

Alaina's Essay

Everyday I wake up and prepare to be met by others with the same question that I get quite often, "What's wrong with you?" These words pierce my heart every time because there is nothing wrong with me. I am forced to tell a complete stranger why I walk with a limp, why I can't use my left arm, why my smile is crooked. The answer of course, is because I had a hemispherectomy thirteen years ago and have been and will continue to be disabled.

I considered my disability a blessing because I was the one person in a million people to get Rasmussen's Encephalitis and I also consider myself an extraordinary young woman because I made it through brain surgery and have learned to do most things for myself.

The greatest challenge that I've been faced with resulting from having hemispherectomy is the disapproving looks and comments that I get from strangers of all ages. I do not consider the parts of my body that are now virtuously useless nor any of the other effects of my operation to be my greatest obstacle.

I have been able to adapt my life in order to succeed in my current condition which is how I made it to be where I am today. I have learned to dress myself, I have learned to walk again, and I have improvised for my vision loss. I can not, however, prepare my heart and my mind for the attitude of the world in which I live.

I have put a strong belief in the power of educating others about my disability, and it has worked so far. When I tell people what I have been through they find me to be courageous and inspirational and I have used the message of my life and my disability quite effectively, especially in my church. As often as I can, I use opportunities to let people wherever I go know about what happened to me because it saves my ears from the words that I do not want to hear. I can let people know before they ask that the answer to their question is nothing, there is nothing wrong with me.

Although it is true that I will likely encounter this question for the rest of my life, I have found a way to turn a negative into a positive by educating people and helping them to realize that there is nothing wrong with carrying a disability. I have come to realize that I have been successful in adapting to the many aspects of having a disability and dealing with strangers is no exception.