

My younger brother's bedroom is about as typical as a little boy's room can get. The floor of his room is home to a collection of matchbox cars, army men, and airplanes. My mom bought him a bunk bed anticipating sleepovers with friends and cousins, but what she never expected was that no one ever would sleep in it. My mom would put my little brother to bed at night and would find him sleeping on the floor underneath the bunk bed in the morning. At first, this happened just when he was sick. It wasn't very long before there were more days he was sick than healthy, and at this point, he always slept under his bed.

This little quirk started to be accompanied by many other debilitating symptoms. My brother developed a phobia of extreme weather and he believed a tsunami coming to get him even though we didn't live near water. He would irrationally refuse to go outside if it was cloudy. At the time, I was fifteen, and he was seven.

For my family, this was one part of a chain that would eventually lead us down a detrimental spiral, a spiral. I remember being told my brother was doing amazing in writing and math. His social skills were fantastic, everyone called him charming and that he was bright for his age. Then all of a sudden he couldn't do math or even hold a pencil even though only a week ago he was excelling. And no one knew why, and no one would know until a couple of years later when my mom first heard the acronym "PANDAS."

Even after we got the diagnosis of PANDAS confirmed, we had a long way to go. I tried my best to help out when my brother's symptoms became uncontrollable. He would have these episodes of anger that came out of nowhere. One moment he was laughing, and the next, he would be screaming at the top of his lungs, pushing and throwing things at my mom and I.

Once after a nasty episode, my brother told me that he was scared of himself because he didn't want to hurt anyone. My family walked on eggshells every day, trying to prevent an episode. Days without these episodes were few and far in between.

In my college application essay for Miami University, I wrote about my family's experience and described it as a "family at war," and on one side was my family and my little brother, and on the opposing side was the monster called PANDAS.

The thing that terrified my older brothers and I more than those tense moments was when my little brother started having seizure-like episodes. He would be on the ground, unresponsive. His eyes would roll into the back of his head and wouldn't remember any of it when he came to. It's an image that we would never be able to unsee.

These symptoms came to a halt when he got his first couple of treatments of IVIG, though obtaining this treatment was a battle all on its own. My little brother desperately needed treatment, and we turned to our insurance company to help us pay for the cost. But we waited three long months with no answer, with nothing being done to help my brother. After the three months, we were denied and faced with the daunting task of paying for treatment alone. My family held a fundraiser to try and help pay 8,000 dollars out of pocket with family and friends.

Many of which did not understand the seriousness of what my brother had. Or how much he desperately needed the treatment.

In the Summer of this year, my little brother got plasmapheresis instead of IVIG. Again costing about 8,000 dollars per six sessions, and still, insurance will not pay for it. However, with these treatments, I have seen a vast improvement with my little brother. He is excelling in school and loves playing outside.

These treatments for many families is not a one time cost. Families like mine need help, and the biggest way to help is by removing the financial barrier between a sick child and the treatment they deserve.