Sometimes I have to wonder: why me? Why do I, of all people, have to have such an uncommon thing that I have to deal with? Day in and day out and for the rest of my life it’ll never escape. No medicine or anything I do will ever make it cease. I have what is called nystagmus. It is an eye condition that constantly makes my eyes jerk back and forth super fast. It originates in the brain where your eyes are able to focus. Since I was born with it, it doesn’t make me feel sick or anything, but this has come with huge obstacles I’ve had to encounter over my lifetime.

Nystagmus also causes severe astigmatism. That’s when the shape of your eye is more like a football so what you see doesn’t reflect on the correct part of your eye. This will cause you to have very blurry vision. As for me, I am severely nearsighted because of it. I’ve tried contacts. It’s funny because all of those contacts commercials say, “Have astigmatism? Try our contacts for astigmatism!” What they fail to tell you is if your astigmatism is as bad as mine, the astigmatism contacts don’t even work. They slid around all over my eyes, so I was forced to try hard lenses. They honestly feel like plate glass on my eyes. That obviously doesn’t work well, so I’m stuck with glasses forever.

This disorder beat me up pretty badly as a kid. It caused my balance to be way out of whack. While every other kid was out riding his or her bike around the neighborhood, I was running into stop signs about a block from my house. My elbows are nothing but scar tissue from falling so much. Gym class was a nightmare. Every time we played dodge ball, I walked away with a fat lip. When the ball was moving back and forth, I didn’t really know which way to go but down. My timing was always off so the ball would hit me square in the face. I was never allowed to play contact sports in high school.

Nystagmus has caused me to have a total of three eye surgeries in my life already. I was a very active kid until I had my first eye surgery. The eye surgeon claimed he knew what he was doing, but he really didn’t. What he was supposed to do was fix the muscles in the back of my eyes so my null point would be at a normal position. The null point is a position that a person holds his or her head so his or her eyes stop shaking. In my case, it is very high
and to the left, which, without treatment, will cause neck and back problems when I’m much older. That day changed my life.

I was almost six years old and was forced to crawl on the ground. He had made me cross-eyed. Over the course of slowly recovering for three months, I had repeated eye infections, I had to wear eye patches, I was on constant antibiotics, and I put on some weight. After that, I was always a chunky kid.

My second eye surgery corrected my crossed-eyes. Of course we consulted a new doctor this time. I still struggled severely with my weight. I went to a small Catholic school my whole life. I was put in a Catholic school because I would be able to get extra help if needed, and the doctor worried that in a big school, I wouldn’t be able to see very well with a lot of movement around me. This proved to be an accurate observation. With my eyes already constantly moving, any extra movement confuses me. When I started middle school, I came home with headaches everyday because I had to change classes with other people. It took time, but I’m completely used to it now.

Soon after my second surgery, my null point returned to its original position. This resulted in the third eye surgery. I worked really hard to get my weight down, and I did after the second surgery. The third eye surgery brought on an overwhelming number of challenges. I aspirated during surgery. This is going to get gross but hang in there with me. I’m a very nervous person, and I got sick in the car on the way to Columbus before surgery. They gave me nausea medicine to calm me down, but it happened again, only this time it happened while I was anesthetized. The vomit went back into my lungs, and that was the closest I have ever come to dying. I distinctly remember having a dream during this, and I remember wanting desperately to sit up and to get off the operating table, but I couldn’t. After that, everything turned white, and the next thing I knew I was in recovery surrounded by family and doctors. I wasn’t conscious long until I fell back to sleep. After this surgery, I got pneumonia three times in a row and was on steroids, antibiotics, and was given several shots in a very tender area. After I got over that, I was diagnosed with asthma. I was on inhalers, breathing treatments, and medicine every day for two years. I gained the weight back plus some because I couldn’t run very well anymore. I still can’t run for very long, but I’m still really fast.

Even though I had been attending a Catholic school, I was still brutally tormented during school. I was called names like Santa Claus, ugly, fat, tubby, and much more. I remember kids spitting in cups and putting peas, raisins, milk, and anything else they had in their lunch and passing it down to me asking, “You still hungry?” Comments like that were said to me every day. I bawled almost every day after school, and I always despised going. No matter what my mom did, nothing was ever good enough. No problems were ever fixed. The guidance counselor told me to suck it up and get tough. I was being called degrading
things, no one really liked me, and I was being told to get over it. There’s something wrong with that. You never understand how badly it hurts until it’s forced on you relentlessly. It feels as if you’re tied up and people are throwing daggers at your chest, and every time you scream they only laugh. They leave you there to hang just waiting to do it again the next day, and you start to wonder: what’s the point of being around anymore? Nothing anyone says makes it any better. Just thinking about it makes me want to burst into tears. I had only one loyal friend in middle school. I’m pretty sure she’s the only reason I ever made it through.

I was completely fed up with being “ugly and fat.” Finally during my freshman year of high school, I lost forty pounds and grew two inches. Now I am 125 pounds, and I am 5’6.” In the process, I gained eight best friends. They are honestly the best group of friends I could ever ask for. I really have no idea what I would ever do without them. Things started to look up, until I turned fifteen and the eye doctor told me I probably would never drive.

It’s rather funny how things in my life have worked. When I was younger, the eye doctor always told my mom I would never be able to take timed tests because I would never get done in time. I proved him wrong. He told my mom I would have to have my school worksheets in bigger print to read them. I proved him wrong. He told my mom I would have almost zero reading comprehension and that I would read very, very slowly. I proved him wrong. He told me I would never be like the other kids, and I would have low grades. I wish he could see my everyday life now. I just got a 4.0 GPA last quarter. I proved him wrong again. He told me a year ago I’d be very lucky if I passed Driver’s Ed and the license test. Last September I got my driver’s license. Now if someone tells me I can’t do something, I look them in the eyes and say, “Watch me.”

It’s going to be funny the first time I get pulled over, maybe more interesting than funny. When adrenaline increases, my eyes shake more rapidly. The first thing the cop will notice is that my eyes are shaking, and he will wonder if I have been drinking. He’ll make me get out and walk a straight line. I can’t walk in a straight line at all because when the ground is always moving, balance is hard. I don’t really know what “still” looks like. The only way I’ll get out of it is to take a breathalyzer test.

Prisms were put in my glasses to fix my upright null point a few years ago. Problem solved. Since I couldn’t ever play contact sports, I took up golf just like my grandpa. He teaches me everything he knows. He won the city championship last year and is the assistant coach of my golf team. Problem solved. To help with my balance issues, I was put in dance in the first grade, and I’m still in it today. I love it. I couldn’t see myself doing anything other than golf and dance, especially since I’m actually good at both. I think this helped make me feel like a normal kid because from there on out, I stopped running into things, I stopped holding my head funny, and I took up a high school sport that two of my best friends also did.
I could pity myself everyday for having nystagmus, but I don’t. It affects every decision I make. Some places I can’t drive to because it’s too far for my eyes to handle. When I go to busy public places, I can’t go alone or I’ll get lost. When I go to the beach and can’t have my glasses, my friends have to always make sure I’m not drifting too far away because I can’t tell. If I hadn’t had to deal with this disorder, however, I wouldn’t have been placed in Catholic schools. Consequently, I wouldn’t have my amazing friends today. If I could actually play contact sports, I might not have been in golf. Therefore, I probably would’ve never become best friends with my BEST of all friends, Jenna. If my middle school life hadn’t been so abusive, I don’t think I would’ve ever changed. I also don’t think I would be as strong of a person as I am now because of all the things I’ve had to overcome. I almost looked death straight in the eyes, but there’s a reason I didn’t. For some reason, God brought me into this world with nystagmus because it was my destiny, and He let me live to see another day. It’s a part of who I am, and I accept that. I accept all the challenges I am given because there’s a reason for everything, and if that means sacrificing something others can do that I can’t, then so be it. That just means there wasn’t a reason for me to do it anyways. The struggle was nothing but trying to figure out how I could fit in, not be hated, and still be happy. I went through all the pain there and back. I am a lover, a fighter, a survivor. I think after all I’ve been through, I’m ready for my next challenge: going to a huge college, in a huge city, far away, another thing I was told I would never be able to do.