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Paper 1

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Up until the age of 11, I was a happy go lucky, adventurous kid. Once 6th grade started, I began to have the migraines that changed the rest of my schooling. We saw over a dozen doctors of the course of the next seven years. The amount of days I spent at home in bed just sleeping was countless, missing out on what is supposed to be the time of finding yourself in the teenage years. Teachers and friends never could exactly what I was going through. They just knew I wasn't at school. They mostly didn't understand because I didn't look sick, so how could I be sick? Classmates said I was just skipping, when having a migraine that hurts so badly where the light hurts, the smallest sounds seem like a drum is right next to my ear. Through all the doctors we have found out I have multiple food allergies, seasonal and environmental allergies, Raynaud's disease, and hypothyroidism. From these I have also dealt with depression and anxiety from stress. All I went through in high school, I still finished with my class with a 3.2 GPA. Teachers sometimes questioned me how I kept my grades up. I would say when I felt well I would work hard to study and try to stay ahead of work. In my struggles of having an "invisible illness", I have learned that I doctors' offices can be the worst, I'm now used to getting my blood drawn, and I've tried almost all the different headache remedies out there. Personally, I have learned how to deal with doctors, to speak up for myself about a situation, and patience in life.

Most people dread going to their yearly check up. Try going to doctors on average once a week, sometimes 2 to 4 times a week. I was so used to just sitting there just letting my mom tell

them the same story again, letting me just sit there as if I couldn't speak or tell them myself. Let me tell you that was one of the worse parts of it: feeling like my mom thought I couldn't speak for myself. Many doctors offices are kept cool, stiff, and stale. Dressing so I'm going to be comfy and warm is important. I'm going to be uncomfortable. There is no denying that. When I most likely feel lucky to begin with, I want to try to make myself comfy as I can be for the situation. I like to reward myself for getting through the appointment, whether that is some chocolate or going out to lunch.

Having food allergies means speaking for myself when out with friends, and explaining to people that no I don't have celiac disease. Yes, I can eat almonds and other nuts as long as they haven't been roasted in peanut oil. Right now my allergies aren't that severe as others, but that doesn't mean I can't not care what I eat. In some situations it means that I have to talk to people ahead of time to see what will be offered and if something isn't safe, I have to bring my own food. I have had some situations where I'll have anxiety about it and that I would just rather stay home. Now that I'm older and going to some doctors appointments on my own, I've had to learn how to explain how I'm doing.

There was one time I was at a doctor's office a good hour-and-half before even getting called back. We also saw a doctor in Grand Rapids. We had a three hour round trip travel plus at least an hour visit. When I first had found out about having food allergies the doctor told me to go off wheat and dairy before we got the results back. She said it could take up to six weeks to get the wheat completely out of my system. Patience is the name of the game when it comes to becoming healthy. As time goes on a new test might come out, new research is done and new medicine is approved.

I would say that I've come a long way from where I was, and hopefully on the upswing of getting better to a healthy life. In high school I still didn't let having food allergies hold me back. I still participated in swim team, orchestra, and youth group. I went on handful of orchestra trips without my parents. Finding the right people to surround myself with to help encourage me and that understand some of what I've gone through is important. I'm still going through testing to get my body to be back to as healthy as it can be. It maybe something that I just have to continue to monitor and have the rest of my life, then I will just have to learn how to make the most of life with what I can handle.

In Alice Walker's narrative *Beauty: When the Other Dance is the Self* she talks about when she was little she had injured her eye, no longer seeing out of it. For so much of her life she thought people perceived her for what she looked like. Then one day her young daughter told her that "there's a world in your eye". Her daughter was able to teach her that it didn't matter that her eye wasn't the same. Alice was able to accept that her eye being how it is, is part of her now. For me it isn't something visible that makes me different. It's what I eat and how I do things during my life. To most people, I'm healthy. In reality I'm not. I've had to learn that this is what life has brought forward for me and I just have to accept it.

When life throws you a curveball to make it just that harder on you, I could have either face it head on or let it control your life. For some people an illness or disability can be visible, but for me it's invisible, that doesn't mean I'm less than important or that I can't tell have people tell me that I'm okay. I've learned how to deal with doctors, speak up about what I need and how to have patience in life. Next time someone says they are sick, but they don't look sick, don't

shrug them off, don't try to be sympathetic about it, either. Just try to understand what our life is like and what we need to lead a productive life.