

I'll be honest with you. The goal to become a nurse wasn't a lifelong dream of mine. For awhile, I wasn't quite sure what I was destined to grow to be and was getting quite anxious. But then a blessing in disguise, dressed in the form of a disease redeveloped itself in my body, changing my life forever.

To fully understand the nature of my condition, starting at the beginning would be most appropriate. I was born with Hepatic Endothelioma; a rare condition made up of vascular blood tumors that affect the endothelium lining of the body. The doctors at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) had never seen such a case before and were unsure of the protocol to treat such a condition. From seeing pictures of myself, I was so distressed-looking. Picture a 3-month-old baby with an extended belly and short, appendages. The tumors were so large, pooling blood that I went into heart failure and was prescribed Digoxin to help pump and circulate my blood. With surgery out of the question, due to the fact of my age, but mainly due to the severity of my condition, shrinking the tumors was the only option. The doctors suggested the steroid Prednisone having read literature from the past that it might shrink vascular tumors. With a strong faith in the doctors, but most importantly a stronger faith in God, my parents consented to this treatment as they held onto each other with clutched desperation.

Overtime, the tumors shrank and totally disappeared. A miracle they tell me today. I was able to enjoy a wonderful childhood growing up in a warm environment. I was healthy and faced no discrepancies from Hepatic Endothelioma, making it far into the past. It wasn't until the winter of my junior year at college until something felt off. I was experiencing a lot of pain after consuming food or drink. Believing it was an ulcer, I went to get tests done, and to make a long story short, it was discovered that I had vascular tumors all throughout my liver. The disease had come back and I was in need of a liver transplant if I had wanted to continue on my path of life. The condition I was in put me at the end of a long list of people waiting for a cadaver liver transplant. The doctors realizing that I couldn't afford to wait roughly around three years for a liver suggested an alternate option: a living donor transplant. This involves someone willing to donate 60% of their liver, which is placed in the recipient, after their troubled liver, is taken out. As one surely knows, the liver is the only organ in the body that can regenerate itself, rather quickly actually. The procedure is very lengthy (13 hours) and poses a greater risk to the donor. Without hesitation, my mother was the first to offer up her liver. Going through all sorts of vigorous tests, she was chosen to be the prime candidate. On June 19th 2001, the 11th successful living donor transplant at the University of

Pennsylvania Hospital took place. Later the doctors told us that my mother had two bile ducts and vena cava, an anomaly that would never have been discovered if the circumstances hadn't turned out as they did. Under a normal living transplant scenario, a bile duct in the recipient has to be reconstructed by cutting into the small intestine to serve as a port for bile, luckily that didn't need to be rendered for me thanks to my mother's peculiar anatomy. Looking at it philosophically, my mother says that she was born to do this. I just feel that there is no better proof out there in the existence of God.

The process of recovery for someone takes a lot of skills that most likely have not been used before in a long time. For me, my two-week recovery period was to say the least, a challenge. But the reality of it all could not have been accomplished without the excellent training and humanitarian dedication of my nurses. With both my mother and me, our nurses were our first lines of defense around the clock. If anything fluctuated or decreased they were the ones to alert the doctors. This is where I got to realize the importance of nursing and how a shortage of nurses affects the patients. My mother was released earlier than I was (due to a rejection of my new liver), but I still never felt alone because I knew I was under great care. In many ways, my nurses took the place of my own mother.

As time went by, tests were done and tubes were out and I was ready to go back to school in the fall. Adjusting to my new "life" was difficult but I was able to manage because of my strong will and determination to succeed. That spring, I graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of the Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies and landed a job in Insurance that come fall. I was living at home and commuting, I liked what I did, but did not love. I'm sure the pressures of Insurance and atop of that the monotonous daily grind would have pushed my level of like to hate, if I had stayed. I don't want to say luckily I got sick again, because it didn't seem like it at the time, but looking back now I realize that it was a blessing in disguise.

After enduring two months of pain whenever I sat, insomnia, and some loss of my lower limbs, I admitted myself into the hospital. The tumors were back in a more aggravated form; this time, they were in my lung, all up and down my vertebral column and yes, my new liver. I had to resign from work and found myself in a downward spiral for about six months constantly in and out of hospitals for various reasons, one almost costing me my life. With a cloud of uncertainty hanging over me, one thing was clear: if I ever am able to live a semi-normal life, I owe it to myself, God, and everyone whose ever helped me, to give back

however I am thinking more along the line of pediatrics. I was blessed with a wonderful childhood, but some children aren't. To give one child hope while caring for their needs is so rewarding, but to experience this first hand, I know I would not ever regret my suffering in the least bit for me to realize this.

Currently, each day is a struggle. The tumors are still present making them known to me by causing a dull aching pain in various parts in my body. I am on a lot of medication, one being Interferon Alfa, which causes me to be tired and weak most of the time, but it still doesn't stop me from living. Although there still is no protocol for my disease due to the rarity of it and lack of knowledge in treatment, I don't let the reality of what the future might hold get me down. If living with this disease has taught me anything, it is to take one day at a time. Life is so precious and yet so unpredictable, everyday should be considered a blessing.

J. Creedon, 25, nursing student

By Sally A. Downey
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Jill Laura Creedon, 25, of Wayne, a nursing student who helped care for patients while she was battling a fatal illness, died at home July 12 of heman-gioendothelioma.



Jill Laura
Creedon

Miss Creedon was diagnosed when she was 2 with the rare disease, which causes tumors to form in the blood vessels. Though doctors were doubtful she would survive, with treatment, the disease went

into remission and she enjoyed an active childhood.

She graduated from Notre Dame de Namur Academy in Villanova, where she played soccer and softball and ran track, and then attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where she played soccer. In her junior year, the disease returned and formed tumors in her liver.

In June 2001, her mother, Janet Spross Creedon, donated 60 percent of her liver to her daughter. Miss Creedon returned to college and graduated with her class in 2002. She worked for several months for a mutual fund company before tumors appeared in other parts of her body. After doctors stabilized the disease, her mother said, Miss Creedon decided she wanted to give the kind of care to patients that she had received. She took prerequisite science courses and enrolled in the Villanova University College of Nursing in 2004.

While she was studying at Villanova, the disease worsened. She received infusions of chemotherapy, interferon and morphine, her mother said, but she wouldn't quit, and completed her clinical training this past year at Lankenau and Bryn Mawr Hospitals. She had a 3.2 average for her course work and received a distinguished achievement award from Villanova.

"She never let anything stop her, and never said, 'Woe is me,'" her mother said. Right before her liver transplant, she went river rafting and hang-gliding in Europe. In May she visited the Acropolis and last month attended a friend's wedding and spent a weekend at the Shore. She was determined to live life, her mother said, and wouldn't talk about her sickness.

Miss Creedon enjoyed music, especially Pearl Jam concerts; playing the guitar; and photography. Last summer, her painting *A New Awakening* won an award from the Wayne Art Center.

In addition to her mother, she is survived by her father, Timothy J. Creedon; a brother, Paul; and her grandmother, Mildred A. Spross.

A Memorial Mass will be said at 11 a.m. today at St. Thomas of Villanova, on the university campus. Friends may call from 9:30 a.m.

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