Allison Wendlberger

“There’s a bubble in my brain.”

That is the way that my young mother decided to describe to me that she had a brain tumor.

“The doctors have to go in and take it out. Or else, it might hurt me.”

I was scared when my mother told me she was going to have surgery. But I was only five years old and I didn’t understand how this one surgery was going to affect me for the rest of my life. She said they were doctors and that were going to make her better. I thought after a few weeks in the hospital my mom would be as good as new. But I was so wrong.

Only a few weeks after my mother told me she was going to have surgery, I remember walking into her hospital room. She couldn’t speak, and my whole family was surrounding her. I kept talking to her about the things she had missed the past week in kindergarten, and she wouldn’t respond.

“MOMMY!!! ANSWER ME! Why won’t you talk to me anymore?!”

And just like that, I became the mother of my family. With my parents getting divorced, my dad was often out nights until really late. My mother couldn’t get around on her own, and my brother, who was only three years old at the time, needed someone to take care of him. I used to vacuum using the vacuum that was twice my height and what felt like twice my weight. I was the one who made sure everyone was fed. I was the one who held my brother through lightning storms. I needed to be the mother figure that my brother needed, and the caregiver that my mother needed.
I remember that once my family was so low on food that my mom and dad had me come along with them door to door and ask our neighbors if they had any spare food. When they saw how skinny I was, each house we went to couldn’t help but give us at least one extra can of food. With our terrible financial situation and my parents getting a divorce, they each decided to move back in with their own parents.

At first, my grandparents sort of took the role of my parents. But as time went on, and my grandparents got older, I again had to step up to the plate and help out both my ageing grandparents and my disabled mother. I helped out the family as much as I could by physically helping them around the house. And as soon as I turned sixteen, I took on even more responsibilities. At sixteen I finally got my divers license and began to take care of my family outside of the house. I was the one who took them to all of the doctor appointments and the one who drove my brother to his soccer practices. I even got a job! I worked at a pre-school over summer and I worked for two years at round table pizza to help provide more financially for my family. Since as long as I can remember, I have always been taking care of myself and my family.

Ever since my mother had surgery to remove her brain tumor, she has been disabled. The part of her brain that controls her motors skills was affected severely by the surgery. Although she can now talk, it is extremely hard for her to get around. She needs to use a walker or wheelchair and wears a leg brace. It is also hard for her to write or hold things for long periods of time, because she often doesn’t have good control of her arms.

Although I did miss out on many of the big things, like having a mother who could cook for me and walk with me places and drive me to school, it’s the little things that I miss. When I walk around the mall and watch as a mother shops with her daughter and helps her try things on
and when I watch a mom do her daughter’s hair for her, those little things are what I really wish I could’ve had with my mother. I wish I could have someone to shop with and have someone do my hair for me.

When my mother ever does need to go shopping, it is a big ordeal. We have to load the walker or the wheelchair into the car and I have to help her change in the dressing room. And usually it is my mother who gets her hair done. Her hands are very shaky so usually I am the one who has to do it for her. Sometimes, I feel like I am her mom. But more often than that, I feel like we are sisters. We were there for each other through everything. She couldn’t be there for me physically too much, she was there for me emotionally.

It is so hard to simply sum up how a disabled parent has changed me in only three pages. It has completely changed my life in so many more ways than anyone can imagine. My life would have probably been an average, middle-class life-style, and my parent’s might not have even gotten divorced! But this tumor made my family stronger than most families are. When you have a disabled parent, it doesn’t only mature you as you take on more responsibilities, it also makes you appreciate the simpler things. I never know when the last day will be with the people I love, so I make every moment with them matter.