



With one violent motion, followed by a delayed but happy giggle, Bekah knocked off half of the letter magnets from the fridge. She had only her gross motor skills to work with and most motions were made with an energetic thrust of her arms at full extension. But if one stood near her wheelchair one might feel a gentle swipe of her hand—her way to acknowledge another’s presence. Rebekah had a lot of limitations. She didn’t have control over her fingers and her thumbs tended to curl inwards. She couldn’t speak or stand, and she struggled to hold her head up (even after extensive back surgery). Her head always seemed to flop out of her custom-designed wheelchair headrest and down towards her right side. So, during fridge/magnet time we would park her wheelchair with her right side nearest the refrigerator. This was our attempt to help her maintain a mostly upright position.

Rebekah’s cerebral palsy was caused by the umbilical cord wrapping around her neck cutting off oxygen for several minutes. She was rescued by an emergency cesarean section. Her IQ level was infantile, but she was fascinated with light and loved music. Herb Alpert and the Tijauna Brass made her laugh. She also loved the Pixar animation *Finding Nemo*. She watched Nemo on an almost daily basis for years (though we began to mix in a few other videos that she seemed to enjoy as well). Our whole family can quip lines from *Finding Nemo*, thanks to Beck.

She taught us a lot. Because she required full care with everything, it was often difficult to attend to all of her needs. Our whole family learned to love her and minister to her needs. My younger brothers and sisters played with her and spent quality time with her. I learned how to give Becky an enema and assist her on the toilet, bathe her and give her medications. We often added Milk of Magnesia as a laxative to her other oral medications (which included medicine for seizures). My brother and I received compensation from the state of Oregon for babysitting Becky for our Mom. Our Aunt Lori and another dear friend were also employed by the same state program to help our family. Still, Mom carried most of the responsibility for Becky’s care during the day, so when Dad came home from work in the evening, he elected to help Mom by feeding Becky her dinner and putting her to bed at night. If she woke up crying in the night, I would try to make her comfortable as my room was next to hers. She couldn’t talk, so it was a guessing game of trying to figure out what she needed. Sometimes



her diaper was wet or soiled. Sometimes she was thirsty or her back ached. Sometimes she was lonely or scared. If I couldn't calm her, I would go upstairs and wake my parents. Dad would always tell Mom to go back to sleep and he would come help me. Becky was always especially happy to see Dad (Mom used to joke that he was her "favorite parent").

Beck doesn't knock magnets off the fridge anymore. In May of 2015 she left her wheelchair and went home to be with Jesus, leaving an indelible mark behind her. She had touched so many lives in our small town; and all who knew her spoke of her laughter. Her special needs taught my family a whole new level of love. Before Rebekah came, I was uncomfortable with people with disabilities. When she left, I began to see them in a compassionate and understanding way. Since then I have had the privilege of being a part time life coach for another young lady with cerebral palsy. She was handicapped (though to a much milder extent than Rebekah) by a stroke in utero. We walk together at parks and inside of supermarkets and malls (when the Florida heat becomes too much for us) and make it a goal to get her doctor-ordered number of steps in for the day on her Fitbit. I will not be able to continue working with this dear young lady as I am enrolled almost full time in the dental hygiene program at Daytona State College, and I have had to find a different job with evening hours. However, I know that people with cerebral palsy and other special needs have dental concerns. I hope that someday with my experience of caring for Becky and this other young lady, that I will be able to anticipate and respond to the needs of those who suffer from various disabilities while I clean their teeth.

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