

I remember being pulled out of the room to choose a toy from the chest. So many to choose from, but I happily settled for the fishing game to play with my brother. Little did I know, my mother was given some of the most devastating news of her life. My nephrologist had just informed her that I would most likely be deaf and have cataract by the age of 13. When someone hears you have a chronic disease, they usually respond with the typical pity and sympathy. What people don't know, is that while having such a diagnosis is upsetting, it can also be inspiring.

My family has a history of Alport Syndrome, it has affected my mother, aunt, grandfather and grandmother. Dealing with Alports has never been easy. I had to take growth hormones in the form of shots every night, and take many different types of medications to not only maintain my kidney function, but also to treat things such as anemia, cholesterol, and vitamin deficiencies which can be side effects of the disease. To protect the kidneys, it's important that my blood pressure remains low, so for most of my childhood, I dealt with fatigue, nausea, and headaches that eventually became the norm.

Alport Syndrome is rare and there isn't much research done about it. Therefore, even many nephrologists haven't come across it during their career. The prediction my doctor made years ago could have very well come true, but my disease took a slightly different path so thankfully I still have both my hearing and my vision at 17, although my kidney function has deteriorated significantly. Something that has always confused my nephrologists was the irregular pattern that this disease follows in my family. Alport tends to affect males more severely than females, but in the case of my family, it has been the opposite. That intrigued me, and made me even more inclined to enter this field of study.

Having Alport Syndrome has fueled my interest in medicine.. For as long as I can remember, I visited the nephrologist and imagined that I would one day be one of the doctors in the hospital making a difference. Alport Syndrome has not only drawn me to this field, but also made me more resilient and optimistic. Sometimes, it's hard to be positive when the doctor delivers bad news and it's something you can't fully control, but if you don't, worry and stress will consume you and only make things worse. Understanding how bad my situation could have been, compared to what it actually is, I realize that I have so much to be grateful for.

Growing up with Alport Syndrome made me a more empathetic person, and allowed me to become more mature at a young age. I don't look at the difficulties I've faced as a negative in my life, but rather, they have shaped me into the person I am and I definitely would not be the same without them. They have showed me where I want to go in life, and what it is that I have a passion for pursuing. Becoming a nephrologist and learning more about Alport Syndrome to help others out there has been a major goal of mine, and I plan on working as hard as possible to reach it.

Having Alport is not easy so on tough days I found solace in my music. I have been a part of my high school's orchestra for seven years. Playing the violin has been my go to comfort; every time life pulled me down, music pulled me back up. I also frequently use my gift to bring joy to the elderly in the nursing homes by playing music to them with a small group of musician friends. Another passion of mine is traveling and meeting new people and learning about new cultures. Nothing excites me more than learning a new language, so I am fluent in Arabic and Spanish and plan to pursue a minor in Spanish literature in college.

On August 27, 2017 my life was turned upside down. Hurricane Harvey hit my hometown of Katy, a suburb of Houston, and destroyed my home and those of my neighbors and friends. I suddenly found myself without a home, living at my uncle's house. We have lost our cars, our home and belongings all in one day; thankfully we had each other and that was all that matters. It was a huge sense of loss for all of us displaced by the hurricane but also an incredible sense of community and neighbor helping neighbor. This loss couldn't have come at a worse time for my family that has to rebuild our house, replace our cars so we can go to jobs and schools and help pay for my college tuition when I start college in August 2018. The financial pressure that my family is under is what prompted me to apply for the Paul Silver Tribute Award.

My dream is to become a nephrologist, thus I chose Biology as my major as I applied to colleges here in Houston, Texas. I plan to stay and be a part of my community as it rebuilds itself because as we say here "We Are Houston Strong" and we will rebuild. If I win this award, I plan to use the monetary awards toward my biology education in the hopes of becoming a pediatric nephrologist and one day help find a cure for Alport Syndrome. Maybe one day this award will actually benefit not just me but the greater community of the Alport Family.