

## The Definition of Normal

In 1999, there was an accident. My family, consisting of my parents, my grandparents, my little sister and my little brother was vacationing in Colorado. I was 7, my sister was 5 and my brother was 3. It was spring break, but we loved the state so much that we had already planned to rent a house there for Christmas break. It was a beautiful cabin that overlooked a cliff.

The day of the accident, we had made plans to go to the hot springs. It was going to be a fun day. A normal day. Before we left, my parents went inside our cabin to sign some papers for the house we were planning to rent. My siblings and I stayed in the car.

While my parents were inside, the car knocked out of gear. It began rolling toward the cliff on which the house was situated. My parents flew out of the house and, in a final, desperate attempt to save our lives, my mother ran in front of the rolling car with her arms outstretched, determined to stop it.

There are many things I do not remember about that day. I do not remember what month or day it was. But I remember the chilling air severely biting into my chapped cheeks. I do not remember what my mother looked like that many years ago, but I remember the terrorized expression on her face, right before she went under the SUV. I do not remember how many seconds passed, or how long we were rolling before my grandpa managed to catch up to the car and pull the emergency brake on the driver's side. But I do remember the bump. I do remember realizing, *we just ran over our mother.*

My mom is paralyzed and doctors say she will never walk again. I was just 7 years old when I learned how to go grocery shopping on my own. I was 8 when I learned to transfer my mom into the bathtub and onto her medical bike, and load my mom's wheelchair into the car. By the time I was 9, I was lobbying senators in Washington DC for stem cell research.

Can all of this be considered "normal?" Most of you would answer, "no." But I beg to differ.

My mom is the woman who taught me to laugh at the little humors in life, such as how the game Don't Step on a Crack or You'll Break Your Mother's Back, no longer applied and that we could step on every sidewalk crack we wanted to because her back was already broken. My mother is the woman who told me that when people stare at us in stores because we're with someone in a wheelchair, we had every right to stare right back at them. My mother instilled in me all of the characteristics that make me who I am: she essentially *created my normal.*

Yes, I have a disabled mother. But no, it does not hurt anymore. Instead, it makes me who I am.

After the accident, I remember trying to be strong. I was trying to be strong for my mom and my dad and my sister and my brother. And I was good at playing the part. But then I remember the morning back when I was 8 years old, sitting on top of the kitchen counter with my legs crossed, frustrated and scared after I had just set a dish rag on fire trying to get the biscuits I had made for my sister and brother out of the oven. I remember my mom wheeling into the kitchen and taking my hand. And then I remember crying. I climbed into my mom's lap in her wheelchair and sobbed until I couldn't breathe anymore. When I finally got it together, I said I was sorry. I remember my mom looking at me and saying, "Chlo, it's normal to cry. It's so, so normal."

The word normal is used to describe "the usual, average, or typical state or condition." And up until I was 7 years old, this is how I would've described my life. But what really defines normal? Is it common practice, majority rule, or simply a contrast to abnormal? I disagree with all of these definitions because I believe that there is none. Normal cannot, and will never be defined because the definition changes according to every individual. I want to challenge you all tonight to abandon the rigid, static conception of normal that is gradually seared into all of our brains. We get into the mindset of thinking that there is *one* definition of normal and that it serves as a prototype for everyone to follow. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

So drop the conception of normal you've had for years, allow it to be flexible, find *your* normal, and know that it's okay. My mother will never walk again. I do not think of this as abnormal, but rather, a different kind of normal. She is my mother, and this is *my* normal.