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The Barn

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How to Have a Rare Disorder

Cora Yoesting

Step one of having a rare disorder is to have a rare disorder.

Step two of having a rare disorder is realizing you have a rare disorder.

This is where things get complicated. Ever since I was very young, I remember thinking, “Does everyone breathe like this?” But I didn’t think to ask any follow-up questions. When I was in the fourth grade, I started furrowing my eyebrows. I thought it was because I wore my ponytail too tight. I did it so often that my friends began to notice. One friend offered to help by slapping me on the forehead anytime I did it, regardless of the situation. We tried that for a couple of weeks, and it seemed to work. I didn’t think any more of it for years.

Scratch that — step two is realizing you have something.

Over the years, my symptoms very slowly, almost imperceptibly, worsened. I had my first big tic attack — or what we called a tic attack at the time — in August of 2019. Maybe it was the stress of beginning my senior year. Maybe it was random. All I know is that one day I was a normal teenager who sometimes had twitches, and the next day I was disabled. Now, it wasn’t just my eyebrows furrowing. My whole face would morph into what looked like a silent scream. Silent because, at the same time, my throat would close so that I couldn’t breathe. Over and over, these spasms continued throughout the day, and by the evening, I was utterly exhausted. My chest was tight. I was lightheaded. My throat hurt. I could barely function. This was when my mother caught a candid video of my spasms for the very first time. Finally, I had something I could show to a doctor. I soon received my first diagnosis: Tourette’s syndrome.

Step Three: Adjust to living with your new diagnosis.

Throughout my senior year of high school, I slowly grew more comfortable with having a visible disability. For a while, every time I talked to someone new, I would preface

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