

I am 17 years old and have had epilepsy since I was 2 ½. The journey my family and I have been on has been difficult, frightening and discouraging at times. From episodes of status epilepticus, to ambulance rides in grade school, to walking out of a classroom and down a flight of stairs during an absence seizure, my experiences in school and in social settings have been quite challenging. Having a seizure during classes was very frustrating and embarrassing because I did not have control over my own body. You can imagine the reactions of my fellow classmates, especially in junior high, where appearances are everything! Now that I'm a few years older, I realize their behavior was likely a result of their own fear of the situation and not knowing how to react or how to help me. After failing several medications, at the end of eighth grade (junior high school) I started the Ketogenic Diet which proved to be very successful for me. I became a driven person. Over the course of 2 ½ years I was able to reduce my medications (currently on Keppra 750 mg 2x/day) and seizure frequency significantly. This helped build my self esteem and confidence in school. Although my first trip to the high school cafeteria, with my keto meal in hand, was more eventful than I would have liked, other aspects of my school life improved. Even though I never returned to the school cafeteria, I worked diligently and earned honors academically and excelled in my art abilities. My work has been chosen twice to compete in The Hyde Museum (Glens Falls, NY) High School Juried Art Exhibition. I was also selected to participate in the New York State Summer School of the Arts (NYSSSA) program in July 2007. This year I began as an early admissions student at our local community college to get a "jump start" on college requirements. These achievements have encouraged me to want even more.

The open, accepting environment of college life is so appealing; I feel I need it to grow both intellectually and socially. Attending college will allow me to develop my interests and explore new ground. It will provide me with independence and the knowledge of having endless possibilities at my fingertips. I am undecided as to my course of study but want to start college by exploring my interests: visual arts, animation, performing arts, music, marine biology, animal science, environmental sciences, geology and astronomy. This foundation will help guide me to a career I will look forward to learning more about every day.

I have been accepted to the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT and the State University of New York at Oswego, so receiving this scholarship would help me achieve my goals and dreams (which are bigger than my bank account). Having some degree of financial freedom would also benefit my parents. As you know, the medical expenses can be difficult to handle, not to mention the emotional toll. My parents have been strong and encouraging through ambulance rides, hospitalizations, intubations, tests, the list goes on. Even though I've experienced some limitations because of epilepsy (i.e. I had to quit gymnastics and the swim team because of increased seizures) my parents have always tried to provide a good balance - steering me to other activities and interests.

I realize many applicants for this scholarship are deserving. Each case is different but I believe I can attest to the difficulties and road blocks others have experienced. By attending college, I will have opportunities open to me that may otherwise not be available. I appreciate your consideration of my application.