



This is me; Kara Rosel Nothem. I look like a pretty normal sixteen-year-old with pretty normal worries and problems. I don't like showing my teeth in pictures. That was a brand new Hollister shirt that I bought that day, and my hair looked amazing so I decided to take a quick self portrait. You know the normal teen priorities, but what makes me stand out just a little bit more than the rest of the crazy teenagers in my life is what you can't see in this picture, what I consider to be normal, my right leg.

To most, my right leg looks like it's in a cast, but to those who know me, they know better. I was born with a birth defect known as Klippel Trenaunay Syndrome, also known as KTS. There aren't many KT cases, but each one is very unique. My type of KT involves vascular malformations, which are abnormal clusters of blood vessels in my veins, which is also why I have a lot of veins that make my right leg look bigger than my left one. My KT syndrome also involves hemangiomas, which are an abnormal, benign growth of the skin that can cause abnormal growth of blood vessels as well. I have a port wine stain, which is just a fancy name for a birth mark but with weaker skin. My leg is enlarged, and skin lesions are not uncommon to me.

The cause of this birth defect is unknown, and there is no cure. But as more and more symptoms come up, more and more treatments are being found. I've had growth plates removed from my right foot, and my toes have been removed. I've been admitted to Children's Hospital over a hundred times due to Cellulites, surgeries, and laser therapy, and I'm positive there will be many more times to come.

Like I said before, I do stand out more than any other teenager, but as I also said, this is normal to me. This is my life. Yes, I do have pain and problems every day of my life, but this is who I am. To me, those obstacles are just hurdles, and all I have to do is jump right over them. Many people stare and point and make fun of me, but I think that reflects more on them than on me. I've had people stop being friends with me because they were embarrassed. I've seen people follow me around the mall when I'm shopping, and I also get the random person coming up to me and shooting me all sorts of questions. But to be quite honest, even though it does hurt me at the time, what doesn't kill me only makes me stronger. I still live my life the way I want to, without letting those low points ruin the person that I am.

I am a sixteen-year-old junior at West Bend East High School. I've student-directed two plays and am working on my third. I was voted Most Likely to Walk the Red Carpet for my school's yearbook, and I absolutely love all my teachers. My friends and I watch tons and tons of movies on DVD and in theaters. Entertainment Weekly is my favorite magazine. I plan on going to college majoring in film, and I love folk parody bands. Going to the cabin with my family is without a doubt my favorite part of summer. From driving the boat to tubing with my brothers, I love every part of it.

So, as you can see, I'm just an every day kind of girl, and I wouldn't be the person that I am today without those people that give me a hard time. But mostly, I wouldn't have made it this far without my friends, who I can always count on for a great

get-away, and my family. My mom tells it like it is and keeps me strong. My dad gives me hope and guidance. Thane has the best shoulder to cry on, and Tyler always has laughter ready waiting for me. Without my family giving me their love and support, I wouldn't be the optimistic, hopeful person I am today. Without them, I would be the stereotypical pout sitting in the gutter crying over myself, but no; I refuse to be that kind of person. That gets me nowhere, but because of my family's support, I'm actually getting somewhere.

I don't know what the future holds for me and my Klippel Trenaunay Syndrome, but I do know that switching my right leg for a fancy, new one is most definitely a possibility, but the thing is with very limited insurance coverage for the prosthetic, my family's future medical responsibility could be tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, and that's why you just being here means so much to me. It's hard for me to admit, but I cannot do this alone. This is the one hurdle that's just a little too high for me. Any contribution would mean the world to me. Like I said before, you just standing here holding this letter in your hands or listening to this letter being read to you means that you care, that you are willing to give your love and support, and for that I will always be thankful.