

The Day my Life went to Pieces

by Emily Welsh



Cancer is a disease that we associate with adults. It often comes as a shock when we hear of children being afflicted with this disease. As adults, we try to cope with whatever emotional resources we can muster but it is not only adults that suffer when a close one struggles with a life-threatening disease. Showing us a rare glimpse into how a 13 year-old adolescent deals with the grieving process, Emily Welsh wrote the following titled "The Day My Life Went to Pieces." Emily's hope is that as many people as possible would be impacted and encouraged by her story.

There are two ways of meeting difficult challenges: alter the difficulties or alter yourself to meet the challenges. When my family experienced a tragic event, it

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changed me drastically. My outlook on life, my faith in Christ and my sense of responsibility, were forever impacted. Looking back at the events before, during and after the traumatic event in our family, shows how the transformation in my own life unfolded. Miraculously, the greatest challenge of my life ended up causing the greatest and most profound growth of my life.

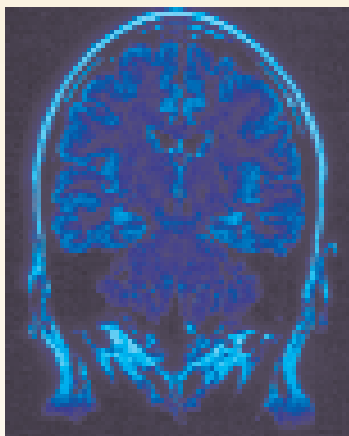
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Preceding the tragedy, I was living what many people would consider to be a *normal life*. I was bored with my life. Nothing interesting ever happened. Nothing was very exciting. I would wake up every morning, do my schoolwork, read a book or two, and maybe go out somewhere. My biggest worry was that I would never have anything compelling to discuss.

Then the drama began to unfold—My brother Andrew started getting worse and worse headaches. Oblivious to the impending danger, I wasn't concerned with what appeared to be something as common as a cold, but eventually, it started to concern me. Every time I wanted to go somewhere or do something, I was prevented because "*Andrew had a headache.*" This disruption of my daily life was really getting annoying.

Even after numerous doctors' appointments, nobody could figure out what was causing Andrew's terrible headaches, until they did a CT scan and discovered the source of the problem—**My brother had a brain tumour!** Those were words I thought I would never hear. This was something that was supposed to happen to other people, but never to me, and not to MY brother.

My world turned upside down. Confusion reigned in my life. Uncertainty filled my thoughts. *Would my brother die?* I didn't know. Andrew was rushed off to Children's Hospital and my younger brother Matthew and I were sent to stay with friends. Playing with my friends took my mind off my



worries, but the fact still remained—**My brother had a brain tumour.**

The next few months were filled with uncertainty. After the doctors relieved the pressure that

had built up in Andrew's brain, his headaches were gone, but the tumour was still there. We didn't know when he would have to go for radiation, so we couldn't make any plans for the summer. We didn't really know anything nor did we have any control over what was happening. We were entirely dependant on God.

As fall approached, Andrew's radiation treatments were approaching just as fast. He had to go to Vancouver every day for six weeks! Our schedule was extremely hectic. It was not a very good environment to get any kind of work done. If it

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weren't for my Grandparents, who came out from Toronto to help, not much of anything would have gotten done.

The whole ordeal was one I could have lived without, but the impact it had on my life is something I wouldn't trade for anything. There is never an official end to a huge challenge like the one I went

through; it is really a continual thing. One of the things that cheered me up the most through all the tough days, were flowers. I love flowers and when people generously gave us flowers it always put a smile on my face. Through the whole ordeal I have learned many things and changed some of my ways of thinking. One of the hardest things I had to do was accept what happened to Andrew and learn from it. The challenge I experienced matured me faster than I might have liked and gave me a new *pair of glasses*. I no longer look at things the way I did before, instead I put them in perspective and learn from them. Taking responsibility and becoming independent is something that was kind of forced upon me, and I had to just accept it. Life comes at you with things both good and bad. I have learnt to live with both. You can take a bad thing and use it to torture yourself or you can use it to learn and to grow. *"How would a person ever know whether his faith was weak or strong unless it had been tried and tested?"* I have grown a lot deeper in my faith and have learnt to depend entirely on God because our plans can change in an instant, whether or not we want them to. *Over all, the impact of the events have been positive and have taught me a lot about myself, others and God.*

Post Script:

This is a story still in progress. Since Emily's essay Richard and Louise Welsh offer this update:

...Another very positive thing that was totally unexpected, was that, as a result of his life-threatening tumour, Andrew was granted a wish by the *Children's Wish Foundation*. When you hear about these things, you always think it is something that happens to **other people's children**. Being granted a wish forced us to accept the reality of the potential seriousness of

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Andrew's situation and was very instrumental in helping us through the grieving process. As the whole family was included in the wish, it turned a difficult situation into something very special and wonderful for all of us.

Andrew's wish was to visit the Kennedy Space Center, so the last week in May, 2006, the whole family went to Florida for a week-long, all expenses paid trip. We also visited DisneyWorld and Sea World while we were there. It was truly a memory that will last a lifetime!

Andrew's recent MRI showed no tumour growth for which we are very thankful! He will continue to receive yearly MRI's indefinitely to ensure there have been no adverse interval changes. His growth in height has slowed a little and it remains to be seen as to whether or not he will benefit from growth hormone in the future. He had comprehensive neuropsychological testing done at BC Children's Hospital which showed he still has an above average IQ, although there was a drop in processing speed which is likely due to the effect of the radiation. However, this seems to be improving over time. He loves being home schooled and enjoys playing violin and soccer.

Richard, Louise and the Welsh Family

If you would like to write a note of encouragement to the Welsh family please forward to Wayne Elford at welford@shaw.ca. He will act as intermediary. 