

A Lost Sister

When I see how relatively healthy people choose to abuse their bodies, I can't help but think of my innocent sister. I can't help but think of April 7, 2005, the day she died.

It all started on May 20, 2003, when my sister was born. I was 2 years old at the time. After a couple of weeks, my mom knew something was wrong with her. She cried all the time, didn't eat much, and her skin started to turn to yellow, so my mom took her to get blood tests done. After all the tests, my mom demanded they do a liver profile. We ended up spending two weeks at Lutheran Hospital with even more testing on my poor little sister. After what seemed like a century, they called us with results. We were told to pack our bags because we were going to Riley Children's Hospital that day. We found out that my little sister had biliary atresia, a disease of the liver and bile ducts that happens in infants.

There was so much testing done on my sister before she was old enough to even sit up by herself. At 2 ½ months old, she had her first major surgery called a Kasai Procedure. During the procedure, the surgeon removed the damaged bile ducts and brought up a loop of intestine to replace them. This won't cure the disease, but slows it down instead. In the summer of 2004, she was placed on three state lists for a new liver. There were many problems while we were waiting for a liver. She started getting a lot of infections and was always in and out of Riley hospital. She was on a ton of medications; she had up to 16 oral medications with an IV, and was fed through a g-tube. After all the waiting and no improvement, they put her on the national list for a liver transplant.

On November 7, 2004, our family got the call that there was a liver waiting. We rushed to the hospital. After arriving there, it took the doctors over five hours to prepare for the surgery. By 4 a.m. the next morning, she was in the PICU. We could only look at her, though, because we didn't want to get her sick. I was just happy to be able to see my sister. Over the next couple weeks, she fought with what could have possibly been a blood clot, which was causing troubles with her spleen. After a while she started to get better so my aunt came to Riley, so my family could go home and recuperate. The weekend we went home, she started to retain fluid and was put back into the ICU. The next few days, she just kept getting worse and worse. The doctor wanted to do a TIPPS procedure on my sister at the IU Medical Center. My mom had to sign papers for it, like usual, but this one was very different. This one had the words "death" written as a complication. The procedure did not go well. On April 7, 2005 at 11:10 a.m. my little sister gained her wings and flew right into God's open arms.

You might be wondering, "Why is this story in a substance abuse awareness book?" Well, to me, it's very obvious. People that are smoking are literally ruining their livers. Consuming an overabundance of alcohol also damages the liver greatly. They have something that my sister didn't have, which is a chance to live a healthy life.

I understand that God has a plan for everything; I know there was a reason for my sister to leave at such a young age. The thing that I do not understand is why people are CHOOSING to sacrifice

their healthy, functioning liver for a small, rolled up piece of paper or for a couple drinks. Abusing these substances can kill you; it's a known fact.

If you abuse substances, think about others who have passed away. You have the choice to have a healthy liver. Some people are born with unhealthy livers and don't have that choice.

The next time you go to light a cigarette or consume alcohol without limiting yourself, please remember my sister and the life she could have led.

As told to Hannah Dull