

One More Step  
By Hannah S.

“Just one more step, Michelle,” the doctor said calmly as Michelle clutched the horizontal bars at her sides. She repeated the mantra in her head, “You can do this... you can do this.” She put one foot forward and fell. Pushing herself into a sitting position, she thought, “*What’s the point? I’ll probably never walk again.*” She rested her head on her knees. “*I don’t want to get up,*” she thought. The doctor tried to coax her into a sitting position, but Michelle resisted, and a nurse helped her into the wheelchair and rolled her into her room. The events of the harrowing day replayed in Michelle’s mind.

It had been a clear day, just like any other. She was doing her homework, and her mother was in the kitchen; humming while fixing dinner. When her younger sister, Danielle, bounded into Michelle’s room, Michelle took Danielle into her arms and tickled her until she laughed her head off. Danielle was just 11 years old with blonde hair that naturally fell into waves, and eyes like emeralds. Her laughter rang into the air and Michelle laughed too.

But then the doorbell rang.

Three men in Navy attire stood stiffly at the door with grim faces. Looking from face to face, Michelle expected to find her father. He wasn’t there. She didn’t hear what the first officer said, but her mother’s reaction was all the explanation she needed. Her father wasn’t coming home.

“No!” she shouted. She pushed past the men. Danielle called after her, unaware of what had happened. Michelle didn’t stop. She stormed into the garage, tears streaming down her face. She hopped onto her ATV and drove it down the long dirt road.

She suddenly became aware of how fast she was going; too fast for the rocky terrain. Quickly accelerating, she hit one bump, and then another. She hit the largest bump, heart pounding, and swerved one way, and then the other. A split-second later, she was flung from the ATV and into a ditch. The ATV caught fire and fell on her leg. Pain shot from her foot, all throughout her body. She yanked her leg from under the ATV, revealing a three-inch deep cut running up and down the side of her calf. Both of her legs became numb and she didn't feel like getting up. Another wave of pain swept through her. She started to bawl. She felt so hopeless and far away. She became aware of how fast she was losing blood. She wanted all of it to drain out of her. She wanted to be with her father.

The flames erupting from the ATV spread to the fuel line, and a small explosion emitted from it. She was drifting in and out of consciousness. Then a voice in her head said, "*Would your father want this?*" Of course he wouldn't. Michelle struggled to look behind her. She saw a small figure running up the road. Who could it be? Mom? One of the Navy officers? Danielle? Danielle! How could she have been so stupid? Danielle needs her, and there's already been one tragedy in her life today. Now she'd created another one. Michelle prayed that Danielle wouldn't see her like this, but sure enough, Danielle's innocent face emerged and looked into Michelle's eyes. Tears flooded her sister's eyes. Michelle slowly became unconscious.

She woke up in the hospital, unable to walk. She hated herself. She had not been visited even once. "*They hate me,*" she decided, "*for everything I've put them through.*" Why else would they not visit her? She continued to think as she drifted off to sleep, and the accident filled her nightmares.

The next morning, she woke to a surprise. A large bouquet of flowers was beside

her bed. She read the note:

Dear Michelle, Hey, it's me, Danielle! I'm so sorry we haven't been able to visit you yet. It's been hectic with school and funeral plans. Don't worry! We'll get you to the funeral even if we have to come and break you out of the hospital! I can't wait to see you! Expect a visit from us soon!

Love, Danielle

Michelle smiled. A realization ran through her mind. Michelle needed to walk. She owed it to her family. An idea swept into her mind.

That night, Michelle slipped into her wheelchair and wheeled herself down the hall, into the elevator, and into the therapy room. She, once again, clasped the metal bars and stood. She fell countless times, but by the sunrise, she had almost made it. Exhausted, she wheeled herself back into her room and slipped under the covers for a much needed rest. The next night, she did the same thing. By four A.M., she had reached the end of the bars and then walked back. For the rest of the week, she walked back and forth, still clutching the metal bars. On Monday, she let go. She wobbled and had to grasp the bars again for extra support, but when she let go the second time, she did not sway. She put one foot forward and didn't fall. She walked to the end of the bars, but clutched them on the way back. She wheeled back into her room with a new hope for the next few days.

In the nights that followed, she tried not to use the bars. One day at around five A.M., she decided that no matter what, she wouldn't even touch them. She succeeded --

managing the whole way, back and forward, without using them. The next night, she rolled her empty wheelchair back to her room. *“This is what Dad would want.”*

Later that afternoon, Michelle woke up to a familiar sound. Danielle, her mother, and her doctor’s voices echoed down the hall, and got louder as she came nearer. She smiled more than she ever had, sprang up out of bed, and ran out the door to meet them.