

Grace Bowar
Brandon, SD
South Dakota State University

As a kid dream jobs changed between zookeeper, police officer, teacher, and doctor. For me, I never really had a consistent dream job until I was eight years old. That's when my little brother was born. I got up at four in the morning to be at the hospital with my parents and I was there until he was born. Little did my family or I know how much my brother, Rigley, would impact our lives.

When Rigley was born, I was there to cut the umbilical cord and the sibling connection started. Unfortunately, I only had about a minute to hold him, before he was rushed to the NICU because of low oxygen levels. While Rigley was in the



NICU, the nurses monitored oxygen level, his heart rate, and other vitals. The doctors confirmed my brother was born with Down syndrome and later diagnosed him with Hirschsprung's disease. Rigley spent three weeks covered in cords and oxygen tubes taped to his face. The worst part was no one under the age of eighteen was allowed in the unit, meaning I could see my brother on a television screen outside the unit. By the time he was able to come home, I felt like we had

lost so much time. He had grown since the first time I held him and I felt like I missed so much.



Once my family was able to be home together, the challenges continued. The doctor told us that Rigley would need to live in “a bubble” to avoid illnesses. Despite our best efforts Rigley was back in the hospital two weeks after being released from the NICU. I remember just wanting to help and wishing there was

something I could do to make it better. For the next couple years, my brother would go to the hospital at least three times a year fighting Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) or Pneumonia.

While he was in the hospital, I learned how to help. I would take care of things at home while my mom and dad took turns at the hospital. I learned how to take off the stickers that held the oxygen tubing to his face; I figured out how to distract him during shots or blood draws; and I always spent time with him reading books, watching movies, and singing songs. I also observed the nurses and



doctors taking care of Rigley. I would watch how the nurses cared for him with their gentle touch. I saw how they learned what worked and what didn't when it came to his care and how they developed a relationship with him. Rigley is a very positive and optimistic kid and brings a smile to everyone he meets. These are things I continue to learn from him every day.



As the years have gone by, Rigley's immune system has strengthened. His stays in the hospital are minimal. My brother is one of the bravest people I know and is one of the main reasons I want to be a nurse. Because of my brother, I began to notice more around my community. I became passionate about volunteering, being an advocate for individuals with disabilities, and wanting to put others needs before my own. By the time I was in high school, I was actively volunteering in my

community and within my church. I joined Health Occupation Student Association (HOSA) to learn more about the field of nursing and to make connections with others who share the same passions. I became CPR certified and a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at a local nursing home. During the fall semester of my senior year, I interned with Avera McKennan where I was able to follow nurses and CNAs on the Surgical/Trauma Unit. Between my internship and time spent with my brother in the hospital I understood this was my dream job. High school was also when I discovered a club called Best Buddies, where we focused on

inclusion for those with disabilities within the school. Through Best Buddies, I was nominated for the Youth Spirit of Volunteerism Award hosted by the local Helpline Center and was honored to win. In that moment I knew that my brother was my role model and my inspiration.

All of this has led me to the passion for helping others and wanting to be a nurse. When looking into the future, I plan to have a bachelor's degree in Nursing and continue on to graduate school to become a Nurse Practitioner. I plan to do missionary work with my degree, helping third world countries with medical dilemmas and treating people who cannot afford or are not provided with healthcare. My brother is the reason I found my passion for helping and he is still the reason I want to continue this path in the future. After the missionary work, I would like to join a children's hospital where I could work as a Pediatric or NICU Nurse Practitioner. Here I would be providing care to kids just like the nurses did for my brother.

My brother, Rigley, has taught me so much and opened my eyes to so many possibilities. From that first moment he has had an effect on me and I cannot believe how different my life has been because of him. I just hope to impact lives the way he has impacted mine.



Thank you my sweet boy for all the inspiration,

Grace