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When Every Breath Hurt

Personal Essay

I'm your average eighth grade student — waking up, going to school, and going to bed all on repeat. I'm just doing what it takes to get by. I'm walking to my sixth period class and I just feel this strong pain in my chest. I hit my vape hoping it'd make the pain go away, but it just kept getting worse. I decided I needed to call my mom, "Hey, Mom, I have this really sharp pain in my chest, and it won't go away." She says, "When you come home, take a nap and see how you feel after that," and I hung up the phone. Finally, after fifty-five minutes, "Ding, Ding," so I know the day is finally over. I walk out of the building, the cool breeze hits my face as I walk to my mom's car. On the way home, the pain is just getting worse and worse, almost unbearable. We arrive at the house, I stumble inside and lie on the couch, my head is whirring, everything starts to spin.

When all I hear is "Nat, Nat" and then everything just goes black.

I begin to gain consciousness again and there's this obnoxious sound: "Wee Woo". "Wee Woo." I can finally get my eyes to open and all I see is my mom, tears rolling down her face. The man next to her is fairly large, bearded, with a jacket on. I read "EMS" and I knew where I was. I try to speak and nothing comes out. My mom taught me ASL when I was younger, so I asked my mom, "What is happening?" The wet tears start to dry as she notices I'm awake, and she says, "You're going to the UK, everything is going to be okay. Your Dad is right behind us in our car." I signed, "Okay, I love you," and I laid down. I'm riding in the ambulance for what feels like an eternity watching all the lights go past the windows. We finally come to a stop and the bearded man says, "I'm praying for you" and he hands me a stuffed animal dog as he wheels me into the hospital. I read the words "ICU" on the top of the door as we went in. All I can hear is what feels like a million beeping noises all at once. The ladies are poking needles all over me, I just start to go numb until a boy around my age rolls his wheelchair by my door and gives me the biggest smile and a wave. I knew right then that life was worth fighting for, that reminded me that in my darkest times I need to always think of the positives.

One of my nurses, Kelly, began to roll me into this colorful room. There're paintings on the walls and an airplane picture on the ceiling right above my bed. This hospital room is nothing like the cold and dull hospital rooms I've been in before. My parents are finally done signing papers, and they will come sit with me and my stuffed animal dog. My mom says, "They're going to finish running tests and find out what's wrong. They think you'll be here for about a week." I lay down and started praying that everything will be okay.

I can't stop coughing, I feel like I'm fighting for air. Kelly comes back in and turns the oxygen meter up. I look over it and it reads 100%. The look on my parents' faces is a look I will never forget.

A couple of hours go by, then a doctor comes into my room and says he needs to speak to my parents outside. When they return, they tell me that I have pneumonia in my right lung and I have severe asthma and need to see an asthma specialist. The doctor asked me if I had vaped. I tried to deny it, but I could tell by the look on his face he knew. He started by telling me about the dangers of vaping and how it almost ended my life. I promised him that I wouldn't get addicted to vaping again because I know I have a life worth living.

My sister's cheer competition is today. I'm so sad that I had to miss it, but thankfully we are able to watch it on Facebook Live. While we watched it my parents got me Taco Bell and that was the first meal that I've been able to hold down since being in the hospital. All of a sudden I hear a knock on the door, and my Nana walks in. She brought me a vibrant basket full of gifts and gave me the biggest hug of a lifetime. She was here for about an hour but the doctor asked her to leave because I wasn't doing very well. So I had to tell her bye and I watched movies for the rest of the day.

The next day rolls around and Kelly comes in "Good morning Nat, today you get to be removed from the ICU and be taken to a regular room," I was overjoyed. It felt like I could almost see the light at the end of the tunnel. My parents were gleaming with joy. They rolled me up to floor 6 now instead of 3. Once I got to the new room my doctor said "you should only be in the hospital for about 2 more days. Also, you're going to have to use an inhaler and take breathing treatments regularly from now on."

As the days went on, they lowered my oxygen level to 30%. I begin to get better and stronger, I can walk by myself, eat, and breathe without pain. After 5 days in the ICU and 7 days in the hospital, I finally got to go home. Life didn't completely go back to normal but I had to learn a new normal.

Something I thought was so small changed my life forever.