

Alexandra de Catalogne

September 11, 2018

Seminar (Fake)

Memoir

Our flight leaves at 10 am. We have trained all season for this upcoming week, and now it is finally here. We have practiced 4 hours a day, 5 days a week, and the week is finally upon us. Over fifty countries are flying to Minnesota to compete with some of the best teams in the world. It's still surreal that we were one of the teams that got a bid to go. The flight felt like we were soaring in the sky for hours, but in actuality, it was only a two-and-a-half-hour flight. My mindset had never been so focused. From the time we left Georgia until we landed in Minnesota, I was already locked in and ready to play. My headphones were practically glued to my ears, and the music was continually playing. Falling asleep that night was almost as difficult as trying to put a five-year-old to sleep on Christmas eve. That night, I woke up at least five times to check the clock, each time hoping my alarm was soon to go off. As soon as we heard the loud beep, we sprung out of bed so quickly that the subsequent wind practically turned the alarm off. The bus ride to the venue was quiet, but our energy spoke volumes. My team and I walked to our court with our heads held high, posture straight, and our confidence held higher. It was finally time to lace our shoes, strap on our ankle braces, pull up our knee pads, and play. The first set was filled with sweat, weak muscles, and sore voices. We used every ounce of energy we had going into the second set, because we knew winning was not going to be easy against the number one team in

our bracket. It was a tie: twenty-four to twenty-four. Whoever got the next two points was going to win the game. My coach had just called a timeout; we knew what we needed to do to walk out of the arena with a win. “1, 2, 3 win,” I screamed as we broke down the huddle. The ref blew the whistle and motioned his hand, and the opposing team served the ball. It floated seamlessly across the net, and landed perfectly on our liberos platform. She effortlessly passed the ball. My eyes were laser sharp, focusing on the ball as it left her platform and fell into our setter’s hands. I began my approach as soon as the ball glided off her fingertips. One, two, three — and then my volleyball career was over. A scream came over the whole arena as I lay gripping onto my leg, a pain so strong I was numb to the world around me, so strong I thought my world was over. I looked down and saw my left knee bent all the way towards the inside of my leg. I then began to scream even louder. My coach came running, my parents came running, my teammates came running with tears down their face because they knew what that scream meant. They knew that was my last volleyball game. My world had changed in a blink of an eye. Volleyball had been my life ever since middle school, and it was going to be my life all through college. But this one final play changed all that. I was done. I had torn my acl and meniscus, as well as dislocated my knee. The pain of not only dislocating your knee, but tearing your acl and other tendons is so immediate that you do not even have time to brace yourself. The world arounds you feels like a dream, still but chaotic at the same time. I ended up blacking out because the pain was so severe, and I awoke to being carried of the court. My parents drove me immediately to the hospital with my assistant coach in the back seat holding my hand. Before leaving the court, I remember each

of my teammates grabbing my hand and saying, “Don’t worry Al, this win is going to be for you.” My team did exactly that. That night, I had immediate knee surgery, waking up to the news that they not only won the first game, but the championship. After their victory, they rushed to my bedside, where we all sat together, crying. I had never felt so proud of my girls. They worked so hard the whole year. We all did. It took me months to come to terms with the idea that I had played my last volleyball game, but I found another path, which led me to where I am now. Therefore, I have learned that I cannot be sad or have any regrets. I have to be grateful that each of those moments or what I thought were setbacks have led me here to New York City in front of all of you.

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The last two weeks before one is supposed to walk across the long black stage to get the piece of paper they have worked all four years to receive, is a time that is supposed to be filled with excitement; well it is supposed to be at least... My time was filled with ambulance sirens, hospital monitors, and going in and out of machines for a variety of test. I was sitting in my AP art class finishing up the final touches of my portfolio before my year of hard work is supposed to be shipped off to be critiqued. As I'm sitting there I can feel my whole world around me start to slowly shift in a literal sense because that's how dizzy I started to feel. My teacher saw it in my eyes, that something was not right, so she sat me against the wall. A few minutes later the school nurse came in, I was wheeled into the hallway, then I woke up to teachers surrounding me holding my neck and feeling my pulse. 10 minutes later my mom arrives. I was wheeled out to her car and woke up to hands gripping my neck, but this time a familiar siren noise in my ear. Then I saw the ambulance. They loaded me in the ambulance, took me to the hospital and ran a variety of test. While waiting for the test results to arrive I woke up to my mom's eyes piercing into mine anxiously. I had just had my first two seizures. Little did I know I would be waking up to people's eyes piercing into mine for the next 3 months. But what I didn't know is that I would be spending my last summer at home going in and out of different doctors' appointments. After

laying in the hospital bed for almost half the day the doctor finally comes in with a “diagnosis”. “Oh, it’s just anxiety” he said questionably. The next day I laid at home resting with my mom who was laying practically on top of me watching for my seizures. The following day I went back to school. I was sitting in my class and as I was sitting there I felt my legs begin to go numb. Luckily, the nurse was on standby right outside my class; it was almost like she sensed that I didn’t feel right. She quickly wheeled me into the clinic once again. I lied down on the bed praying to god the feeling would pass. Shortly after my three best friends rushed in. I could feel their hearts pounding and see the worry on their faces. They waited right by my side for my mom to arrive, however, my body didn’t wait. I woke up to four paramedics lifting me on to a stretcher once again. I felt like it was a bad dream, or the worst case of Deja-vu. I had had four seizures while laying on that clinic bed. When I came to, a rush of feelings came over me. A feeling of embarrassment of the fact that I was going to have to be carried away by an ambulance in front of my school once again. The feeling of pure sadness from seeing what I have just put my mom through but also from the pain, worry and tears I have put my friends through. But also, the feeling of fear. The last thing I remember before they closed the door to the ambulance was my mom and my three best friends holding each other while an ocean of tears were released from their eyes. What I didn’t know was that this was going to be my last day of high school. This time at the hospital was different; the doctors performed a whole range of tests. They had insisted that I stayed overnight. Luckily, for my parents I did because I think it offered them some sense of relief that if needed doctors were right down the hall. It was a good thing that they

did because just in that one night I ended up have twenty seizures. All I really remember from that time in the hospital was feeling so weak and exhausted because my body was so drained from all these events. But I do remember the feeling of stepping out of those automatic hospital doors, not having to breathe in the dry air that is filled with young innocent patients that grasp onto their terrified parents arms. The days before I was supposed to graduate consisted of me laying in bed having the seizures that felt like my new normal. The night I graduated was filled with excitement but also worry in the back of my mind, as well as my closest friends minds.

“Come on body, you got this, you are going to behave, just for tonight be normal”. I repeated this to myself the whole night, but unfortunately my body decided not to listen. I ended up having three seizures right before I was supposed to enter the stadium to receive my diploma. My friends were there each time by my side to catch my fall and form a circle around me so others could not see. Luckily, I was able to bounce back up, make it to the stadium entrance, walk to my seat, then across the stage with my friends following right behind me ready to act just in case, then back to my seat with a proud smile across my face with my diploma in my hand. I was not going to let these past three weeks or even the twenty minutes prior ruin this night or my memories of the past four years of high school. The next two months of my summer were the same. These months consisted of, my mom calling me every 10 minutes to make sure I was okay, my friends having to pick me up cause the doctors wouldn't allow me to drive, my friends forming a circle around me to block people from having to see me seize, waking up confused in public settings, in and out of doctor appts, being told I was not going to be able to go to school

and laying in my bed most days. The last months of summer I went to whom I call the miracle doctor. He is the man who finally figured out what was causing my seizures. Then we were able to come up with a game plan to minimize and hopefully make them stop. I went home with this new information and took it day by day, my seizures slowly became less and less. Each day that I went without a seizure was a celebration and a huge accomplishment. I refused to let someone tell me that I was not going to be allowed to attend school. Three weeks later, I had my follow up appointment; “Okay, I think I am comfortable enough with you leaving to school”, these were the words I had been waiting to hear. In my stubborn mind I was going to go either way. But it definitely made everyone feel better knowing I had the doctor’s approval. Now, we are here a month and a half later seizure free as of today and in New York City.