

Alex Rhodes

My name is Blake Rhodes Sutton. My older brother, Alex Rhodes was born with Tay-Sachs. His influence on my life began from the very moment I was born. Alex was a little more than two years older than me, and my parents were already trying to handle the process of caring for a sick child. When the doctor told my parents that I had Hirschsprung's disease, they did not freak out. Their only question was if I could be fixed.

I grew up in a quiet house that was full of in-home nurses. This environment helped make me the person I am; a quiet, thoughtful person. I think through situations before acting, and have never been the rowdy type. Growing up like I did, where loud noises could have made Alex have seizures, I had to learn to have fun without causing havoc. I spend quiet time alone reading books to help me relax, and I am sure that this is because of how I was raised.

As I got older, the only memories I had of Alex are the Teddy Roxbury doll he had (I believe a cassette player was in his back), the photos of us together, and the middle name that I carry with me. Growing up with this background, I have always cared about those in need. I understand what it is like to live in a family that has dealt with tragedy. I still see the love in my parent's eyes when they talk about Alex. It shows me how much they really care about my siblings and me. I know that if they could be strong and stay together through such tough times, that I will be able to do the same.

The impact that Alex's death has on me today is clear: I am blessed to have the life I have, and am thankful for everything that God has given me. While some blame God for bad things that happen in life, I know that everything happens for a reason. I wouldn't be the person I am today if it weren't for Alex. My quiet demeanor helped shape who my sister and brother are. Because I never had a problem with spending time reading, I did well in school. I graduated high school with a 4.0. I have continued through college, and currently have around a 3.5 in the Dell Web School of Construction at Arizona State University.

Alex will continue to have impacts on my life. I am going to be getting married next May, and when I have children, I will pass on our middle name to my oldest child. I will share the story of how I was raised with my children when they are old enough to listen. I will always remember that I am the oldest child, but that I wasn't the first born, and that his death prepared my parents to raise me, another sick baby. The only difference is I was lucky enough to live, and because of that, I will always cherish life.