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What adjustments have you made as a student to accommodate your leukemia?

When I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in October of 2020, I was just a high school senior not knowing what the future would look like. I didn't even know if there would be a future. I shut out the entire world. I didn't want anyone to feel sorry for me. It wasn't until around the spring of 2021 I connected with others again. When reconnecting with the world, I made a realization that I wish I could have told my past self and others going through this disease. I realized that there is so much learning in sadness and to accept that bad things happen to people. These bad things aren't what make us, rather, it is how you respond. I could live the rest of my life in sadness with closed doors. But what good does that do? So, I made the best decision of my life, and it was to rewrite my story. No longer am I a sad, sick kid. I am now an inspired, motivated, sick kid who was one of the lucky ones to get another shot in life. I began going back to high school in person, during COVID. I was the first person my oncologist has ever sent back to school during intensive chemotherapy. I wanted to be a light to others and inspire them to get through their hardships. My desk was in the corner of my English teacher's room, six feet away from all the other students. My classmates graciously wore masks (although they weren't mandated at my school) along with me. I wore protective goggles as well. My classmates saw this, but this is only half of what I went through. I would have day-long chemotherapy appointments and return to school the next day. My accommodations didn't stop there, as complications with my disease worsened.

I graduated high school and began college at Liberty University in the fall of 2021. My oncologist had given me a disability placard to make getting around easier. However, one afternoon I received a ticket for parking in a faculty handicap spot, even though the university had told me numerous times that that exact spot was fine to park in. So, I went to the police department on-campus to appeal the ticket. When I got there, an officer had come out and talked to me. I explained the situation and halfway through speaking, the officer stopped me and said, "I do not want to hear this sob story. We will waive your ticket and allow you to park there." I was angry. This officer knew nothing about me, and he clearly knew nothing about my character. I was angry not because of what he had said, but because my story wasn't a sob story at all. I was blessed to be able to overcome this disease, not many are as lucky as me. This wasn't a sob story at all. My story was a story of triumph. I overcame a disease that had almost taken my life and that had once taken all joy and happiness I had ever felt.

Months later, in the winter of 2021, I had tremendous pain in my right arm. MRI scans and a multitude of other tests were taken, and it turned out to be avascular necrosis (AVN) in my right shoulder. This new disease (due to steroids given during chemotherapy) destroys the joints in your body. An orthopedic surgeon recommended a shoulder replacement immediately. I cried as soon as we left. I was angry to have yet another setback in life. But this time, the sadness didn't stay long. I was looking at this disease the wrong way. I don't 'have' to get my shoulder replaced; I 'get' to. I'm lucky enough to have great surgeons and I am so lucky that they are going to take this pain away and help get me to my normal self. In March of 2022, I had my right shoulder replaced. I was a very rare case of AVN and had it in many joints in my body. My left shoulder was replaced in December of 2022.

This replacement didn't last, however, as it became infected. The surgeon did a clean-up surgery in March 2023 and said that I was all clear. However, the infection came back not even a month later. I was admitted to the hospital due to the symptoms. Three days later, they removed my shoulder prosthesis and put in a temporary shoulder, that will last for around a year. I had 6-weeks of 24/7 IV antibiotics. I was angered, but I promised myself I would never let anything else ever take my motivation or happiness again. I have two fully collapsed hips that need a replacement immediately, limiting my steps to 2,000 a day. I will be getting my first hip replacement in July 2023.

All these things have caused a lot of needed accommodations in my life. I do school half online and half in person. This allows me to take minimal steps throughout the day and also allows me to continue class through all surgeries. I drive with a handicap placard which is admittedly embarrassing for a college student, but I'm learning to accept it. I had to buy a new car that was higher off the ground because I physically could not get out of my previous car, as my hips could no longer lift me. However, the biggest adjustment I made was to my attitude. As a student, I could feel bad for myself and allow myself to take an extended break from education. But what good would that do? Instead, I am going to push through, inspire, and ultimately work my hardest to give back to every single person who has helped me on my journey. I am so motivated to help support other kids in similar situations as me and there will be nothing that stands in the way of me doing that.

How this scholarship will benefit me

Having this scholarship be tremendous for not only me but also my family. This has been a challenging time, especially financially. The cost of chemotherapy, appointments, replacements, and physical therapy two times a week is a lot to deal with for one family. With

college on top of all of this, it is needless to say how much this scholarship would be appreciated by my family and me. I have two sisters, one younger and older. When I was diagnosed my little sister, who is 10, had sacrificed a lot for me. She couldn't continue her sports or extra-curricular activities she once loved, because it put me at risk of being sick. Having this scholarship would allow my family to have a less-financial focus on me and allow them to spend more time with her doing the things she loves. The impact this scholarship would have on me and my family will never be able to be put into words, we would truly be forever thankful.