

Every year autumn comes with a confused mixture of happiness and tragedy. The leaves on the trees turn brilliant shades of red and gold, the jackets and scarves are yanked out from the backs of the closets, and there is a feeling of eager anticipation for the new school year to begin. A chill runs through the air for the first time in months, while at the same instance a different chill makes its way through the hearts and home of the Margolis family. It was during autumn that my big sister, Mollie Sara Margolis, was born in 1987. It was also during autumn, four years later, that she passed away.

Mollie was born a beautiful, happy baby on September 24, 1987. She was my parents' first child, and they were overjoyed. They brought her home from the hospital and gave her the best attention a baby could get. It was only months later, when Mollie was around other babies her age that my parents began to notice that something seemed wrong. While other babies were sitting up and playing with their toys, Mollie seemed lethargic and apathetic. They took her to a doctor and after performing certain tests she was diagnosed with Tay-Sachs disease.

I was born on September 5, 1990, three years after my sister was born and one year after my brother was born. I do not have any personal recollections of my sister as she died when I was only a year old, but the repercussions her death had on my entire family are still as apparent today as they always were. I have heard the story leading up to my birth countless times – especially the moment in which my parents found out that I was to be a girl. This held a great amount of significance for them, as I was their second hope at raising a healthy baby girl.

I am the only child in my family to be a carrier of the Tay-Sachs gene, which means that not only do I carry the story of Mollie with me emotionally, but that I carry it with me physically as well. I keep Mollie's story with me wherever I go, and it has become a central part of who I am today. One of the greatest lessons I have learned from my sister's short life is to expect the unexpected. The Tay-Sachs gene is common in Jewish families, which explains its existence in my dad, but my mom still has no idea from where in her lineage she inherited the carrier gene.

Her life has also had more specific effects on my own outlook of the world. My mom was pregnant between having me and having my younger brother with another baby affected with Tay-Sachs disease. This time, however, the doctors were paying special attention for exactly that, and they determined the fetus to be affected before it was born. My mom, knowing she could not handle bringing another baby fated to die into the world, decided to have an abortion. For this very reason I am a fierce supporter of a woman's right to choose in the matter of abortion.

Mollie, in her death, has taught me so much about life. I realize how random and unfair life can be sometimes, and it makes me so much more grateful to be in the situation I am in today. I also have so much more respect for my parents for having the strength to continue on after such a tragic occurrence, and for instilling in my brothers and me such strong convictions of the importance of family. Finally, I recognize the importance of remembering, as we light the same red Yartzheit candle marked with the words "In Memoriam" every year as the air turns colder.

*(sent by Rebecca Margolis from Chile)*