

Milestones

When my father experienced bleeding in the brain, our family learned to celebrate unexpected milestones.

BY SAMANTHA LIBRATY

Milestones act as markers on the path of a person's life. For example, we mark important birthdays (often called milestones), new privileges—such as getting a driver's license—and important events (such as graduations), which are all part of growing up. These milestones are especially precious to children and adolescents. As young people grow older, these milestones mark the path they have taken to becoming adults.

I am 16 years old, in a year full of milestones that are supposed to mark my passage into adulthood. However, they have often been overshadowed by milestones of a different sort.

My father experienced major bleeding in his brain about a year and a half ago. In the beginning of his recovery, our world was filled with his milestones: when he came out of a medicated coma; when he could breathe on his own; when he could move a finger. My father re-experienced many of the milestones a young child would typically go through in development.

Within the course of the day when my father experienced the bleeding, our lives were turned upside down. Many parts of my life had to be put on the back burner. I was just finishing my first year of high school, but a new reality had taken over my life and the lives of my family members. This new reality had to be meshed somehow with the old one—the time before the bleed.

It is difficult to tell a child that things won't be the same. It is also difficult for a child to hear—to realize that his or her life will never be the same again. On top of watching my father—whom I love and look up to—suffer and struggle, I had to realize that many of the milestones I would experience in the next year would not be the same as the ones my friends would experience.

When I began to drive, for example, I could not

fully share the excitement with my father because he was confined to a hospital and could not get in the car with me. I had to tell him about my driving lessons instead of having him experience them with me.

It was very important to me to fulfill all of the driving requirements in order to get my license quickly. While most of my friends were not even thinking about getting their licenses because they knew they had all the time in the world, I realized that it would be helpful to my family if I had my license as soon as possible.

I celebrated the milestone of receiving my license by beginning to drive my brothers and myself to school, to extracurricular activities such as sports practices, and even to the supermarket. I took on certain adult responsibilities so that my parents would not be too overwhelmed and to allow my brothers and me to participate in activities just as we had before.

I am extremely fortunate to have a great family, loving parents, and many opportunities afforded to me. As it turns out, I have been able to experience all of the milestones that a 16-year-old should experience. And in a way that I didn't expect, my father is experiencing them along with me. We have celebrated his ability to drive again, to travel on a plane, and to go swimming. Most importantly, I learned how important his own perseverance and the support of family and friends have been in his progress. It's such a valuable lesson.

Now, I am looking forward to my 17th year and to all of the many milestones I will continue to experience with my father.

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