken it all out on the one person who comforted me throughout it all. She was my number one advocate.

"You never had that droop again," my mother told me.

My mother and I were finishing our conversation about my seizures.

"How many more times do you think I had one after that, if you said I didn't have more than a few?"

I was still in shock to find out that I had only really had three major seizures in my life. I had one the first day I woke up, consciously. I had a grand mal seizure in my sleep that following night, and I had a final seizure in the morning during our family vacation in Ocean City, Maryland. Turns out, the only reason I had one in Ocean City was because of a lack of sleep and perhaps a missed night of my medication. All this time I was thinking I had many more, but my mind deceived me, once again. I would feel the symptoms, but my medicine would save me from

having one. Still, the symptoms were real, and so were the memories of me having the other seizures. Being conscious throughout them scarred my memory and terrified me from ever feeling relaxed waking up in the morning. I lived fearful that I would wake up at a sleepover, or even with my family, and show them what my body was capable of doing. There have even been times, in my adulthood, where the taste had returned or the numbness comes briefly and I shake myself hoping that it's all in my head.

“I want to say you acted weird or said something to me once or twice before school. That was it, the whole time you were on medication. Then once, when we were on vacation in Ocean City, you had one, but that was it.”

“No,” I argue. “No, I had more than that, I remember. There had to be more.”

My eyes welled up in tears again. This time, I felt the tears in my chest and throat, coming to the surface. It was as if all the emotions I've shoved down there were bubbling to a boil. I was angry at my mind but mostly angry at myself for not knowing this earlier. I've allowed myself to create a monster within myself who hates who she is. It was my fault that I felt this way.

“No. I did something about it. Took care of you, went to the doctor, got you medicated, and you never had another grand mal — a real seizure — again.”

She saying it again, “a real seizure.” As if the ones I was conscious of were not as real to her as the ones she could see and feel with me. I have to remind myself again to not take her words to heart. She is right, she took care of me.

“I never saw your face droop again, drool again. You would just say that it's happening, that you feel it coming. You felt it happening. I'd tell you to go sit down and if it still feels that way, you don't have to go to school. If you do, you can stay home. But, you would always say you felt better, and you would go to school. Those days would be the days I would remind you to

go to the nurse if you weren't feeling well and you could call me to come pick you up from school.

“I just wanted you to have a normal life. Dr. Woo agreed with me. She said you would have a normal life. ‘Nothing is going to change drastically because of this. You don’t want her to feel that way. Oh my God, my kid has a problem! Then everyone wants to treat you differently because of it. I don’t want her to feel like that. I want her to feel just as normal as the next kid. You go about your life and don’t do anything different. Other than doing what you can do to make her feel comfortable. Don’t give her grapefruit juice. Grapefruit juice, as we all know, interacts with a lot of medications.’”

I remembered how much I loved grapefruit juice.

“You drink grapefruit juice and it’s just as if you didn’t even take your medication that day. Back then, when you were little, you loved grapefruit juice and I had to tell you that you couldn’t have it. Big frikin deal, have orange juice. Mommy doesn’t want you to drink grapefruit juice, and then your medicine doesn’t work. I would keep you out of the sun, make sure you wore sunscreen and you didn’t get too overtired in the sun. Dr. Woo was talking to a parent she doesn’t know. She assumed I could be the kind of parent who just let her kids stay up until 12 every night, don’t watch them, let them eat snacks, not brush their teeth. There are parents out there that don’t give a shit. Don’t worry about me, Dr. Woo, I have a regimen! You ate well, you went to bed on time, you didn’t drink grapefruit juice, and I avoided all the things that would avoid you having a seizure.”

“Mom, I remember it happened more than that.”

“No, you would have told me.”

“I would have, right? Then why do I remember having much more than three seizures” My heart began to race. I didn’t know what to think any more. She kept speaking to me, but all I continued to do was roll through, time after time, moments when I thought I was having another seizure. Disconnected from my body, unable to control what my brain did and frozen in time. “*Why can’t I remember?*” It’s terrifying to think I’ve been remembering this all wrong.

In all the conversations my mother had remembered and was replaying with herself over the past hour and a half, I realized the only conversation she wasn’t replaying was with me. She was so concerned about her daughter having a normal life and I couldn’t blame her for that. My mind felt different, my body felt out-of-control and I didn’t feel like I was ever the same. I didn’t think she will ever understand that and it’s time to let go of that ever happening.

“I feel like I’ve blacked out part of my life. It’s scary.” I couldn’t sit still any longer. I looked around the room, looking for the moments I somehow seem to have forgotten.

“That’s what I hear happens, Kaitlin. Everyone told me that after a person has a seizure, sometimes they forget the few hours after. Your body needs to rest because your brain just mis-fired. It’s exhausting for your body. Most people don’t remember it.”

But I wanted to remember it.

This is why I did this. This is why I interviewed her. I wanted to confirm with myself that all these memories and feelings were validated just to find out that I was allowing myself to feel pain when I could have let this go a long time ago.

I began to sob, I couldn’t control myself again. I felt the same sense of overwhelming release of emotions, as my brain rushed through our conversation, revisiting each detail.

“I already felt so lost, Mom. I hated being different. Something was happening, more than you think was happening. No one understood what was happening to me. No one was in my brain anymore. Now, I find out that I wasn’t even there myself.”

How could I have let myself resent someone who never judged me for my seizures? She made me so angry that she didn’t address my issue and comfort me the way I wanted her to. I wanted to stop feeling alone. What I didn’t recognize was that she was spending every moment of my childhood comforting me. She did everything in her power to mask my condition with love and support. I realized I’ve wasted seventeen years being angry with her. I could not see through my tears that drenched the inside lens of my glasses. When I looked up, my mother stood in front of me. She grabbed my face by my cheek, lifting it up from its bow.

“Honey, it’s OK, you’re going to be OK. It’s going to pass. Everything is going to be fine, my freckle-face, curly red hair, beautiful daughter. There’s no need to be afraid. Do you remember this?”

I started to remember all the times I cried to my mother that it was happening again. The metallic, silver-and-gold flavor rushing from the back of my tongue. In waves it crashed past my tongue, deep between my gums. A numbness now, up to my bottom eyelids. A frozen rush of emotions that paralyzed me and made me want her near, to help me. I cannot blink. My eyes were powerless. I stared hard at her, crippled. I felt useless, as I once felt before. I couldn’t sit, but I felt a pressure on my cheeks as she slowly guided my body back onto the couch. I didn’t even realize I stood up. Her eyes were soft now. They didn’t show the hard, avoidable look she gave me as I was interviewing her earlier. She was gazing into mine as she wiped my tears away with her thumbs. I hear a “shh” in between what she was saying. She was smiling, and my heart slows slightly. The feelings were passing. It’s almost passed.

“It’s almost over and then it will be done. You’ll go on with your day. There is nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to worry about. Mommy’s here and I love you.”

I sat on the couch, crying helplessly, like I used to.

She was comforting me, the same way she used to.

Taking deep breaths, I calmed to the melody of her voice.

I needed nothing else.

She kissed my right cheek.

Vita

Kaitlin Goetchius was born in Warwick, New York and raised in Vernon, New Jersey. She earned a Bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Comparative Literature from Rutgers University in 2013. After finishing her undergraduate degree, she worked two years in higher education admissions in San Diego, California. Soon after, she decided to return to New Jersey and pursue a New Jersey Alternate Route Teaching program and her Master's degree, simultaneously. She began both programs in the fall of 2014. Since then, she has completed her certification to teach and had taught in various New Jersey school districts as well as a charter school in Greenville, North Carolina. Now, she is a middle school writing teacher in Sussex County, New Jersey finishing her final semester of her Master's degree at University of New Orleans. After attending UNO's writing abroad program in Brunnenburg the summer of 2017, she has been accepted to the low-residency program through UNO. She plans to attend UNO's writing abroad program in Cork, Ireland this summer. In her free time, she plays in a soccer league, coach's basketball and enjoys traveling and spending time with her niece and nephew.