

The Life I Want to Live



In the final years of high school, I wasn't sure I wanted to go to college. I was emotionally and physically exhausted. AP classes and the seemingly all too encompassing social stresses were trying, but paled in comparison to being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at 15 years old. I was in a bad place then—stumbling through classes, and suffering from depression and anxiety. I applied to colleges as I thought I should, not expecting much back.

Once I entered college, I wasn't sure I liked it. But I was aware of the immense privilege I had to be able to access higher education. During my sophomore year, I finally found my footing. I discovered what studies I wanted to pursue, and my grades have reflected my passion, as they seem to get better with each passing quarter.

I am now a junior in college, and this past year was a year of changes for my MS. I experienced new symptoms and went on a new medication. In May, I had a flare-up that manifested itself in vertigo, something I had never experienced. I woke one morning with the world spinning. I could not walk without falling, and I could not stop vomiting. It was terrifying. Walking up with numb legs or feet was pretty "normal" for me, as weird as that is to think. But to lose my ability to walk or any sense of balance scared me.

My mom came up to Bellingham from Seattle as soon as she could. I saw it in her eyes—the despair of seeing her child suffer from something she had no control over. The issues persisted for a week and a half, before I got an IV steroid.

In August of last year, I went from daily Tecfidera to the monthly infusion of Tysabri. A more serious drug for more serious symptoms. Since starting Tysabri, I have had no flares. The

recent MRI reported zero new lesions. It was in that moment that I realized how much I wanted my MS to be stable. Hearing that news made me happier than I had been in a long time, nearly on the verge of tears.

Outside of MS, my life was changing as well. I got my first job last September. I worked for the university to register students to vote. I have always been passionate about civic duty and using the rights given to me. I tried to instill that same vigor into my peers. There were some who had been disenchanted from voting. But this did not keep me from trying to get people to vote.

As for getting connected to the MS community, I had made moves to get more involved. When I was diagnosed at 15, I wanted nothing more than to forget about it. That meant avoiding all aspects of the MS community. As I have gotten older, I am more interested in the experiences of other people with MS. A friend the same age as me was doing a project related to MS. She has the disease and was taking pictures of others with MS. I volunteered to be a part of her project, and it was a great experience.

This past year was a rough year for many, myself included. However, some amazing things happened, too. I traveled to New Zealand with my family, and it was phenomenal.

Even with some awful MS symptoms having happened, I wasn't and am not going to let them keep me from the life I want to live.