

## **McKenna Francis - St. John the Baptist Dry Ridge – Badin High School, page 1/3**

Although the past couple of years of my life have been very challenging, I have tried to use my experience as a positive influence on others. In the past two years I have been faced with many medical challenges. This has turned my world upside down. I had to stop playing soccer, which I loved, and I missed three months of school. I have to admit this was devastating, however, it taught me many things and I try to use what I have learned to pay forward to make others happy.

It all began one day when I was running awkwardly during a soccer game and my coach sent me to see a physical therapist. The physical therapist knew something was not right so he sent me to Children's Hospital. I saw many doctors and no one could figure out what was wrong. We finally met an orthopedist named Dr. Tamai. He diagnosed me with hip dysplasia and he recommended femoral and pelvic osteotomies. My surgery was 11 ½ hours. I was in a spica body cast which went from my chest down both legs with a bar in the middle for six weeks and one day. I felt like I was trapped inside my own body. I had a hospital bed in my living room and my parents did everything for me. They fed me, bathed me, moved me in different positions, and helped me get dressed. I missed three months of school and my mom homeschooled me during this time. I was affected mentally, emotionally, and physically. I was left behind by many of my friends and I missed out on a lot of social events. After a lot of hard work and determination, I was finally back on my feet and my life was almost normal again.

During my hip journey, I developed a very good relationship with my orthopedic doctor, Dr. Tamai. He told me that many times younger kids and babies are diagnosed with hip dysplasia, but sometimes kids such as myself are older when they are diagnosed. I asked him if there was ever anyone older that was going through the same things that I did, to please give them my information and I would try to be a support for them as well.

After my initial recovery, I shared my story on a social media app. It was a support group for parents with children and older kids diagnosed with hip dysplasia. A girl my age reached out to me. Her name was Anna and she was from Spain. She had hip dysplasia and was about to go through the same thing I had. I had to explain to her how I was affected emotionally, physically, and mentally. Only being about 12 years old, Anna was very scared and nervous. I knew exactly how she felt because I was also 12 when I was diagnosed. She was also in a body cast for six weeks and she talked to me about how she was doing. I talked her through her struggles and gave her hope for what she could accomplish when she got better. I tried to make her laugh when she was upset and even gave her some advice on how I coped while not being able to move while in my body cast. I was taking Spanish at the time and it was very neat as we also helped each other with learning each other's languages. Her operation went smoothly and she is now a happy and healthy girl.

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My dad's co-worker has a daughter, Lucy, who was also diagnosed with hip dysplasia. She was diagnosed shortly after I was back to doing all the things a 12 year old girl does. She was just a little girl who was only 18 months old when she had her operations. It made me so sad to think of such a little girl having to go through the same thing. I knew what her family was going through so I wanted to do something to try to help them. I asked my parents to take me to the toy store. I took my own money and bought her some things to keep her occupied while she was stuck in the cast just as I had been. I wrote her parents a letter saying that if there was anything I could do, I would be more than happy to help out. I also wanted them to know that there was a light at the end of this journey and Lucy would be okay. Although Lucy was unaware of what she was going through, I knew it still had to be painful for her and her family. Her parents were very appreciative of what I had done and I was very happy I could help them through the long and hard journey.

Although I missed more than three months of school, I have always achieved First Academic Honors at my school. Because of this, I have been asked to help tutor the younger kids at my school for the past three years. I enjoy doing this very much. When they finally understand what we had been working on, they smile from ear to ear and it makes me happy knowing I helped to put that smile there.

Four months after I returned to my regular life, I was diagnosed with avascular necrosis. The ball of my hip was dying because the blood supply was not getting to the bone like it should. It is a rare complication from the surgery, but sometimes it happens. Two more surgeries followed, trying to fix the problem. I was on crutches for about eight more months, once again missing out on most of my 12 year old life. The surgery worked initially, however this past fall my avascular necrosis progressed and the doctors said that there is not much else they can do. I am back on crutches again because I can no longer straighten my hip or walk on my right leg. In just a few short weeks, I will be having my hip replaced. The doctor said they usually don't do hip replacements on kids as young as me, but they are going to do it to help me get back my quality of life as they say. I am looking forward to this surgery. I know I do not have an easy recovery ahead of me, but I am ready to fight hard. I am hoping to turn this into a positive experience too. I hope to in some way be able to help younger kids like me that have to have a hip replacement.

Going through this journey has also taught me how to not take things for granted and that a little bit of help can go a long way. At my school, I enjoy participating in the fundraisers to give back to our community. I help by donating baby items to the Pregnancy Center West. I like to donate those items because it helps future parents and their children to have a better life. I also collect cans of food for the food drive. When collecting cans for the canned food drive, it makes me happy to know that I helped someone less fortunate get a meal. Whenever I see someone less fortunate on the street, I always want to help them. By giving them some extra change or some

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food, I know that they will be better than they were before. I also enjoy going to help serve at the homeless shelter in Dayton with my grandma and grandpa. I enjoy this the most because I get to see with my own eyes how unfortunate these people are and how happy they are when they get a hot meal. It makes me very happy to be able to help them and reminds me how fortunate the rest of us are.

My hip journey has been quite a bumpy road, but I truly feel that God has chosen me to go through this for a reason. It has made me a stronger person emotionally and spiritually. I hope to be able to continue to help people in many different ways.

“Kind words are short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.” –Mother Teresa