

# SOPHIE MEINHARDT MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY

BY ANGELA BLAKE

My story starts when I was 18 months old. I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease/ Ulcerative Colitis. My parents made a decision to put me on steroids. When I was three years old I was sent to an orthopedic doctor. The steroids were making my legs grow crooked. The doctor made me wear leg braces for a year. I would walk into St. Jude Church and the metal on my braces would clink together and everybody would stare. I was never really bothered by everyone staring at me. Everyone stared at me wherever I went.

My parents prayed and prayed asking God for help. They knew they couldn't keep me on the steroids any longer. The steroids were ruining my legs. My parents brought me to a faith healer in Chicago and they tried everything they could to make me better. My parents prayed to God every single day. They knew that God was telling them to approve of me having the surgeries and that the surgeries would cure me of my disease.

I had two major surgeries when I was four years old. While I was in the hospital, St. Jude Parish was having a fundraiser for Erik Moore. Erik was an eleven year old boy who later died of a brain tumor. My aunt attended the fundraiser. A lady donated a doll along with ten outfits of clothing she made by hand. My aunt bid a lot of money for it and won it for me. The doll has a button you could press. It sings, "It's a Small World." I was moved to tears while listening to it for the first time. The fundraiser helped many people. It helped the Moore family, me and my family, and the lady who made the doll.

Time in the hospital can get really boring. I loved when people visited me. Father Jerry Hyland came and gave me a blessing and a gift. It was another way the St. Jude community reached out and touched my life.

St. Jude is not just a community, it is a family. St. Jude parishioners prayed for me and my family even though they didn't know who we were. My older sister was in the 3rd grade and she was in Mrs. Klopp's class when all this took place. Her classmates made me 'get well soon' cards to decorate my hospital room. The cards brightened my day and my hospital room.

The nurses and doctors who took care of me showed me lots of love. They always said I was special. Children's Hospital's staff was awesome! I couldn't have asked for nicer and more loving people to take care of me through these hard times.

God gave me a special purpose in my life. My purpose was and is to show people that you can be happy when you have loving people to support you through hard times. I showed people it was okay to be sad. I always thought I had a bad 3 years of my life but once I am older I realize it could have been worse.

God planned that when I was cured from my disease I would help people with my same disease. About three to four years ago I talked to a girl who was about 12 years old and was going through the same thing I went through. I told her it would be okay and she would be much happier when it was all over. My parents talked to her parents about Crohn's disease/Ulcerative Colitis. They made them feel like they made the right decision to let their daughter have the surgeries. I visited her in the hospital after her 1<sup>st</sup> surgery. I would still like to talk to her again and see how she is doing now.

I tell people about my story. My family always tells me how much I've grown since I was on steroids and how much I have changed. The steroids stunted my growth. My family also says I was a trooper through bad times.

God showed my family and me that he answers prayers in all sorts of different ways. He has a different plan for each and every one of us. I don't know what this experience would be like without my family and the St. Jude Community.

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