

Jessica Klus - Our Lady of Lourdes - Saint Ursula Academy

Every time your parents leave the house, you just assume they'll come back. But every time they go out on the road, there's a chance. Small, but still a chance, something can happen. I never thought that when my dad left my house, my life would be completely turned upside down.

This past August I was in a soccer tournament in Tennessee. I never knew saying goodbye to my dad would be the last time I got to see him normally. I didn't think much of the small word. But I said it so quick and meaningless when I left. I was on my way to a game when my mom got the call. She almost slammed on the breaks. We pulled into a nearby parking lot and she talked for what seemed like an eternity. When she finally pulled the phone from her cheek, her face was as white as my uniform. I immediately asked a million questions at once. She talked slowly and in bullet points. My dad had been in a really bad wreck. He is on his way to the hospital. He should be okay. Emergency surgery. Every word got more and more muffled. My heart froze. My mother decided to drive home immediately, but I was going to stay and play in the championship game. During the game worry gnawed at me like a constant hunger that could never be satisfied.

When I finally returned home, I returned to a mess. My dad's leg was shattered in two places. He had three emergency surgeries. He was in the hospital, and would be for a while. That meant my mom was there all the time too. That left the house to me and my siblings. Relatives stopped by occasionally, but only briefly. My sister and I took over. We did laundry, arranged rides to practices, walked home, cleaned the house, and

made dinner. We did a lot, but it still seemed like nothing. The following two weeks were long and stressful. I got to visit my dad, but not often.

When my dad finally came home, the house became my dad's house. People would just stop by all the time. Normally people I didn't know. There really wasn't anything I could do for my dad, but it was hard to watch him sit there in his chair with his leg elevated. Sitting. The only things I could do were give him his medicine, or talk to him.

Since I couldn't do very much for my dad, I decided to focus on what I could do for others in need. I started signing up for service opportunities, so I felt like I was still helping make a difference. I sang carols at a nursing home nearby, worked the Lourdes concession stand, served at mass, stayed after school to help kids with math, volunteer taught for two weeks at a safety camp for preschoolers, and made toys for kittens in the SPCA. Although all I could do for my dad was get him a glass of water, or the television remote, I still felt like I should help someone. It was like feeding my need to help. It kept my mind off things too. I would come home and tell my dad stories of what happened that day. I remember the joy it brought me to see his face light up with pride and how proud he was.

Today my dad is beginning to walk again. He is also going through intense physical therapy. I still sign up for service projects when they come up. Now every time I say goodbye, or watch someone I love shut the door, I say every word like it's my last.