

I WASN'T BORN WITH THE FIFTY DEGREE CURVE IN MY BACK. SCOLIOSIS IS SOMETHING THAT TWISTS YOUR SPINE ALL DURING PUBERTY AND I WAS DIAGNOSED WHEN I WAS 16.

THE DOCTORS BENT ME OVER, XRAY-ED MY CURVED, AND SAID I WAS A CANDIDATE FOR SPINAL FUSION. SURGERY

[START MUSIC]

WHEN THE DOCTOR PUT THE X RAY ON THE SCREEN I WAS IN COMPLETE SHOCK.

THE BACK HAD SUCH A CURVE TO IT THAT I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

AND THEN MY MIND STARTED COMING WITH ALL THESE QUESTIONS: HOW LONG IS THE SURGERY? WHAT WOULD SURGERY ENTAIL? SO I JUST HAD TO SIT THERE AND DIGEST IT.

IT WAS MORE LIKE OKAY. WHAT GOES ON WITH THIS. DIDN'T KNOW -DIDN'T KNOW A LOT. SO MY NEXT THOUGHTS WERE HOW DO WE CORRECT THIS. WHAT'S THE LEAST INVASIVE WAY.

[STOP PARENTS]

SPINAL FUSION IS WHEN THEY PUT RODS AND PINS INTO YOUR BACK TO PERMANENTLY STRAIGHTEN IT OUT. IT MEANS THREE DAYS IN THE HOSPITAL, TWO WEEKS OUT OF SCHOOL, SIX WEEKS OUT OF ANY ACTIVITY, AND THREE MONTHS OUT OF MOST SPORTS. THE DOCTORS BASICALLY GAVE ME A CHOICE. LIVE WITH MY CURVE AND WITH THE ACHES AND PAINS THAT CAME WITH IT. OR LIVE WITH THE BIONIC SPINE -A PERMANENT OPTION THAT WASN'T EVEN GUARANTEED TO GET RID OF THE DAILY PAIN. IN THE END, IT WAS UP TO ME TO DECIDE

[START PARENTS]

WELL INITIALLY I WANTED YOU TO HAVE IT. THEN I TALKED MYSELF INTO WANTING YOU NOT TO HAVE IT.

BUT ULTIMATELY IT WAS GOING TO END UP WITH YOU. AND EITHER WAY WE WERE GOING TO SUPPORT IT. I WAS GOING TO SUPPORT IT. IT WAS JUST ULTIMATELY YOUR DECISION

[END PARENTS]

HOW COULD I POSSIBLY MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION?

[BACKGROUND: WHAT IF I CHOOSE WRONG]

I WAS SIXTEEN AND I HAD A WHOLE LIFE AHEAD OF ME AND I DIDN'T WANT IT TO BE ONE OF REGRET,

[BACKGROUND: WHAT IF I REGRET NOT GETTING IT]

BUT AT THE SAME TIME I DIDN'T WANT A LIFE OF CHRONIC PAIN.

[BACKGROUND: WHAT IF IT GETS WORSE]

THE WORST PART ABOUT SCOLIOSIS ISN'T THE CURVE IN YOUR SPINE, IT'S THE WAY IT TWISTS AND TURNS YOUR MUSCLES LIKE THE STRIPES ON A CANDY CANE. EVEN THOUGH THE SURGERY WASN'T GUARANTEED TO FIX THIS PROBLEM, I KNEW I HAD TO AT LEAST GIVE IT A TRY. THE DATE WAS SET. THE TWENTIETH OF DECEMBER

[START BEEP]

THE SURGERY ITSELF WAS NOTHING FOR ME. I WAS PUT ASLEEP AND THEN WOKE UP IN THE RECOVERY ROOM WHAT FELT LIKE FIVE MINUTE LATER. ALMOST LIKE WHEN YOU ACCIDENTALLY FALL INTO A NAP.

MY FIRST MINUTES AWAKE WERE GROGGY. I HAD GONE THROUGH SEVEN HOURS OF SURGERY.

[SOUNDS OF RECOVERY ROOM]

AFTER THE INITIAL SHOCK THE PAIN STARTED TO SETTLE IN. MY MUSCLES ACHED AFTER BEING STRETCHED INTO PLACE, THE INCISION BURNED, BUT THE DOCTORS KEPT ME PRETTY DRUGGED UP

[BACKGROUND: MORPHINE, METHADONE, VALIUM, OXYCONTIN]

I PLAYED MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS SONGS TO HELP IT ALL FADE AWAY. IT WAS MY SECOND DAY IN THE HOSPITAL, DECEMBER TWENTY SECOND, AND I WAS IN THE HOLIDAY MOOD

[START SILENT NIGHT]

[START PARENTS]

YOU WERE...WEAK AND YOU WERE VULNERABLE AND YOU WERE PALE AND THAT'S NOT THE DAUGHTER I KNOW SO IT WAS VERY HARD.

KINDA PATHETIC IS THE WORD THAT I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE. YOU WERE KINDA OUT OF IT. AND THERE WERE TIMES WHERE YOU WOULD BE FINE AND THERE WERE TIMES FOR EVERYONE TO LEAVE THE ROOM

[END PARENTS]

[START ME IN HOSPITAL]

I'M ALEX CROOKSHANKSS. PAIN IS THERE. IT HURTS. I'LL UPDATE LATER BYE.

[END SILENT NIGHT]

[END ME IN HOSPITAL]

I WENT HOME FRIDAY, DECEMBER TWENTY THIRD. THE TEMPERATURE WAS IN THE NEGATIVES AND I WAS NAUSEOUS AND SORE WITH MY BACK SPASMING AND TENSING WITHOUT WARNING. I COULD, HOWEVER, TAKE STAIRS ONE AT A TIME AND GET OUT OF BED BY MYSELF. LITTLE SIGNS OF RECOVERY STARTED POPPING UP ALL OVER THE PLACE, BUT THIS DIDN'T LAST FOR LONG.

THE MORNING OF CHRISTMAS EVE I WOKE UP TO MY STOMACH CHURNING. I WAS AT THE POINT OF DEHYDRATION, BUT I COULDN'T EAT OR DRINK. WE ENDED UP GOING TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM SO I COULD GET FLUIDS FROM AN IV AND I SPENT CHRISTMAS EVE IN A HOSPITAL BED.

MY RECOVERY SEEMED TO TAKE TWO STEPS BACK AS ALL THE LITTLE MILESTONES SEEMED TO WORK IN REVERSE. THIS TIME I LISTENED TO OTHER MUSIC

[START ARABESQUE]

-I WASN'T IN THE CHRISTMAS MOOD.

[FADE INTO BETTER QUALITY]

I WENT HOME CHRISTMAS AFTERNOON AND REALLY DID RECOVER FROM THERE. EACH DAY I COULD EAT A LITTLE MORE FOOD, WALK A LITTLE FARTHER, STAND A LITTLE LONGER. AFTER TWO WEEKS I COULD SHOWER AGAIN. AFTER FOUR WEEKS I COULD SIT THROUGH A FULL DAY OF SCHOOL. AFTER SIX WEEKS I COULD JUST BARELY PICK THINGS UP OFF THE GROUND.

[START PARENTS]

[STOP ARABESQUE]

I'M IMPRESSED WITH THE RECOVERY. I MEAN DAY ONE WALKING. NOT MUCH, BUT AT LEAST YOU HAD THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST. OFF OF MEDS IN A WEEK. YOU STILL GOT UP AND DOWN AND WALKED AROUND. IT WAS MORE THAN WHAT I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO.

I REMEMBER BEFORE THE SURGERY THE DOCTOR SAID THIS IS A LIFE CHANGING MOMENT AND IT'S YOUR CHOICE AND A LOT OF PEOPLE GO THROUGH THE SURGERY AND CHOOSE NOT TO GET BETTER. OR YOU CAN TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME, ONE STAIR AT A TIME, AND ONE TOOTH AT A TIME AS YOU BRUSHED YOUR TEETH FOR THE FIRST TIME AND THAT'S WHAT YOU DID. YOU WERE VERY GOAL ORIENTED. AND IT MAKES A MOM PROUD.

[END PARENTS]

IN THE END, I CAN'T SIT HERE AND TELL YOU MY SPINAL FUSION HAS CHANGED ME INTO A STRONGER, BETTER, PERSON. IF ANYTHING I THINK WHAT'S CHANGED THE MOST IS JUST MY POSTURE. I ALSO CAN'T SAY WHETHER OR NOT THE SURGERY

WAS WORTH IT. I'M NEVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO BEND BACKWARDS AGAIN, BUT I WILL ALSO NEVER AGAIN HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE THREAT OF MY CURVE LOOMING IN THE BACKGROUND. HOWEVER, THERE'S NOTHING SCARIER THAN THINKING PERHAPS ALL OF THIS WAS THE WRONG CHOICE FOR ME TO MAKE. BECAUSE HONESTLY, HOW COULD SOMEBODY MAKE A CHOICE LIKE THAT.

FOR 91.3 WHJE I'M ALEX CROOKSHANKS WITH MY FEATURE PIECE STANDING STRAIGHT. FOR MORE WORK LIKE THIS -INCLUDING MY REGULAR PODCAST *ENVIRONMENTAL*- VISIT OUR WEBSITE WHJE.COM.